

Orthodoxy and Contraception

**From the "Collected Works of CJS
Hayward" series**

CJS Hayward

CJS Hayward Publications, Wheaton

©2000-2020 by CJS Hayward

CCo licensed (“No rights reserved”). Distribute freely.

Questions and contact information:

CJSHayward.com/contact

The reader is invited to visit CJSHayward.com.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	1
“Sacred Seed, Sacred Chamber,” by Fr. Joseph Gleason.....	3
Our Crown of Thorns.....	27
Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article.....	31
Advice to Orthodox Couples Who Are Childless: Christ Is Born!.....	108
Appendix: “Fire in the Hole”.....	115

Preface

Where do the Fathers stand on contraception? Let me cite St. John Chrysostom, who advises couples to leave to their children brothers and sisters rather than things. The passage is one which is mysteriously altered in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. After looking at the Greek, a better one reads:

Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil

filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife.

The Fathers were aware of the distinctions between contraception, abortion, and infanticide, but they did not draw anything like the sharp line we draw between contraception and abortion, just as we may understand a distinction between abortion and infanticide without making one vastly better than the other. With the Fathers, condemnations of one of contraception, abortion, and infanticide slide readily enough into the other. Some of Catholicism and Orthodoxy has veered away from the patristic consensus, Catholics by allowing a contraceptive timing called "natural family planning": *what is natural about (after artificial calculations) abstaining from intercourse precisely when a woman is capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response?* A faction of Orthodox have fallen into a different snare, or some have; there is a so-called "new consensus" (which may be new but is hotly contested and therefore not a consensus) which says that contraception is permissible given some ground rules apparently first given in an article by one scholar, Zaphiris, which the author quotes with commentary in the first piece.

This work is formatted to have what may be called a "wide-narrow-wide" structure. It starts widely with a look at what is good for human sexuality, then gives a tight and microscopic focus to specific issues to contraception as received in Orthodoxy, then widens out to look at what, really, is best as far as sexuality goes.

The overall intent is to lay the axe at the root of the tree, to expose at root what plays down in the attempted retroactive contraception of abortion.

Sacred Seed, Sacred Chamber

By Fr. Joseph Gleason. Used by gracious permission.

At every Orthodox Christian wedding, the Priest prays for God to bless the couple with multiple generations of descendants.

Marriage is a sacrament, children are a blessing, and the Christian home has always been a prime source of Church growth. By raising up godly children, souls are added to the Church, future priests and monastics are born, and the population of heaven is increased.

Holy Scripture tells us why God brings a husband and wife together, making them one flesh:

“But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring.” (Malachi 2:15)

St. Nikolai Velimirovic said it well:

“Did the New Testament bring any change concerning the bearing of children? The bearing of children in the pre-Christian marriage aimed ‘to replenish the earth,’ whereas the Christian marriage has for its aim to replenish Christ’s Church on earth and in heaven. And, finally, to replenish Paradise.” (*St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Faith of the Saints, p. 68*)

For this reason, Satan has always been intent on attacking marriages, and preventing the birth of godly children. Whether by abortion, or by contraception, the devil seeks to diminish the growth of the Church.

That helps us understand why the Saints have been unanimous in their prohibition of birth control. With no exceptions, Orthodox Saints have always forbidden the use of contraception.

However, in recent years, some people have questioned this position. While they acknowledge the Church’s prohibition of abortion, they have sought for a way to justify contraception methods which do not involve an abortion. The argument usually goes something like this:

“Until recent advances in medical science, people didn’t have many options in regard to birth control. The few contraceptives they had could cause abortions. The Early Church Fathers were not necessarily opposed to birth control, but they were opposed to abortion. They prohibited all contraception, only because they didn’t want to risk there being any abortions.”

In other words, they claim that the Early Church was not opposed to *sex-while-avoiding-procreation*. They just were not medically capable of accomplishing that goal, yet.

Indeed, such a position is false, and is not supported by the historical evidence. When we take a look at history, we find the following:

- Numerous forms of birth control were available in the Early Church
- The Early Church had access to birth control which did not cause abortions
- The Early Church condemned all forms of birth control, including ones which were not abortifacient
- The Orthodox Church has historically had severe penances for the sin of contraception
- Faithful Orthodox Christians continue to avoid contraception today

Numerous forms of birth control were available in the Early Church

In fact, they have been available for much longer than that. For approximately 5000 years of recorded history, there have been many well-known methods of contraception, including *coitus interruptus*, pessaries, spermicides, barrier methods, and herbal medications, including several which in modern times have been proven to have contraceptive qualities.

Condoms were used as early as 3000 B.C., when it was recorded that King Minos of Crete used the bladders of goats to shield himself during intercourse (*John M. Riddle, Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*).

As Megan Evans has noted:

“By 1000 B.C., Egyptians were using a linen sheath around the penis to protect from spread of disease. . . . there is some evidence from cave paintings and historical documents that a condom-like device was used in Europe and imperial Rome.”
 (*Megan L. Evans, A DESIRE TO CONTROL: Contraception throughout the ages. The George Washington University School, Volume 1, Issue 1. Eo8.*)

As noted by John T. Noonan, a scholar on the history of contraception:

“The existence of contraceptive technique in the pre-Christian Mediterranean world is well established. The oldest surviving documents are from Egypt. Five different papyri, all dating from between 1900 and 1100 B.C., provide recipes for contraceptive preparations” (*John T. Noonan, Contraception, p. 9*)

And even though the Israelites had left Egypt behind, it appears they brought some of this knowledge with them:

” the means of contraception known to the Jewish communities included not only *coitus interruptus*, but

postcoital ejection, occlusive pessaries, sterilizing potions, and sterilizing surgery.” (*John T. Noonan, Contraception, p. 11*)

By the dawn of the Christian era, society had already acquired thousands of years of experience with contraceptive methods and medications. And a number of these medications prove themselves potent, even today:

“over a hundred different plants have been reported to contain substances affecting human fertility. Reports of such plants come from every continent in the world. . . . Some of the plants appear to have properties effecting temporary sterility, and would be true contraceptives. . . . the experiments do show that contraception is possible by means of distilled or crushed plants. Without being able to determine accurately whether the potions used by a given society were effective, we can say that the use of plant potions to affect fertility was a rational method of trying to achieve temporary sterility.” (*John T. Noonan, Contraception, p. 12*)

Noonan also mentions various passages from Aristotle, and from Pliny the Elder, shedding light on the many methods of contraception which were available at the time.

Suffice it to say that access to numerous forms of birth control is not a recent development. For thousands of years, women have had many types of contraception at their disposal. This is a situation which the Early Church Fathers were well aware of, even 2000 years ago.

The Early Church had access to birth control which

did not cause abortions

The ancient woman had access to many forms of birth control. But were any of them true contraceptives? Or was abortion always a risked side-effect? According to Noonan:

“Contraceptives were discriminated from abortifacients in theory. . . . Use of the sterile period, precoital pessaries, postcoital exercise, and gum for the male genitals were all intended to work only contraceptively.” (*Noonan. p. 17*)

“It is also germane to the Christian judgment that almost all the methods used were intended to achieve only temporary sterility. Only a few potions were apparently intended to sterilize permanently. The other potions and all the other means proposed were ways by which pregnancy might be postponed for a given time.” (*John T. Noonan, Contraception, p. 17*)

Specifically, what forms of birth control were available to ancient people, which had zero risk of causing an abortion? Here are several examples:

- *Coitus Interruptus* – premature withdrawal, spilling the seed in an unnatural location
- Mutual Masturbation – spilling the seed in an unnatural location
- Oral sex – spilling the seed in an unnatural location
- Anal sex – spilling the seed in an unnatural location

- Precoital Pessaries – absorbent and/or spermicidal
- Condoms – block seed, so that it can later be discarded in an unnatural location
- Genital Mutilation – unnatural intervention to keep seed from reaching the egg
- Certain herbal mixtures which reduced fertility, without causing abortions

People in the Early Church were aware of numerous forms of contraception, many of which did not bring about any risk of abortion.

If a couple's goal was only to avoid pregnancy, that could be accomplished via abstinence. So why would people practice sex in any of the ways listed above? The answer is obvious. They want to separate procreation from sexual pleasure. They want the pleasure, without accepting the responsibility which is connected to that pleasure.

Contraception is a tool for seeking pleasure, in a way which God the Father has not blessed.

The Early Church condemned all forms of birth control, including ones which were not abortifacient

We have established the fact that numerous forms of birth control were available in the early Church, and that many of those contraceptives did not cause any risk of abortion. And according to the Saints, what is the Orthodox Church's position regarding these various "safe" forms of birth control?

How has sex been understood by Orthodox Saints throughout history? Are there any cases in which it is permissible to have sex merely for the sake of pleasure, while artificially removing any possibility of pregnancy?

To answer these questions, consider this sample of quotations from Orthodox Saints throughout the first millennium of the Church, from both the East and the West:

1st – 2nd century

“Thou shalt not be like to those whom we hear of as committing wickedness with the mouth with the body through uncleanness [orally consummated sex]; nor shalt thou be joined to those impure women who commit iniquity with the mouth with the body through uncleanness”.

(Letter of Barnabas 10:8 [A.D. 74])

“Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted.”

(Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor of Children 2:10:91:2)

“But this kind of chastity is also to be observed, that sexual intercourse must not take place heedlessly and for the sake of mere pleasure, but for the sake of begetting children. And since this observance is found even amongst some of the lower animals, it were a shame if it be not observed by men, reasonable, and worshipping God.”

(Pope St. Clement of Rome, Recognitions 6.12)

3rd – 4th century

“But let those also be of good cheer, who being married use marriage lawfully; who make a marriage according to God’s ordinance, and not of wantonness for the sake of unbounded license; who recognize seasons of abstinence, that they may give themselves unto prayer; who in our assemblies bring clean bodies as well as clean garments into the Church; who have entered upon matrimony for the procreation of children, but not for indulgence.”

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 4.25)

“[Some] complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife.” *(Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6:20 [A.D. 307])*.

“They [certain Egyptian heretics] exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption.”

(St. Epiphanius of Salamis, Medicine Chest Against Heresies 26:5:2 [A.D. 375])

“And fornication is the destruction of one’s own

flesh, not being made use of for the procreation of children, but entirely for the sake of pleasure, which is a mark of incontinency, and not a sign of virtue.”
(*Apostolic Constitutions* 6.28)

“The same argument holds with regard to copulation. Blessed is the man who in his youth having a free yoke employs his natural parts for the purpose of producing children. But if for licentiousness, the punishment spoken of by the Apostle shall await the immoral and adulterous (Heb. 13:4).” (*St. Athanasius, 1st Epistle to Amun, The Rudder, pp. 576–77*)

5th – 6th century

“Intercourse even with one’s legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of the offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Juda, did this and the Lord killed him for it.”
(*St. Augustine, De coniug. adult., lib. II, n. 12, Gen, XXXVIII, 8-10 – cf. Genesis 38*)

“For the virtue of each thing then discovers itself when it is brought to its own fitting work, but when to one that is alien, it doth no longer so. For instance, wine is given for cheerfulness, not drunkenness, bread for nourishment, sexual intercourse for the procreation of children.”
(*St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, Homily XII*)

“I am supposing, then, although you are not lying

[with your wife] for the sake of procreating offspring, you are not for the sake of lust obstructing their procreation by an evil prayer or an evil deed. Those who do this, although they are called husband and wife, are not; nor do they retain any reality of marriage, but with a respectable name cover a shame. Sometimes this lustful cruelty, or cruel lust, comes to this, that they even procure poisons of sterility [oral contraceptives]”

(St. Augustine, Marriage and Concupiscence 1:15:17)

“Husbands and wives are to be admonished to remember that they are joined together for the sake of producing offspring; and, when, giving themselves to immoderate intercourse, they transfer the occasion of procreation to the service of pleasure, to consider that, though they go not outside wedlock yet in wedlock itself they exceed the just dues of wedlock.”

(Pope St. Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule 27)

“Who is he who cannot warn that no woman may take a potion [oral contraceptive] so that she is unable to conceive or condemns in herself the nature which God willed to be fecund? As often as she could have conceived or given birth, of that many homicides she will be held guilty, and, unless she undergoes suitable penance, she will be damned by eternal death in hell.”
(Caesarius of Arles, Sermons 1:12 [A.D. 522]).

“[I]n truth, all men know that they who are under the power of this disease [the sin of covetousness] are

wearied even of their father's old age [wishing him to die so they can inherit]; and that which is sweet, and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have mutilated nature, not only killing the newborn, but even acting to prevent their beginning to live".
(St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew 28:5 [A.D. 391])

7th – 8th century

“Again, vice is the wrong use of our conceptual images of things, which leads us to misuse the things themselves. In relation to women, for example, sexual intercourse, rightly used, has as its purpose the begetting of children. He, therefore, who seeks in it only sensual pleasure uses it wrongly, for he reckons as good what is not good. When such a man has intercourse with a woman, he misuses her. And the same is true with regard to other things and our conceptual images of them.”
(St. Maximos the Confessor, Four Hundred Texts on Love, Philokalia, Vol. 2, 17)

The quotations above are only a representative sample. Additional quotes are available. According to the mind of the Church, it is never acceptable to pursue the pleasure of sex, while unnaturally interfering with the possibility of conception. As Fr. Josiah Trenham has noted:

“It is particularly a perverse act when we note that

the primary reason God attended the sex act was to encourage procreation. This consistent link between pleasure and procreation is emphasized by Chrysostom on many occasions. Those who would separate the two realities, something which Chrysostom says cannot be done, must invent a new perspective on pleasure not taught by the Church.”
(Josiah B. Trenham, On Contraception: according to the Holy Fathers of the Church, pp. 24-25)

The Orthodox Church has historically had severe penances for the sin of contraception

In 7th century England, according to the Penitential of St. Theodore (Archbishop of Canterbury), married couples were forbidden from performing sex acts which resulted in the spilling of seed in unnatural places. The following penances were prescribed:

- Inter-femoral sex (between thighs) – 1 year penance
- Anal sex – 7-15 years penance
- Oral sex – 7-22 years penance

St. Theodore calls oral sex “the worst of all evils”, and accordingly grants it the longest and most severe penance. It was well understood that the mouth was ordained to receive the Eucharist, which may help explain St. Theodore’s severity in regard to this particular sin.

So far, we have only considered sources from the first several centuries of the Church. It is important to note that the second millennium brought no changes to the Orthodox

prohibition of contraception. As the Orthodox Faith grew and expanded in the Slavic nations of the East, the Orthodox understanding of sexuality remained steadfast.

According to a Serbian Orthodox penitential document from the 14th century, there is a close parallel between abortion and contraception:

“It is worth asking both men and women how long they were in that state and how many children they killed . . . for what reason and in which manner. There are those who make a potion to drink so that they cannot conceive a child. This is worst of all, because they do not know how many would have been born. . . . If they do not stop this, they may not receive communion.”

(Mount Sinai 17(17), ff. 1170v-171r; Bulgarian National Library 251(200), ff. 137v-138r. Cited in Eve Levin, Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs 900-1700, p. 176)

As Eve Levin points out,

“From the medieval Slavic perspective, contraception, abortion, and infanticide were similar offences . . . All three represented the same thing: an attempt to forestall the introduction into the world of a new soul. For that reason, all three offenses were sometimes called *dusegub'e*, literally, ‘the destruction of a soul.’ . . . Voluntarily preventing conception or aborting a pregnancy could carry a penance of three to ten years.”

(Eve Levin, Sex and Society in the World of the

Orthodox Slavs 900-1700, pp. 175-176)

According to Slavic Orthodox canons, mutual masturbation between husband and wife was forbidden as a sinful activity, and penances of two to three years were prescribed for oral sex. A deacon or priest could be barred from communion, if guilty of practicing *coitus interruptus*, or any sort of non-vaginal marital intercourse. Under no circumstances was it permitted to artificially separate sexual pleasure from procreation.

In the 18th century, St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite provides grave warnings regarding the serious nature of sexual sin. Like a number of Saints in the Early Church, St. Nikodemos mentions the biblical story of Onan in Genesis 38, and identifies his sin of contraception via *coitus interruptus*. St. Nikodemos includes this sin under the general category of “masturbation”, which is the term he seems to use for any illicit spilling of seed in an unnatural location. An excerpt from his treatise is included here:

Masturbation is a sin so abhorrent to God that on account of it He put to death Onan, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, because he was the first to commit the act upon the earth, and it is therefore also called onanism. For the Holy Scripture says in Genesis (38:10): “And the thing which he (Onan) did appeared as evil before God: wherefore He slew him.”

So then, this sin is like a pestilence and corruption of the human race, and causes masturbators to live here and now a disgraceful and miserable life, and to be tormented eternally in the next life in the fire of

hell.

(Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, On Masturbation)

Indeed, Orthodox Saints favored contraception no more in the second millennium, than they did in the first. For 2000 years, there is not a single Orthodox Saint who has approved of any form of birth control, regardless of whether it involved *coitus interruptus*, oral sex, or chemical contraceptives. There is only one place in the universe where a husband is permitted to issue his seed.

A faithful Orthodox Christian seeks to follow the teachings of the Saints. And in regard to this current topic, the consensus of the Saints is clear: *All contraception is off-limits, even if it presents no risk of abortion.*

Faithful Orthodox Christians continue to avoid contraception today

In modern times, a number of Orthodox bishops and priests continue to teach faithfully in regard to the Church's opposition to birth control. In agreement with Orthodox Saints throughout history, godly Christians continue to recognize contraception for the sin that it is.

In 1957, the Greek Archdiocese Yearbook made the following statement:

“If a husband and wife do not desire to have any children, they ought to abstain from all conjugal relations until they are able to have children, and then to come together again in sexual union, relying entirely and solely on God's omniscience. The use of contraceptive devices for the prevention of childbirth

is forbidden and condemned unreservedly by the Greek Orthodox Church.”

(Greek Archdiocese Yearbook – 1957, pp. 50-51)

In agreement, Archbishop John Shahovskoy says that we must not interfere with procreation:

The Church of Christ suggests a way, of which the Gospel revelation speaks quite clearly. Continence outside a marriage, and continence in marriage itself. So says the word of God, and such is the understanding of the word by [the] best Christians of history . . . The Orthodox Church, without doubt, categorically rejects interference with the mystery of childbirth.

(Abp John Shahovskoy, 1961 Yearbook of the Metropolia)

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, in the first edition (1963) of his famous book, “The Orthodox Church”, simply points out:

“Artificial methods of birth control are forbidden in the Orthodox Church.”

Fr. Dimitru Staniloae acknowledges that husbands and wives sin, if they seek sexual pleasure while trying to avoid pregnancy:

St. John Chrysostom declares that a marriage is accomplished even when only its principle purpose – the regulating of sexuality – is achieved without the

fulfillment of its second purpose, the procreation of children. He adds, however, that the marriage is realized without the birth of children when this occurs not through the will of the spouses but apart from their will. For when the birth of children is intentionally avoided, the bond between the spouses declines into a simple occasion of satisfying the desire of the flesh and thus shifts towards acts that are sinful. (*Fr. Dimitru Staniloae, The Experience of God, Vol. 5, pg. 182*)

Fr. Seraphim Rose classifies birth control as a “severe sin”:

On the subject of birth control, the Orthodox Church is certainly no more “liberal” than the Catholic, and any kind of interference with the natural object and result of intercourse, i.e., the begetting of children, is strictly condemned as a severe sin. Certainly the “pill” falls into this category. The “wisdom” of man is one thing, the law of God another. As to abstinence [from sex] on fast days, this is part of the same asceticism or self-denial that decrees fasting from foods. Married love is not regarded as evil any more than meat or eggs are, but our life here is a preparation for an eternal life where there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage, where there is an endless feast not of earthly foods, and a part of the discipline on the way to this Kingdom is through taming the flesh to the Spirit. St. Paul speaks of husbands and wives denying each other (1Cor. 7:5), and this is interpreted as referring especially to

preparation for Holy Communion, but also to other fasting periods.”

(Fr. Seraphim Rose, Letters from Father Seraphim: Letter May 5/18, 1970)

Bishop George (Shaeffer) of Mayfield simply explains, “No contraception is ever allowed.”

And according to St. Justin Popovich’s disciple, Bishop Artemy (Rantosavlievich):

The Church cannot condescend any further, and she considers sinful any means of method, whether natural or artificial, to prevent conception and avoid procreation. For they who employ such means prove that they consider sensual pleasure the sole purpose of intercourse. From this it becomes evident why the Church does not permit Holy Communion to such individuals, nor to anyone else who does not conform to the Apostle’s ordinance concerning self-control (1 Cor. 7:5) and to the sacred canons of the Orthodox Church [See Canon LXIX of the Holy Apostles and the commentary, as well as Canon XIII of the 6th Council, Canon III of Dionysios of Alexandria, Canon XIII of Timothy of Alexandria, Canon V of John the Faster]. *(Bishop Artemy, “The Mystery of Marriage in a Dogmatic Light” in Divine Ascent: A Journal of Orthodox Faith vol. 1, nos. 3/4, p. 57)*

Fr. Josiah Trenham sums up the historic teaching of the Orthodox Church on this subject:

Those not prepared to assume the responsibility of

sexual relations ought not engage in them. The intense pleasure of sexual relations are designed by God to promote the procreation of children, since the difficulties inherent in childbearing and Christian parenting might otherwise tempt spouses to avoid this solemn responsibility. Today's contraception culture strikes at the heart of the God-designed unity of pleasure and responsibility, opting to embrace pleasure while avoiding the responsibility of childbearing and calling it "family planning." Such planned parenthood and family planning is in reality planned barrenhood and family banning, and as such has been vigorously forbidden by the Holy Fathers throughout the history of the Church. St. Paul teaches that married women find their salvation in and through childbearing.

(Fr. Josiah Trenham, Orthodoxy Today: Sexual Relations, November 16, 2005)

In 1968, when Pope Paul VI released his *Humanae Vitae* encyclical, condemning all forms of birth control, Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople said, "*We are in total agreement with you.*" The Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church may differ on many things, but this is not one of them.

What about Menopause, Pregnancy, and Infertile Times of the Month?

While the Saints of the Orthodox Church have consistently forbidden birth control via artificial methods, they have not uniformly forbidden sexual activity during times of infertility. While some have discouraged sexual

activity in such cases, the consensus of the Saints is not strict in this regard.

St. John Chrysostom, in his fifth homily on Titus, says there is nothing sinful about sexual relations between an elderly husband and wife. What God has blessed during their fertile years, does not become illicit when a woman reaches menopause. Likewise during pregnancy, and infertile times of the month. The Church does not require couples to engage in sex, or to avoid sex, based on fertility.

What the Church does require, is for sex to take place in one context alone. There is only one place where a husband may issue his seed, which can ever lead to pregnancy. And that is the only place where he is ever permitted to issue it.

What about Priests who Disagree?

Throughout the history of the Orthodox Church, it has been possible to find bishops and priests who are in error, and who do not hold to the fullness of the Faith. Today is no different. It is possible to find bishops and priests who are ignorant of the Church's traditional teaching, or who are aware of it, and reject it. Whenever faced with this unfortunate situation, what is a faithful Orthodox Christian to do?

The answer is clear: *Follow the consensus of the Saints.*

Conclusion

In the entire universe, there is only one place where a Christian man may legitimately issue his seed. His seed is intended for the wife of his youth. She has a sacred chamber, and that chamber is the only place where sexual activity may take place in a holy way.

As the Orthodox Saints have unanimously agreed for the past 2000 years, the seed is neither to be killed, nor to be spilled in an unnatural location. This principle makes every form of birth control forbidden. At no time is it ever permissible to seek for the pleasure of sex, while artificially avoiding the possibility of pregnancy.

Additional Information

For more information on this topic, the following resources are recommended:

- **Marriage and Virginty According to St. John Chrysostom**, by Archpriest Josiah B. Trenham
<http://www.amazon.com/Marriage-Virginty-According-to-St-John-Chrysostom/dp/1887904301>
- **Orthodox Christianity, Marriage & Contraception**, by Anthony Stehlin
<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1490557539>
- **Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring**, by CJS Hayward
<http://cjsheyward.com/contraception/>
- **Articles from Orthodoxy Today**
 - Contraception and Chastity:
<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles/AnscombeChastity.php>
 - The Roots of Roe vs. Wade:
<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/ReardonAbortion.php>

- **Articles from The Orthodox Life**

- Birth Control and the Supreme Court:
<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/birth-control-and-the-supreme-court/>
- Murder Before Conception:
<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2013/12/09/murder-before-conception/>
- Celebrating Every Conception:
<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2014/02/19/celebrating-every-conception/>
- The Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2013/12/08/the-conception-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary/>
- The Purpose for Marriage:
<https://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/the-purpose-for-marriage/>

- **Articles from Touchstone Magazine**

- The Delightful Secrets of Sex:
<http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=17-01-020-v>
- Choosing Love and Making Life:
<http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-01-023-f>
- The Roots of Roe vs. Wade:
<http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.p>

hp?id=16-01-003-e

Our Crown of Thorns

I remember meeting a couple; the memory is not entirely pleasant. Almost the first thing they told me after being introduced was that their son was “an accident,” and this was followed by telling me how hard it was to live their lives as they wanted when he was in the picture.

I do not doubt that they had no intent of conceiving a child, nor do I doubt that having their little boy hindered living their lives as they saw fit. But when I heard this, I wanted to almost scream to them that they should look at things differently. It was almost as if I was speaking with someone bright who had gotten a full ride scholarship to an excellent university, and was vociferously complaining about how much work the scholarship would require, and how cleanly it would cut them off from what they took for granted in their home town.

I did not think, at the time, about the boy as an icon of the Holy Trinity, not made by hands, or what it means to think of such an *icon* as “an accident.” I was thinking mainly about a missed opportunity for growth. What I wanted to say was, “This boy was given to you for your deification!”

Why must you look on the means of your deification as a curse?”

Marriage and monasticism are opposites in many ways. But there are profound ways in which they provide the same thing, and not only by including a community. Marriage and monasticism both provide—in quite different ways—an opportunity to take up your cross and follow Christ, to grow into the I Corinthians 13 love that says, “When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me”—words that are belong in this hymn to love because love does not place its own desires at the center, but lives for something more. Those who are mature in love put the childish ways of living for themselves behind them, and love Christ through those others who are put in their lives. In marriage this is not just Hollywood-style exhilaration; on this point I recall words I heard from an older woman, that you don’t know understand being in love when you’re “a kid;” being in love is what you have when you’ve been married for decades. Hollywood promises a love that is about having your desires fulfilled; I did not ask that woman about what more there is to being in love, but it struck me as both beautiful and powerful that the one thing said by to me by an older woman, grieving the loss of her husband, was that there is much more to being in love than what you understand when you are young enough that marriage seems like a way to satisfy your desires.

Marriage is not just an environment for children to grow up; it is also an environment for parents to grow up, and it does this as a crown of thorns.

The monastic crown of thorns includes an obedience to one’s elder that is meant to be difficult. There would be some fundamental confusion in making that obedience

optional, to give monastics more control and make things less difficult. The problem is not that it would fail to make a more pleasant, and less demanding, option than absolute obedience to a monastic elder. The problem is that when it was making things more pleasant and less demanding, it would break the spine of a lifegiving struggle—which is almost exactly what contraception promises.

Rearing children is not required of monastics, and monastic obedience is not required married faithful. But the spiritual struggle, the crown of thorns by which we take up our cross and follow Christ, by which we die to ourselves that we live in Christ, is not something we can improve our lives by escaping. The very thing we can escape by contraception, is what *all* of us—married, monastic, or anything else—need. The person who needs monastic obedience to be a crown of thorns is not the elder, but the monastic under obedience. Obedience is no more a mere aid to one's monastic elder than our medicines are something to help our doctors. There is some error in thinking that some people will be freed to live better lives, if they can have marriage, but have it on their own terms, "à la carte."

What contraception helps people flee is a spiritual condition, a sharpening, a struggle, a proving grounds and a training arena, that all of us need. There is life in death. We find a rose atop the thorns, and the space which looks like a constricting prison from the outside, has the heavens' vast expanse once we view it from the inside. It is rather like the stable on Christmas' day: it looks on the outside like a terrible little place, but on the inside it holds a Treasure that is greater than all the world. But we need first to give up the illusion of living our own lives, and "practice dying" each day, dying to our ideas, our self-image, our self-will, having

our way and our sense that the world will be better if we have our way—or even that we will be better if we have our way. Only when we have given up the illusion of living our own lives... will we be touched by the mystery and find ourselves living God's own life.

Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article

The reason for writing: "Buried treasure?"

Computer programmers often need to understand why programs behave as they do, and there are times when one is trying to explain a puzzle by understanding the source, and meets an arresting surprise. Programmer slang for this is "buried treasure," politely defined as,

A surprising piece of code found in some program.
While usually not wrong, it tends to vary from cruffy to

bletcherous, and has lain undiscovered only because it was functionally correct, however horrible it is. Used sarcastically, because what is found is anything *but* treasure. Buried treasure almost always needs to be dug up and removed. 'I just found that the scheduler sorts its queue using [the *mind-bogglingly* slow] bubble sort! Buried treasure!'"

What I have found has me wondering if I've discovered theological "buried treasure," that may actually be wrong. Although my analysis is not exhaustive, I have tried to provide two documents that relate to the (possible) "buried treasure:" one treating the specific issue, contraception, in patristic and modern times, and one commentary on the document I have found that may qualify as "buried treasure."

How to use this document

This document is broken into two parts besides this summary page.

The first part is taken from a paper written by an Orthodox grad student, with reference to Orthodoxy in patristic times and today. It sets a broad theological background, and provides the overall argument. One major conclusion is that one paper (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) is important in a troubling shift in Orthodox theology.

The second part, motivated by the understanding that Zaphiris's paper is worth studying *in toto*, is a relatively

brief commentary on Zaphiris's paper. If the initial paper provides good reason to believe that Zaphiris's paper may be worth studying, then it may be valuable to see the actual text of his paper. The commentary can be skipped, but it is intended to allow the reader to know just why the author believes Zaphiris is so much worth studying.

It is anticipated that some readers will want to read the first section without poring over the second, even though the argument in the first section may motivate one to read the second.

Why the fuss?

The Orthodox Church appears to have begun allowing contraception, after previously condemning it, around the time of an article (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) which may have given rise to the "new consensus." This article raises extremely serious concerns of questionable doctrine, questionable argument, and/or sophistry, and may be worth further studying.

A broader picture is portrayed in the earlier article about contraception as it appears in both patristic and modern views, which are profoundly different from each other.

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward –
christos.hayward@gmail.com - cjshayward.com

Patristic and Current Orthodoxy: on Contraception

Introduction

Patristic and contemporary Orthodoxy do not say exactly the same things about contraception. Any differences in what acts are permitted are less interesting than the contexts which are much more different than the differences that would show on a chart made to classify what acts are and are not formally permissible.

Much of what I attempt below looks at what is unquestionable today and asks, "How else could it be?" After two sections comparing the Patristic and modern circumstances, one will be able to appreciate that one would need to cross several lines to want contraception in Patristic Christianity while today some find it hard to understand why the Orthodox Church is being so picky about contraception, I look at how these considerations may influence positions regarding contraception.

How are the Fathers valuable to us?

I assume that even when one criticizes Patristic sources, one is criticizing people who understand Christianity much better than we do, and I may provocatively say that the Fathers are most interesting, not when they eloquently give voice to our views, but precisely when they shock us. My interest in what seems shocking today is an interest in a cue to something big that we may be missing. This is for much

the same reason scientists may say that the most exciting sound in science is not "Eureka," "I've found it," but "That's funny..." The reason for this enigmatic quote is that "Eureka" only announces the discovery of something one already knew to look for. "That's funny" is the hint that we may have tripped over something big that we didn't even know to look for, and may be so far outside of what we know we need that we try to explain it away. Such an intrusion—and it ordinarily feels like an *intrusion*—is difficult to welcome: hence the quotation attributed to Winston Churchill, "Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on."

Understanding Church Fathers on contraception can provide a moment of, "That's funny..."

The Patristic era

My aim in this section is not so much to suggest what views should be held, than help the reader see how certain things do not follow from other things self-evidently. I would point out that in the Patristic world, not only were there condemnations of contraception as such, but more deeply, I would suggest that there was a mindset where the idea of freeing the goodness of sexual pleasure from any onerous fecundity would seem to represent a fundamental confusion of ideas.

We may be selling both the Fathers and ourselves short if we say that neo-Platonic distrust of the body made them misconstrue sex as evil except as a necessary evil excused as a means to something else, the generation of children. The sword of this kind of dismissal can cut two ways: one could

make a reductive argument saying that the ambient neo-Gnosticism of our own day follows classical forms of Gnosticism in hostility to bodily goods that values sex precisely as an experience and despite unwanted capacity to generate children, and so due to our Gnostic influence we cannot value sex except as a way of getting pleasure that is unfortunately encumbered by the possibility of generating children whether they are wanted or not. This kind of dismissal is easy to make, difficult to refute, and not the most helpful way of advancing discussion.

In the Patristic era, some things that many today experience as the only way to understand the goodness of creation do not follow quite so straightforwardly, in particular that goodness to sex has its center of gravity in the experience rather than the fecundity. To Patristic Christians, it was far from self-evident that sex as it exists after the Fall is good without ambivalence, and it is even further from self-evident that the goodness of sex (if its fallen form is considered unambiguously good) centers around the experience of pleasure in coitus. Some contemporaries did hold that sexual experience was good. The goodness of sex consisted in the experience itself. Any generative consequences of the experience were evil, to be distanced from the experience. Gnostics in Irenaeus's day (John Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatments by Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, 57, 64. *Unfortunately, not only is there no recent work of Orthodox scholarship that is comparable to Noonan, but there is little to no good Orthodox scholarship on the topic at all!*), Manichees in the days of Augustine (Noonan 1986, 124.), and for that matter medieval Cathars (Noonan 1986, 181-3.) would hold to the

goodness of sex precisely as an experience, combined with holding to the evil of procreation. (I will not analyze the similarities and differences to wanting pleasure unencumbered by children today.) Notwithstanding those heretics' positions, Christianity held a stance, fierce by today's standards, in which children were desirable for those who were married but "marriage" would almost strike many people today as celibacy with shockingly little interaction between the sexes (*including* husband and wife), interrupted by just enough sex to generate children (For a treatment of this phenomenon as it continued in the Middle Ages, see Philip Grace, *Aspects of Fatherhood in Thirteenth-Century Encyclopedias*, Western Michigan University master's thesis, 2005, chapter 3, "Genealogy of Ideas," 35-6.). Men and women, including husbands and wives, lived in largely separate worlds, and the framing of love antedated both the exaltations of courtly and companionate love without which many Westerners today have any frame by which to understand goodness in marriage (See Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980, Chapter 18, for a contrast between traditional and technological society.).

I would like to look at two quotations, the first from Augustine writing against the Manichees, and the second as an author today writes in reference to the first:

Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be

entangled in flesh? This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit (the Blessed Augustine is referring to I Tim 4:1-3).

There is irony here. "Natural family planning" is today sometimes presented as a fundamental opposite to artificial contraception. (The term refers to a calculated abstinence precisely at the point where a wife is naturally capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.) Augustine here described natural family planning, as such, and condemns it in harsh terms. (I will discuss "natural family planning" in the next section. I would prefer to call it contraceptive timing for a couple of reasons.)

Note:

There is some irony in calling "'Natural' Family Planning" making a set of mathematical calculations and deliberately avoiding intercourse at the times when a woman is naturally endowed with the greatest capacity for

desire, pleasure, and response.

Besides the immediate irony of Augustine criticizing the *form* of contraception to be heralded as "'Natural' Family Planning," (remember that "natural" family planning is a calculated abstinence when a wife is capable, naturally, of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response), Augustine's words are particularly significant because the method of contraception being discussed raised no question of contraception through recourse to the occult ("medicine man" *pharmakeia* potions) even in the Patristic world. There are various issues surrounding contraception: in the Patristic world, contraceptive and abortifascient potions were difficult to distinguish and were made by *pharmakoi* in whom magic and drugs were not sharply distinguished (Noonan 1986, 25.). But it would be an irresponsible reading to conclude from this that Patristic condemnations of contraceptive potions were only condemning them for magic, for much the same reason as it would be irresponsible to conclude that recent papal documents condemning the contraceptive mindset are only condemning selfishness and not making any statement about contraception as such. Patristic condemnations of contraception could be quite forceful (Noonan 1986, 91.), although what I want to explore is not so much the condemnations as the environment which partly gave rise to them:

[L]et us sketch a marriage in every way most happy; illustrious birth, competent means, suitable ages, the very flower of the prime of life, deep affection, the very best that each can think of the other, that sweet rivalry of each wishing to surpass the

other in loving; in addition, popularity, power, wide reputation, and everything else But observe that even beneath this array of blessings the fire of an inevitable pain is smouldering... They are human all the time, things weak and perishing; they have to look upon the tombs of their progenitors; and so pain is inseparably bound up with their existence, if they have the least power of reflection. This continued expectancy of death, realized by no sure tokens, but hanging over them the terrible uncertainty of the future, disturbs their present joy, clouding it over with the fear of what is coming... Whenever the husband looks at the beloved face, that moment the fear of separation accompanies the look. If he listens to the sweet voice, the thought comes into his mind that some day he will not hear it. Whenever he is glad with gazing on her beauty, then he shudders most with the presentiment of mourning her loss. When he marks all those charms which to youth are so precious and which the thoughtless seek for, the bright eyes beneath the lids, the arching eyebrows, the cheek with its sweet and dimpling smile, the natural red that blooms upon the lips, the gold-bound hair shining in many-twisted masses on the head, and all that transient grace, then, though he may be little given to reflection, he must have this thought also in his inmost soul that some day all this beauty will melt away and become as nothing, turned after all this show into noisome and unsightly bones, which wear no trace, no memorial, no remnant of that living bloom. Can he live delighted when he thinks of that?

Let no one think however that herein we

depreciate marriage as an institution. We are well aware that it is not a stranger to God's blessing. But since the common instincts of mankind can plead sufficiently on its behalf, instincts which prompt by a spontaneous bias to take the high road of marriage for the procreation of children, whereas Virginitly in a way thwarts this natural impulse, it is a superfluous task to compose formally an Exhortation to marriage. We put forward the pleasure of it instead, as a most doughty champion on its behalf... But our view of marriage is this; that, while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man's first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state. An example might be found in the patriarch Isaac. He married Rebecca when he was past the flower of his age and his prime was well-nigh spent, so that his marriage was not the deed of passion, but because of God's blessing that should be upon his seed. He cohabited with her till the birth of her only children, and then, closing the channels of the senses, lived wholly for the Unseen...

This picture of a "moderate" view of marriage that does not "depreciate marriage as an institution" comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginitly*, and allowances must be made for the fact that St. Gregory of Nyssa is contrasting virginitly, not with an easy opposite today, namely promiscuity or lust, but marriage, which he bitterly attacks in the context of this passage. The piece is not an attractive one today. However, that does not mean that what he says is not part of the picture. This bitter attack is part of a picture in which contraception could look very

different from today, but that way of looking at contraception is not purely the cause of a rhetoric attacking marriage to praise virginity. I present this not to analyze St. Gregory's exact view on marriage, but to give a taste of an answer to "How else could it be?" in comparison to what is unquestionable today.

Some attitudes today (arguably the basic assumption that motivates offense at the idea that one is condemning the goodness of the created order in treating sex as rightly ordered towards procreation) could be paraphrased, "We affirm the body as good, and we affirm sex in all its goodness. It is a source of pleasure; it is a way to bond; it is powerful as few other things are. But it has a downside, and that is a certain biological survival: unless countermeasures are taken, along with its good features unwanted pregnancy can come. And properly affirming the goodness of sex means freeing it from the biological holdover that gives the good of sexual pleasure the side effect of potentially resulting in pregnancy even if it is pursued for another reason." To the Patristic Christian, this may well come across as saying something like, "Major surgery can be a wonderful thing. It is occasion for the skillful art of doctors, in many instances it is surrounded by an outflow of love by the patient's community, and the difficulties associated with the process can build a thicker spine and provide a powerful process of spiritual discipline. But it would be really nice if we could undergo surgery without attendant risks of unwanted improvements to our health."

It seems so natural today to affirm the goodness of the body or sex, and see as the only possible translation of that affirmation "the goodness of the pleasure in sexual experience," that different views are not even thinkable; I

would like to mention briefly some other answers to the question, "How else could it be?" The ancient world, in many places, looked beyond the few minutes of treasure and found the basis for the maxim, "*Post coitum omne animal triste*" (after sex, every animal [including humans] is sad), and feared that sex could, among other things, fundamentally deplete virile energy (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, New York: Random House 1985, 137): its goodness might be seen as a costly goodness involving the whole person, rather than simply being the goodness of "one more pleasure, only a very intense one, that is especially good because it is especially intense" or self-evidently being at the core of even a good marriage (Noonan 1986, 47-8).

This is not to suggest that Christians merely copied the surrounding views. Contraception, abortion, and infanticide were quite prevalent in the Roman world (Noonan 1986, 10-29). Whatever else Patristic Christianity can be criticized for in its strong stance on contraception, abortion, and infanticide, it is not an uncritical acceptance of whatever their neighbors would happen to be doing. And if St. Gregory of Nyssa holds up an example which he alleges is procreation that minimizes pleasure, it might be better not to simply say that neo-Platonism tainted many of the Fathers with a dualistic view in which the body was evil, or some other form of, "His environment made him do it."

Modernity and "natural" family planning

In the discussion which follows, I will use the term "contraceptive timing" in lieu of the somewhat euphemistic

"natural family planning" or "the rhythm method." In my own experience, I have noticed Catholics consistently needing to explain why "natural family planning" is an opposite to contraception; invariably newcomers have difficulties seeing why decreasing the odds of conception through mathematical timing is a fundamentally different matter from decreasing the odds of conception through biological and chemical expedients. I would draw an analogy to firing a rifle down a rifle range, or walking down a rifle range to retrieve a target: either action, appropriately timed, is licit; changing the timing of an otherwise licit action by firing a rifle while others are retrieving their targets and walk in front of that gun is a use of timing that greatly affects the moral significance of an otherwise licit act. I will hereafter use the phrase "contraceptive timing."

Orthodox implications

As Orthodox, I have somewhat grave concerns about my own Church, which condemned contraception before 1970 but in recent decades appears to have developed a "new consensus" more liberal than the Catholic position: abortifascient methods are excluded, there must be some openness to children, and it must be agreed with by a couple's spiritual father. This "new consensus," or at least what is called a new consensus in an article that acknowledges it as surrounded by controversy that has "various groups accusing each other of Western influence," which is, in Orthodox circles, a good cue that there is something interesting going on.

The one article I found on the topic was "lobbyist" scholarship that seemed to *avoid* giving a fuller picture

(Zaphiris 1974.). This one article I found in the ATLA religion database matching the keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" was an article that took a "new consensus" view and, most immediately, did not provide what I was hoping a "new consensus" article would provide: an explanation that can say, "We understand that the Fathers had grave reservations about contraception, but here is why it can be permissible." The article in fact made no reference to relevant information that can (at least today) be easily obtained from conservative Catholic analyses. There was no discussion of relevant but ambiguous matter such as Onan's sin (Noonan 1986, 34-6.) and New Testament condemnations of "medicine man" *pharmakeia* which would have included some contraception (Noonan 1986, 44-5.). There was not even the faintest passing mention of forceful denunciations of contraception by both Greek and Latin Fathers. John Chrysostom was mentioned, but only as support for distinguishing the good of sex from procreation: "The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage." (Zaphiris 1974, 680) Possibly; St. Chrysostom may not have written anything like the incendiary material from St. Gregory above. But "the moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers" *did* write:

The *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* has at times a legendary bias against Rome (let alone against the Eastern Church), and renders Chrysostom as talking about abortion and infanticide but not obviously contraception. This is deliberate mistranslation. To pick out one example, In *Patrologia Graecae* 60.626 (the quotation spans PG 60.626-7), "*enqa polla ta atokia*," rendered "*ubi multae*

sunt herbae in sterilitatem?" in the PG's Latin and "Where are the medicines of sterility?" by Noonan, appears in the NPNF as "where are there many efforts at abortion?" This is a deliberate under-translation.

[St. John Chrysostom:] *Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife. (Homilies on Romans XXIV, Rom 13:14, as translated in Noonan 1986, 98.)*

St. Chrysostom is not so quick as we are today to distinguish contraception from murder. Possibly, as Zaphiris writes, "there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy." But this is a treacherous use of words.

Let me give an analogy to explain why. People consume both food and drink, by eating and drinking. But it is

somewhat strange to point out that a person has never drunk a roast beef sandwich, particularly in an attempt to lead a third party to believe, incorrectly, that a person has never consumed that food item. The Church has "defined" statements relating to Trinitarian and Christological, and other doctrines, and formulated morally significant canon law. But she has never "defined" a statement in morals; that would be like drinking a roast beef sandwich. And so for Zaphiris to point out that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a statement about contraception—a point that would be obvious to someone knowing what sorts of things the Church does not "define;" "defining" a position against murder would, for some definitions of "define," be like drinking a sandwich—and lead the reader to believe that the Church has never issued a highly authoritative statement about contraception. The Orthodox Church has issued such statements more than once.

Saying that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a position on a moral question is as silly and as pointless as saying that a man has never drunk a roast beef sandwich: it is technically true, but sheds no light on whether a person has consumed such a sandwich—or taken a stand on the moral question at hand. Zaphiris's "observation" is beginning to smell a lot like spin doctoring.

I have grave reservations about an article that gives the impression of covering relevant Patristic material to the question of contraception without hinting at the fact that it was condemned. Needless to say, the article did not go beyond the immediate condemnation to try to have a sympathetic understanding of why someone would find it sensible to make such condemnations. If I were trying to marshal Orthodox theological resources in the support of

some use of contraception, I doubt if I could do better than Zaphiris. However, if the question is what Orthodox should believe in reading the Bible through the Fathers, submitting to the tradition in seeking what is licit, then this version of a "new consensus" theological treatment gives me even graver doubts about the faithfulness of the "new consensus" to Orthodox tradition. The Zaphiris article, if anything, seems to be an Orthodox document with influence, and red flags, that are comparable to *Humanae Vitae*.

There have been times before where the Orthodox Church has accepted something alien and come to purify herself in succeeding centuries. In that sense there would be a precedent for a change that would be later undone, and that provides one ready Orthodox classification. The Orthodox Wiki provides no history of the change in Orthodoxy, and a formal statement by the Orthodox Church in America (source), without specifically *praising* any form of contraception, attests to the newer position and allows some use of reproductive technologies, but does not explain the change. I would be interested in seeing why the Orthodox Church in particular has brought itself into sudden agreement with cultural forces beyond what the Catholic Church has.

The Orthodox Church both affirms that Christ taught marriage to be indissoluble—excluding both divorce and remarriage after divorce—and allows by way of oikonomia (a concession or leniency in observing a rule) a second and third remarriage after divorce, not counting marriages before full reception into the Orthodox Church. However, there is a difference between observing a rule with oikonomia and saying that the rule does not apply. If a rule is observed with oikonomia, the rule is recognized even as it

is not followed literally, much like choosing "the next best thing to being there," in lieu of personal presence, when one is invited to an occasion but cannot easily attend. By contrast, saying that the rule does not apply is a deeper rejection, like refusing a friend's invitation in a way that denies any duty or moral claim for that friend. There is a fundamental difference between sending a gift to a friend's wedding with regrets that one cannot attend, and treating the invitation itself with contempt. The rites for a second and third marriage are genuine observations of the fact that one is observing a rule with leniency: the rite for a second marriage is penitential, the rite for a third marriage even more so, and a firm line is drawn that rules out a fourth marriage: *oikonomia* has limits. If a second and third marriage is allowed, the concession recognizes the rule and, one might argue, the reality the rule recognizes. If one looks at jokes as an anthropologist would, as revealing profound assumptions about a culture, snipes about "A wife is only temporary; an ex-wife is forever" and "When two divorced people sleep together, four people are in the bed" are often told by people who would scoff at the idea of marriage as a sacred, permanent union... but the jokes themselves testify that there is something about a marriage that divorce cannot simply erase: a spouse can become an ex-spouse, but the marriage is too permanent to simply be dropped as something revocable that has no intrinsically permanent effects. And in that sense, an ex-spouse is closer to a spouse than to a friend that has never had romance. Which is to say that marriage bears witness both to an absolute and *oikonomia* in how that absolute is observed.

Even with noted exceptions, the Gospels give the indissolubility of marriage a forceful dominical saying

backed by quotation from the heart of the Old Testament Scriptures. If something that forcefully put may legitimately be observed with *oikonomia*, then it would seem strange to me to say that what I have observed as Patristic attitudes, where thinking of contraception as desirable would appear seriously disturbed, dictate not only a suspicion towards contraception but a criterion that admits no *oikonomia* in its observation. Presumably some degree *oikonomia* is allowable, and perhaps one could not rule out the *oikonomia* could take the form of a new consensus's criterion allowing non-abortifascient contraception, in consultation with one's spiritual father, on condition of allowing children at some point during a marriage. *However*, even if that is the legitimate *oikonomia*, it is legitimate as the lenient observation of grave moral principles. And, in that sense, unless one is prepared to say that the Patristic consensus is wrong in viewing contraception with great suspicion, the *oikonomia*, like the rites for a second and third marriage, should be appropriate for an *oikonomia* in observing a moral concern that remains a necessary moral concern even as it is *observed* with leniency.

Conclusion

I am left with a puzzle: why is it that Orthodox have adopted the current "new consensus"? My guess is that Zaphiris's quite provocative article was taken as simply giving a straight account of Orthodoxy and Patristic teaching as it relates to contraception. The OCA document more or less applies both his analysis and prescriptions. But, while I hesitate to say that no one could explain both

why the Fathers would regard contraception as abhorrent and we should permit it in some cases, I will say that I have not yet encountered such an explanation. And I would present, if not anything like a last word, at least important information which should probably be considered in judging the rule and what is appropriate *oikonomia*. If Orthodoxy regards Patristic culture and philosophy as how Christ has become incarnate in the Orthodox Church, then neither condemnations of contraception, nor the reasons why those condemnations would be made in the first place, concern only antiquarians.

Would it be possible for there to be *another* "new consensus?"

"Morality of Contraception: An Orthodox Opinion:" A commentary

The article published by Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90, seems *extremely* significant. **It seems a lobbyist article, and in both content and timing the 1970's "new consensus" as articulated by the Orthodox Church in America is consistent with taking Zaphiris in good faith as simply stating the Orthodox position on contraception.** (This was the one article I found in an ATLA search for keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" anywhere, on 13 May, 2007. A search for "Orthodoxy" and "contraception" on 14

May, 2007 turned up one additional result which seemed to be connected to queer theory.) I perceive in this faulty—or, more properly, deceptively *incomplete* data, questionable argument, and seductive sophistry which I wish to comment on.

I believe that Zaphiris's text is worth at least an informal commentary to draw arguments and certain features to the reader's attention. In this commentary, all footnotes will be Zaphiris's own; where I draw on other sources I will allude to the discussion above or add parenthetical references. I follow his footnote numbering, note page breaks by inserting the new page number, and reproduce some typographical features.

Footnote from Zaphiris's text

Chrysostom Zaphiris (Orthodox) is a graduate of the Patriarchal Theological School of Halki, Turkey, and holds a doctorate with highest honors from the University of Strasbourg, where he studied with the Roman Catholic faculty. His 1970 thesis dealt with the "Text of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Accordance with the Citations in Clement of Alexandria compared with Citations in the Greek Fathers and Theologians of the Second to Fifth Centuries." Dr. Zaphiris taught canon law and New Testament courses at Holy Cross School of Theology (at Hellenic College), Brookline, MA, 1970-72. From 1972 to 1974, he was Vice Rector at the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Studies, Tantur, Jerusalem.

* This paper was originally presented during the

discussion held for doctors of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the surrounding area hosted by theologians of the Ecumenical Institute at Tantur on the question of the morality of contraception. At this point, I would like also to thank Br. James Hanson, C.S.C., for his help editing my English text.

THE MORALITY OF CONTRACEPTION: AN
EASTERN ORTHODOX OPINION*

by

CHRYSOSTOM ZAPHIRIS

PRECIS

This discussion of the morality of contraception includes four basic points: the purpose of marriage as viewed scripturally and patristically, the official teachings of Orthodoxy concerning contraception, the moral issue from an Orthodox perspective, and "the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception."

It is possible through inference to determine that the Scriptures and the early Christian writers considered that, within marriage, sexual activity and procreation were not the same entity and that sexuality was to be practiced within marriage. These assertions are illustrated.

The official teaching of the Orthodox Church on contraception includes five points: a denunciation of intentional refusal to procreate within marriage, a

condemnation of both abortion and infanticide, an absence of any commitment against contraception, and a reliance upon the medical profession to supply further information on the issue. The author offers a theological opinion on the question of contraception allowing for contraception under certain circumstances.

Synergism is the final issue discussed. Synergism is defined as cooperation, co-creation, and co-legislation between humans and God. When people use their talents and faculties morally and creatively, they are acting in combination with God and expressing God's will. The Orthodox view of contraception is perceived within the dimensions of synergistic activity and serves as a contrast to the Roman Catholic view.

The essay concludes with some comments about contraception as a moral issue as perceived within the Eastern Orthodox Church. Allowing for individual freedom and responsibility, and in light of synergism, Orthodoxy avoids definitive pronouncements on such moral issues as contraception.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Contraception is one of the most important aspects of human behavior and family life, and thus it is a part of life which cannot be ignored by theology itself. There can be no question of treating this moral question, but only of outlining the aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition.

I don't know an exact rule for "what must be considered for the Orthodox tradition," but besides of Biblical witness, the Patriarch of New Rome and one of three "heirarchs and ecumenical teachers" of the Orthodox Church, St. John Chrysostom, homilectically treating something as an abomination and calling it "worse than murder" would tend to be something I would include under "aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition."

One reaction which I would like to address in many readers, even though it is not properly commentary is, "Contraception is comparable to *homicide*? It's called "worse than *murder*"? Is this translated correctly? Is this gross exaggeration? Is it cultural weirdness, or some odd influence of Platonic thought that the Church has recovered from? Why on earth would anybody say that?" This is a natural reaction, partly because the Fathers are articulating a position that is inconceivable today. So the temptation is to assume that this has some cause, perhaps historical, despite moral claims that cannot be taken seriously today.

I would like to provide a loose analogy, intended less to convince than convey how someone really could find a continuity between contraception and murder. Suppose that destroying a painting is always objectionable. Now consider the process of painting: a painting germinates in an artist's mind, is physically created and explored, and finally becomes something one hangs on a wall.

Now let me ask a question: if one tries to interrupt the process of artistic creation, perhaps by disrupting the creator's state of mind and scattering the paints, does that qualify as "destroying a painting"?

The answer to that question depends on what qualifies as "destroying a painting." If one disrupts the artist who is

thinking about painting a painting, or scatters the paints and half-painted canvas, then in neither case has one destroyed a finished painting. You cannot point to a completed painting that was there before the interruption began, and say, "See? That is the painting that was destroyed." *However*, someone who is not being legalistic has good reason to pause before saying "This simply does not qualify as destroying a painting" A *completed* painting was not destroyed, but the process of artistic creation that produces a completed painting was destroyed. And in that sense, someone who interrupted Van Gogh and stopped him from painting "Starry Night" is doing the same sort of thing as someone today who would burn up the completed painting. The two acts are cut from the same cloth.

Now my intent is not to provide a precise and detailed allegory about what detail of the creation process represents conception, birth, etc. That is not the intent of the general illustration. My point is that talk about "destroying paintings" need not be construed only as destroying a completed painting in its final form. There is also the possibility of destroying a painting in the sense of willfully disrupting the process of an artist in the process of making a painting. And, perhaps, there is room for St. John Chrysostom's horrified, "*Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation.*" Now is this rhetorical exaggeration? Quite possibly; Noonan studies various penitentials, all from before the Great Schism, and although there is not always a penance assigned for contraception by potion, two assign a lighter penance than for homicide, one assigns the same penance, and one actually assigns a penance of four years for homicide and

seven for contraception. Contraception could bear a heavier penance than murder.

It is somewhat beside the point to work out if we *really* have to take St. John Chrysostom literally in saying that contraception is worse than homicide. I don't think that is necessary. But it is not beside the point that the Fathers seem to treat a great deal of continuity between contraception, abortion, and infanticide, and seem not to draw terribly sharp oppositions between them. Whether or not one assigns heavy-handed penalties from contraception, I can't think of a way to read the Fathers responsibly and categorically deny that contraception is cut from the same cloth as abortion and infanticide. The point is not exactly an exact calculus to measure the relative gravity of the sins. The point is that they are all connected in patristic writing.

First, we need to study the purpose of marriage as we find it in the Scriptures and in the writings of the Greek Fathers. Second, we will reflect on the official teaching authority of the Orthodox Church on this question of contraception. Third, we will offer a moral opinion as to the legitimacy of the practice of contraception from an Orthodox viewpoint. And finally, we will discuss the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception.

II. THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE.

Although the purpose of marriage is never treated systematically in the Scriptures or in the Fathers according to our contemporary

viewpoint and questions, it is possible to infer the thoughts of these classical authors on the purpose of marriage. In general, what we find is that there is the presupposition that human sexual activity within marriage and the procreation of children are not seen as completely the same reality. And furthermore, both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that human sexuality can be expressed within marriage.

The claim in the last sentence is true; more has been argued from St. John Chrysostom. But Orthodoxy does view celibacy and marriage as more compatible than some assume today. At least by the letter of the law, Orthodox are expected to be continent on fasting days and on days where the Eucharist is received, meaning a minimum of almost half days of the year, including one period approaching two months. I don't know what degree of *oikonomia* is common in pastoral application, but an Orthodox might want to drop another shoe besides saying "both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that sexuality can be expressed in marriage."

The Scriptures present us with a Christian doctrine of marriage most clearly in Genesis and in the writings of St. Paul. In Genesis 2:18, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, but that he should have a helpmate which he then gave to Adam in the person of his wife, Eve. Is this help meant by God to be only social and religious?

Apparently the possibility that marriage could, as in the patristic world, be not only an affective matter of what people but a union of pragmatic *help* encompassing even the economic is not considered.

For a detailed answer to "How else could that be?" in terms of a relationship including quite significant pragmatic *help*, see Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980. To someone who has read and digested that book, there seem to be an awful lot of assumptions going into what marriage is allowed to be for the husband and wife.

Or is it also intended by God to be a physical help provided to a man in terms of sexual complementarity?

Does "physical help" simply boil down to the C-word, as Zaphiris seems to mean? Are there no other possibilities? And why is "physical help" just something a wife gives a husband and not something a husband gives a wife? The euphemism sounds like the wife should be kind enough to join a pity party: "*It causes him so much pleasure, and it causes me so little pain.*" I would like to propose a much more excellent alternative: **making love.**

Perhaps it is also possible that "physical help" should also include assistance with errands, or provision, or getting work done as part of a working household? Besides *Stephen Clark, Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant 1980), Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the ideal helpmate who perhaps has children

but is not praised for beauty or as a basic sex toy: she is praised, among other things, as a powerful and effective helpmeet. In the praises, physical beauty is mentioned only in order to deprecate its significance.

In reading Clark, it seems a natural thing to offer a wife the praises of the end of Proverbs. Zaphiris's presuppositions make that kind of thing look strange. But the defect is with Zaphiris.

However we answer these questions, one thing is certain: the question of procreation as such is not raised by the author. Yet, procreation itself is encouraged by the author of Genesis 1:28, when God orders human beings to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Just as the author of the Pentateuch never makes an explicit connection between the creation of Eve and the practice of human procreation, so likewise St. Paul in the New Testament never makes this connection.

In the case of St. Paul, it is a question of sexual relations of continence within marriage or of marriage as opposed to virginity, but never exactly the question of procreation in any of these cases. Paul considers marriage and virginity as charisms within the life of the Church. He exhorts believers to the practice of virginity if they have this charism; if not, he encourages them to marry. This raises a subsequent question: "Does St. Paul encourage marriage first of all to promote the procreation of children or rather make up for human weakness which is experienced in sexual passion?" While I acknowledge that procreation of children is one of the reasons for marriage which

Christian theology has consistently taught, it has never been the *only* reason for Christian marriage.

If we follow St. Paul closely, it is apparent that he encourages a man to marry, not simply to procreate children, but for other reasons, the most prominent of which 679 would be to avoid fornication (cf. I Cor. 7:2). It is because human persons have the right

I would like to make a comment that sounds, at first, like nitpicking about word choice:

Rights-based moral calculus is prevalent in the modern world, sometimes so that people don't see how to do moral reasoning without seeing things in terms of rights. But the modern concept of a "right" is alien to Orthodoxy.

See Kenneth Himes (ed.) *et al.*, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press 2005), chapter 2 (41-71) for an historical discussion including how the concept of rights became incorporated into Catholic moral reasoning from the outside. The change was vigorously resisted as recently as Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), today the subject of embarrassed explanations, but what Catholics apologetically explain is often closer to Orthodoxy than the modern Catholic explanation of what Catholicism really teaches. Even in modern Catholicism, officially approved "rights" language is a relatively recent development, and there are attempts to use the concept differently from the secular West.

Armenian Orthodox author Vigen Guorian's *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1987, page number not available) briefly complains about the modern idea of placing human

dignity on no deeper basis than rights; I would refer the reader to my homily "Do we have rights?" (http://jonathanscorner.com/no_rights/) for moral-ascetical reasoning that rejects the innovation.

The reason why I am "nitpicking" here is that there is a subtle difference, but a profound one, between saying that sex is good within marriage (or at least permissible), and saying that husband and wife have a right to sexual pleasure, and this entitlement is deep enough that if the sexual generation of children would be undesirable, the entitlement remains, along with a necessity of modifying sex so that the entitled sexual pleasure is delivered even if the sexual generation of children is stopped cold.

Zaphiris never develops the consequences of rights-based moral reasoning at length or makes it the explicit basis for arguing for an entitlement to sexual pleasure even if that means frustrating sexual generation. However, after asserting a married right to sex, he not only fails to discourage this reasoning, but reaches a conclusion identical with the one this reasoning would reach.

to be married and to perform sexual activity within that specific context that Jesus Christ and St. Paul have condemned explicitly the practice of fornication (cf. Mt 5:32, 19:9; Acts 15:20; I Cor. 5:1, 6, 13, 18). Thus, in our study of the Christian tradition on marriage and the possibility of contraceptive practices within marriage, we must keep clearly in view this particular function of marriage as an antidote to fornication.

We find a similar sensitivity in the writings of Paul to the human need for sexual gratification in marriage

when he counsels Christian couples on the practice of continence within marriage. "The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husbands. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's. Do not deny yourselves to one another, except when you agree upon a temporary abstinence in order to devote yourselves to prayer; afterwards, you may come together again; otherwise, for lack of self-control, you may be tempted by Satan" (I Cor. 7:4-5). In this passage, there is no question of procreation, but only of the social union between husband and wife within Christian marriage. While, on the positive side, Paul affirms that Christian marriage is a sign of the union between Jesus Christ and the Church and that the married couple participates in the unity and holiness of this union, more negatively he also sees in marriage an antidote or outlet for the normal human sexual passions. In this context, St. Paul always counsels marriage as preferable to any possibility of falling into fornication.

In saying this, St. Paul is obviously not opposed to procreation as the end of marriage. The bearing of children was naturally expected to result from the practice of sexual intercourse within marriage as he counseled it. Abstinence from regular sexual intercourse was encouraged only to deepen the life of prayer for a given period of time. This limiting of abstinence to a specific period of time shows well Paul's sensitivity to the demands of human sexual passions and his elasticity of judgment in giving moral counsel. Thus, from the exegesis of Genesis of St. Paul, the whole contemporary question of the explicit

connection between sexual intercourse within marriage and the procreation of children was simply not raised in the same form in which it is today.

I would like to take a moment to look at the story of Onan before posing a suggestion about exegesis.

I suggest that in the Bible, especially in portraying something meant to horrify the reader, there are often multiple elements to the horror. The story of Sodom portrays same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality. There is a profoundly naive assumption behind the question, "Of same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality, which *one* are we *really* supposed to think is the problem?" In this case, it seems all three contributed to something presented as superlatively horrifying, and it is the combined effect that precedes Sodom's judgment in fire and sulfur and subsequently becoming the Old Testament prophet's "poster city" for every single vice from idolatry and adultery to pride and cruelty to the poor. The story of Sodom is *written* to have multiple elements of horror.

There is one story where contraception is mentioned in the Bible, and it is one of few where Onan joins the company of Uzzah, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod (the one in Acts), and perhaps others in being the only people named in the Bible as being struck dead by God for their sins. This is not an august company. Certainly Onan's story is not the story of a couple saying, "Let's just focus on the children we have," but a story *that* forceful in condemning Onan's sin, *whatever* the sin properly consisted in, has *prima facie* good claim to be included a Biblical text that factors into a Biblical view of contraception. The story is relevant, even if

it is ambiguous for the concerns of this question.

Likewise, in something that is not translated clearly in most English translations, the New Testament (Gal 5:20, Rev 9:21) *pharmakoi* refers to "medicine men" who made, among other things, contraceptive and abortifascient potions, in a world that seemed not to really separate drugs from magic. English translations ordinarily follow the KJV in translating this only with reference to the occult sin, so that it does not come across clearly that the Bible is condemning the people you would go to for contraceptives. This is ambiguous evidence for this discussion: it is not clear whether it is only condemning the occult practices, condemning what the occult practices were used for, or condemning both at the same time, but the question is significant.

Granted, not every Biblical text touching marriage is evidence against contraception. There are other relevant passages like Gal 5:21-33 which discuss the love in marriage with no reference to fecundity, but if one wants to understand the Bible as it relates to contraception, it is surprising not to mention passages that directly impinge on it, ambiguously but raising the question of whether contraception is a grave sin.

Zaphiris's footnote:

1. Cf. *Stromata*, III, 82, 4.

Turning from the writings of Paul to those of the Greek Fathers, we will see that there is a continuity of Orthodox tradition in this understanding of the purpose of marriage. First, let us consider the

statement of Clement of Alexandria who raises this problem as a theologian and as a pastor of the faithful. When he comments on I Cor. 7:2, he uses neither the allegorical nor the spiritual method of exegesis, but rather the literal interpretation of this Pauline text. Through this methodology, Clement, in spite of his usual idealism, recommends marriage over fornication and counsels sexual intercourse within marriage over the possibility of serving the temptor through fornication.[1]

Zaphiris's footnote

2. See H. Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris-Bruges, 1963), pp. 80-133.

679 We find a similar line of thought in his successor, Origen. Although Origen accepts procreation as the end of marriage, he also sees in marriage the legitimate concession to human weakness in its sexual passions.[2]

Likewise Methodius of Olympus continues this interpretation of St. Paul in a very clear statement on the subject: "... The apostle did not grant these things unconditionally to all, but first laid down the reason on account of which he has led to this. For, having set forth that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' (I Cor. VII, 1) he added immediately 'nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife' (I Cor. VII, 2)—that is 'on account of the fornication which would arise from your being unable to restrain your passions.'..." Afterwards the author notes that

Paul speaks "by permission" and "not of command," so that Methodius comments: "For he receives command respecting chastity and not touching of a woman, but permission respecting those who are unable to chasten their appetites."

Zaphiris's footnote

3. Cf. *The Banquet of the Virgins*, III, 12.

Methodius applies similar logic to the possibility of the second marriage, in that he permits the second marriage, not specifically for the procreation of children, but "on account of the strength of animal passion, he [Paul] allows one who is in such condition may, 'by permission' contract a second marriage; not as though he expressed the opinion that a second marriage was in itself good, but judging it better than burning . . ." According to Methodius, the apostle speaks here, first saying that he wished all were healthy and continent, as he also was, but afterwards allowing a second marriage to those who are burdened with the weaknesses of the passions, goaded on by the uncontrolled desires of the organs of generations for promiscuous intercourse, considering such a second marriage far preferable to burning and indecency.[3]

4. See A. Moulard, *Saint Jean Chrysostome, le défenseur du mariage et l'apôtre de la virginité* (Paris, 1923), pp. 72ff.

The moral theologian *par excellence* of the

Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage. On the contrary, he adheres to the Pauline texts and to the apologists for virginity and concludes that marriage does not have any other goal than that of hindering fornication.

"The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers" wrote the passage cited in the paper above:

"Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife."

There is arguably a degree of ambiguity in the Church Fathers. However, the ambiguity is of a far lesser degree. The Fathers argued most vehemently against opponents who believed the procreation of *any* children was morally

wrong; contraception was seen as a duty in all intercourse, and not a personal choice for one's convenience. See Augustine as cited on page 6 above. Acknowledging that the Fathers addressed a different situation, this does not mean that, since the Fathers did not address the situation of a couple not wishing to be burdened by more children for now, the patristic arguments are inapplicable. An injunction against suicide may say something about self-mutilation even if, in the initial discussion, there was no question of mutilations that were nonlethal in character.

There is some element of something in the Fathers that can be used to support almost anything: hence Sarah Coakley's *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell 2002) teams up St. Gregory of Nyssa with Judith Butler, who is a lesbian deconstructionist and "bad writing" award winner, in pursuing the "gender fluidity" that is greatly sought after by queer theory and feminism (157-61). For that matter, I think there is a stronger case for Arianism, from the Bible, than Zapyiris makes from the Church Fathers on contraception, and it involves less "crossing fingers." For the record, I believe the conclusions of both arguments I have brought up are heresy, but there is a reason I brought them up. We are in trouble if we only expect the truth to be able to pull arguments from the Scripture and the Fathers, or believe that an argument that draws on the Scripture and the Fathers is therefore trustworthy. My point is not so much whether Zaphiris is right or wrong as the fact that there's something that can be pulled from the Fathers in support of everything, either right *or* wrong. His argument needs to be weighed on its merits. (Or demerits.)

There is some more complexity to the discussion; I have

left many things out of the shorter article, but the much even of what I have left out would make the point more strongly. Hence Noonan discusses a view that sex during pregnancy is not licit because it will not be fruitful, discusses the Stoic protest of "even animals don't do this," mentions a third-century dissenter from this view (Lactantius) who allowed sex during pregnancy only as an ambivalent concession, and then the well-read researcher writes, "This... is the only opinion I have encountered in any Christian theologian before 1500 explicitly upholding the lawfulness of intercourse in pregnancy" (Noonan 1986, 78.). Properly taken in context, this would support a much stronger position than I have argued, and one less attractive today.

Is the issue complex? There's a lot here to understand. Granted. But in this case, "complex" does not mean "nothing but shades of grey," and I am at a loss for a good, honest reason to claim to provide an overview Patristic theology as relevant to contraception, while at the same time failing to mention how it condemned contraception.

III. THE OFFICIAL TEACHING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ON CONTRACEPTION

While there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy,

To modify what I wrote above: I am not sure exactly what Zaphiris means by "defined." The Church is not considered to have "defined" *any* position on morals in the sense of infallibly pronounced doctrines. In Orthodoxy, the Seven Ecumenical Councils may create canons that are

morally binding, but irreversible doctrinal declarations are mostly connected to Christology. Under *that* definition of "defined", the Orthodox Church would not have "defined" a ruling against contraception, *regardless* of its moral status. Neither would she have "defined" a ruling against rape, murder, or any other heinous offenses, even as she unambiguously condemns them.

This is one of several passages that raises questions of slippery rhetoric, perhaps of sophistry. Assuming that the above understanding of "defined" applies (a question which I am unsure of even if it seems that an affirmative answer would be consistent with the rest of the document), his claim is technically true. But it is presented so as to be interpreted as stating that the Orthodox Church has no real position on the matter, unlike other moral questions where the Orthodox Church would presumably have defined a position. This understandable inference is false. The Patristic witness, and arguably the Biblical witness, in fact do treat contraception as suspicious at best. If so, this is a case of Zaphiris saying something technically true in order to create an impression that is the opposite of the truth. That is very well-done sophistry.

Zaphiris continues with a small, but telling, remark:

there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question.

This short claim is also true. More specifically, there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question and tends to view contraception negatively.

First, the Church vigorously denounces any

obvious case of pure egotism as the motivating force in Christian sexuality within marriage. Any married couple within the Orthodox Church who want absolutely no children sins grievously against both the Christian dispensation and against the primordial purpose of human life which includes the procreation or, as the Greek Fathers prefer, the "immortality" of the human 680 species.

It seems that Zaphiris may be, for reasons of rhetoric and persuasion, providing a limit to how much he claims, so as to be more readily accepted. Zaphiris provides no footnotes or reference to sources more specific than the "Greek Fathers" to buttress this claim, and does not provide an explanation for certain questions. One such question is why, if marriage is not morally required and celibates are *never* obligated to provide that specific support for the "immortality" of the human species, such obligation is binding on *all* married couples. Are all celibates exempt from "the primordial purpose of human life," and if so, why is it permissible to fail to meet such a foundational purpose of human life? I do not see why Zaphiris's logic justifies his making the more palatable claim that some openness towards children is mandatory.

This raises the question of whether he has a consistent position arising from his reading, or whether he is simply inventing a position and claiming he got it from the Greek Fathers.

According to the Greek Fathers, to refuse to transmit life to others is a grievous sin of pride in which the couple prefers to keep human life for themselves

instead of sharing it with possible offspring.

Zaphiris's footnotes:

5. See, e.g., *Didache*, II, i-3, V, 2, VI, 1-2; Pseudo-Barnabas, *Epist.*, XIX, 4-6, Saint Justin, 1 *Apolog.*, XXVII, 1-XXIX,1; Athenagoras, *Supplic.*, XXXV; *Epist. Ad Diogn.*, 5,6; Tertullian, *Apolog*, IX, 6-8; *Ad Nationes*, I, 15; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXX, 2; Lactance, *Divinarum Institutionum*, VI, 20.

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI. 135, *et Eclogae prophetae*, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic—because the embryo carries the soul which is transmitted by God.

7. We must stress the fact that a few non-Christian philosophers took issue with the pro-abortion majority and condemned abortion. Cf. Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Helviani*, XVI, 3; R. Musunius, p. 77; Desimus Junius Juvenalis, *Satire*, VI, 595f.; Philon of

Alexandria, *Hypothetia*, VII, 7 (apud Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VIII, 7, 7).

8. Among other Greek Fathers, see Clement of Alexandria, *Eclogae propheticae*, 50, 1-3.

Secondly, the Orthodox Church, following the teachings of the Fathers,[5] is totally opposed to any form of the abortion of unborn children. Human life belongs exclusively to God and neither the mother nor the father of the fetus has the right to destroy that life. [6] When the Fathers of the Church debated against the non-Christian philosophers[7] of the first centuries, they considered abortion as murder because the life of the fetus is animate being.[8]

(Note, for the closing claim, that the reason Zaphiris provides is articulated in a fashion which does not apply to contraception, at least not directly: destroying a painting is wrong precisely because an existing and completed painting is a work of art. What the rhetoric says, avoids saying, and leaves the reader to infer, seems to be exquisitely crafted sophistry.)

Thirdly, the Orthodox Church has universally condemned infanticide as immoral, following the same line of theological reasoning.

Zaphiris's footnote:

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a

human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI. 135, *et Eclogae propheticae*, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic—because the embryo carries the soul which is transmitted by God.

Fourthly, it is important to stress that the Orthodox Church has not promulgated any solemn statements through its highest synods on the whole contemporary question of contraception. In general, I think it is accurate to say that, as long as a married couple is living in fidelity to one another and not allowing an immoral egotism to dominate their sexual relations, the particularities of their sexual life are left to the freedom of the spouses to decide.

Finally, it is important to note that the Orthodox Church looks to the medical profession itself to come to some unanimity in its biological research on the effects of contraception for human health. At the moment, the world of science does not furnish the world of theology such a unanimous body of opinion as would allow the Church prudently to formulate unchangeable moral teaching on this point. 682

There is probably a higher class academic way of making this point, but there is a classic anecdote, rightly or

wrongly attributed:

Winston Churchill to unknown woman: "Would you sleep with me for a million pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Would I!"

Winston Churchill: "Would you sleep with me for five pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Exactly what kind of woman do you think I am?"

Winston Churchill: "We've already established that. We're just negotiating over the price."

This claim is not a claim that the theological status of contraception is to be determined by the medical profession. The paragraph quoted above means that the theological status of contraception has already been established, with the "price" left to the medical profession to work out.

IV. A THEOLOGICAL OPINION ON THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION

Zaphiris's footnote:

10. Clement of Alexandria, e.g., probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy, defines marriage as "gamos oun esti synodos andros kai gynaikos e prote kata nomon epi gnesion teknon sporai," i.e. marriage is primarily the union of a man and a woman

according to the law in order to procreate legitimate children (cf. *Stromata*, II, 137, 1).

From the material we have surveyed above, it should be obvious that there can be no question of entering into marriage without the intention of procreating children as part of the marriage and still remain faithful to the Orthodox moral tradition.[10]

Pay very, *very* close attention to footnote 10, immediately above. When a Church Father says that marriage is for the procreation of legitimate children, Zaphiris mentions this only in a footnote and immediately *apologizes* for it, explaining it away it as "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy." Are we really talking about the same "Greek philosophy" as Zaphiris describes above as only rarely having people speak out against abortion?

Zaphiris's footnote:

11. When the patristic theologians comment on the Pauline doctrine of I Cor. 7:4-5, they consistently stress the temporary character of the sexual abstinence which was permitted by St. Paul to the marriage partners. This temporary period would be all that a husband and wife should agree to in order to avoid the temptation to evil (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 79, 1).

However, it seems to me that a different question is raised when we consider the case of a couple who

already have three or four children and cannot realistically face the possibility of begetting more children and providing adequately for their upbringing and education. Either they can act fairly irresponsibly and beget more children or they can abstain from sexual intercourse with the constant threat that Satan may tempt the couple to some form of adultery.

I see plenty of precedent for this kind of heart-rending plea in Margaret Sanger's wake. Ordinarily when I see such a line of argument, it is to some degree connected with one of the causes Margaret Sanger worked to advance. I am more nebulous on whether the Fathers would have seen such "compassion" as how compassion is most truly understood; they were compassionate, but the framework that gave their compassion concrete shape is different from this model.

I might comment that it is almost invariably first-world people enjoying a first-world income who find that they cannot afford any more children. Are they really that much less able than people in the third-world to feed children, or is it simply that they cannot afford more children *and* keep up their present standard of living? If this choice is interpreted to mean that more children are out of the question, then what that means is, with apologies to St. John Chrysostom, a decision that luxuries and inherited wealth make a better legacy for one's children than brothers and sisters.

If the first practice of continued sexual intercourse is pursued, there is the likelihood of an unwanted pregnancy in which case the child ceases to be a sign of

their shared love, but risks being a burden which causes only anxiety and even hostility. It is not common that people in this situation of despondency opt for the clearly immoral act of abortion. If this radical action is avoided, and the parents go through with the birth of an unwanted child, there is still the danger that they will subsequently seek a divorce.

Apart from economic or possible emotional problems which accompany economic pressures in family life, there is the equally concrete problem that the health of one of the parents or the health of the possible child might be jeopardized should conception occur.

To limit as far as possible the moral, religious, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems which arise with the arrival of an unwanted child—both for the parents and for the larger community—I believe that the use of contraceptives would be, if not the best solution, at least the only solution we have at our disposal today. I cannot distinguish between natural and artificial means because the morality of both is the same. If someone uses either a natural or an artificial means of birth control, the intention is the same, i.e., to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The use of contraceptives can facilitate a sexual life which enjoys a minimum of anxiety.

Sexual anxiety is, far from what this passage suggests, the product of an attitude which sees God's gift of a child as a curse. That is to say, sexual anxiety is the product of a

mindset encouraged by contraception.

The cure for sexual anxiety is not doing what the passion suggests and using contraception as best you can. The cure for sexual anxiety is to welcome children as they come, and perhaps to value children above a "dual income, no kids" standard of luxury. For having children is not a threat to simple survival, nearly so much as a threat to luxuries people cannot question as *actually* being more significant than children.

With these reflections on the current situation of family life and based on the above understanding of St. Paul and the Fathers, I ask myself what is better: to practice abstinence from the act of sexual intercourse, an act made holy by the blessing of God, or to practice a controlled sexual life within marriage and avoid the temptation of Satan? As we know, sexual intimacy within marriage is a very important aspect of the relationship between husband and wife. With the use of contraceptives this sexual intimacy can be practiced without fear of unwanted pregnancy or without the danger of adultery which may result from the practice of abstinence.

Here contraceptives appear to "save the day" in terms of marital intimacy, and the question of whether they have drawbacks is not brought to the reader's attention. Zaphiris is interested, apparently, in answering the question, "What can be made attractive about contraception?" There are other ways of looking at it.

There was one time I met Fr. Richard John Neuhaus; it

was a pleasure, and very different from the stereotypes I keep hearing about neoconservatives here at my more liberal Catholic school, Fordham.

At that evening, over beer and (for the others) cigars I asked about the idea that I had been mulling over. The insight is that concepts ideas and positions having practical conclusions that may not be stated in any form. I asked Fr. Neuhaus for his response to the suggestion that the practice of ordaining women is a fundamental step that may ripple out and have other consequences. I said, "It would be an interesting matter to make a chart, for mainline Protestant denominations, of the date they accepted the ordination of women and the date when they accepted same-sex unions. My suspicion is that it would not be too many years."

He responded by suggesting that I push the observation further back: it would be interesting to make a chart for American denominations of the date when they allowed contraception, and the more nebulous date when they started to allow divorce.

Fr. Neuhaus's response raises an interesting question for this discussion. There might be greater value than Zaphiris provides in answering the question, "What are the practical effects, both positive and negative, for sexual intimacy that happen when a couple uses contraception?" There is room to argue that intimacy premised on shutting down that aspect of sharing may have some rather unpleasant effects surfacing in odd places. Fr. Neuhaus seemed to think before suggesting a connection between contraception and divorce. But this is *not* the question Zaphiris is answering; the question he seems to be answering is, "How can we present contraception as potentially a savior to some couples' marital intimacy?" This

is *fundamentally* the wrong question to ask.

Zaphiris's foonote:

12. This spiritual union and the physical union are not opposed to one another, but are complementary. As an Orthodox theologian, I cannot treat physical union and spiritual union as dialectically opposed realities, which would result from an opposition between matter and spirit. Rather than getting trapped in this typically Western problem, I follow the theological stress of Orthodoxy; this opposition between matter and spirit is resolved through the Logis, and matter and spirit are affirmed to be in extraordinary accord and synergy.

The use of contraceptives can contribute to the possibility of a couple's having a permanent physical and spiritual union. The practice of contraception can contribute to the harmony between the man and wife which is the *sine qua non* of their union. Furthermore, the practice of contraception can facilitate a balance between demographic expansion on our planet and cultivation of its natural resources. This is absolutely essential if we are to prevent future misery and human degradation for future generations. Furthermore, the church itself, which always desires to promote the economic, social, educational, psychological, and religious well-being of its members and of all persons, should permit the practice of contraception among its faithful if it is to be true to its own task.

There was one webpage I saw long ago, comparing the 1950's and 1990's and asking whether it was still possible to make ends meet. The author, after comparing one or two of other rules of thumb, compared what was in a 1950's kitchen with what was in a 1990's kitchen, and concluded, "We're not keeping up with the Joneses any more.... We're keeping up with the Trumps."

St. John Chrysostom was cited in an academic presentation I heard, as presenting an interesting argument for almsgiving: in response to the objection of "I have many children and cannot afford too much almsgiving," said that having more children was a reason to give *more* alms, because almsgiving has salvific power, and more children have more need for the spiritual benefit of parental almsgiving.

Besides finding the argument interesting, there is something that I would like to underscore, and it is *not* simply because this would be a family size with contraception forbidden. This is in the context of what would today be considered a third world economy—what we know as first world economy did not exist until the West discovered unprecedentedly productive ways of framing an economy. An hour's work would not buy a burger and fries; a day's work might buy a reasonable amount of bread, and meat was a rarity. Those whom St. Chrysostom was advising to give more alms since they had more children, were living in what would be considered squalor today. Or in the West the year of Zaphiris' publication, or perhaps before that.

Why is it that today, in such a historically productive economy, we have suddenly been faced with the difficulty of providing for a large family? Why does the first world present us with the (new?) issue of providing for as many

children as a couple generates? My suspicion is that it is because we have an expected baseline that would appear to others as "keeping up with the Trumps." The question in Zaphiris is apparently not so much whether children can be fed, whether with a first world diet or with straight bread, as whether they can be given a college education, because, in a variation of Socrates' maxim, a life without letters after one's name is not worth living.

I would raise rather sharply the conception of what is good for human beings: as Luke 12:15 says, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. The Orthodox ascetical tradition has any number of resources for a well-lived life. There are more resources than most of us will ever succeed in using. The Orthodox ascetical tradition is not only for people who consider themselves rich. Is contraception *really* justified just because the average middle-class family cannot afford to bring up more than a few children in the lifestyle of keeping up with the Trumps?

This personal theological-moral opinion which I have outlined and which suggests that we take active human measures regarding family life and the future of society does not at all imply that I reject the full importance of the action of divine providence as important—it is probably the most important factor in the human future. On the contrary, I want to suggest the cooperation of human reason with divine providence; for the Greek Fathers, human reason itself is a participation in the divine revelation. The discoveries and inventions of humankind are themselves permitted by God who governs the human

spirit through the Logos without suppressing human freedom.

Furthermore, we must not forget that the physiology of the woman is itself a kind of preventative to the occurrence of pregnancy. During her menstrual cycle, as is well known, she is fertile only part of the time. On the side of the male physiology, it is only by chance, and certainly not the result of every ejaculation of semen, that one of the millions of sperm swims to the ovum with final success so that conception occurs. I believe that the physical make-up of the reproductive system of both female and male shows that God did not intend that every act of human sexual intercourse should result in a pregnancy. Consequently, I believe that the contraceptive pill does not produce an abnormal state in woman, but rather prolongs the non-fecund period which comes from God.

Having arrived at this moral opinion which would allow the use of contraceptives by Orthodox couples, it is important to conclude by underscoring several basic points. First, as an Orthodox theologian, I feel that I must respect the freedom of a married couple to ultimately make the decision themselves after I have done my best to school them in the sacredness of marriage, the importance of their union within the saving Mystery of Jesus Christ, and their role in peopling the communion of saints.

684 Secondly, it is important, from an Orthodox point of view, to recognize in the practice of sexual continence a primarily spiritual reality. That is, sexual continence should be practiced only when a couple

feels that this is being asked of them by God as a moment within their mutual growth in holiness and spirituality. Any imposition of continence as a physical discipline entered into for baser motives such as fear is not the kind of continence which is counseled to us by the Gospel.

This makes an amusing, if perhaps ironic, contrast to *Humanae Vitae*. Here Zaphiris more or less says that "continence" for the sake of having sexual pleasure unencumbered by children is not *really* continence. Which I would agree with. Zaphiris says that the pill (abortifascient, incidentally, on some accounts today) is merely regulating a natural cycle, while crying "foul!" at the Catholic claim that contraceptive timing is a spiritually commendable "continence." The Catholic position is the mirror image of this, rejecting the idea that the pill (even if it were not abortifascient) is merely regulating a natural cycle, and classifying the pill among what Catholic canon law calls "poisons of sterility." Both *Humanae Vitae* and Zaphiris make a shoddy argument for one of these two methods of contraception and cry "Foul!" about shoddy argument on the other side.

Despite the fact that Zaphiris presents himself as hostile to *Humanae Vitae* and rising above its faults, the two documents seem to be almost mirror images, more similar than different.

Zaphiris's footnotes:

13. As we know, the Encratites (e.g. Tatian, Cassien, and Carpocrates) condemned marriage because they

considered every act of sexual intercourse as sinful. It was sinful because it did not come from God (cf. Epiphanius of Salamine, *Adv. Haer.*, I, III, 46). For them, sexuality was also condemned because of its supposed relationship to original sin. The fleshly union allowed by marriage only further propagated this original sin in the offspring. Thus, because sexuality was not divine, Jesus Christ came to suppress it (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 91, 1; 92, 1). In their doctrine, through the suppression of the fleshly union, Jesus Christ opposed the Gospel of the New Testament to the Law of the Old Testament which had allowed sexual intercourse in marriage. The followers of the encratic movement said that they did not accept sexuality, marriage, or procreation because they did not feel that they should introduce other human beings into the world and in their stead as their immediate successors in the human race since they would only endure suffering and provide food for death (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 45, 1).

14. Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility, Situation Ethics at Work*, (London, 1967), especially pp. 34ff.

Thirdly, I want to make it quite clear that I am not proposing a complete and unqualified endorsement of the practice of contraception. Rather I am trying to find that same kind of middle ground which the ancient church followed in condemning both the extremes of sexual puritanism among the Encratites, [13] who found in sex something contrary to the

holiness of God, and the opposite extreme of pagan debauchery which sought to find all human meaning in the practices of sexual excess. Within this Christian context, I exhort doctors to be faithful to the individual holiness of every Christian man and woman and to shun any irresponsible practice of automatically counseling the use of contraceptives in every situation for the sake of mere convenience and dehumanizing utilitarianism. Also, I want to make it quite clear that I in no way support the "new morality" with its ethic of sexual activity outside the bounds of matrimony, which is sometimes facilitated by doctors who furnish contraceptives quite freely to the young and uninstructed.

V. THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION IN RELATION TO HUMANS' ROLE AS CO-LEGISLATORS WITH GOD IN THE WORLD

The roots of the Orthodox teaching on marriage are to be found in St. Paul's statement about the love between Christ and the church, and St. John Chrysostom's view that marriage should be likened to a small church which, like the great church of 684 God, is "one, holy, universal and apostolic." The relationship between husband and wife parallels the earthly church and the eternal church, or the relationship between the visible and the invisible church. These are not two different churches; on the contrary, there is one church with two dimensions: earthly or terrestrial, and eternal or celestial. The two are inextricably linked. Similarly, marriage constitutes

for the Orthodox faith both a terrestrial and a celestial reality, for marriage is both a work of human love and a sacramental means of salvation. Moreover, insofar as every divinely created being, including man and woman, is created according to the Logos, marriage reflects the Divine Logos.

For Paul, marriage is a striking manifestation (exteriorization) of the union between Jesus Christ and his church (Eph. 5:21-33). The Old Testament prophets saw marriage as a dimension of God's covenant with the people. A husband's relationship with his wife is the same as the creature's relationship with the Creator; faithfulness in one is faithfulness in the other and, as with the faithfulness (cf. Hos. 1:1-3, 5; Jer. 3:1ff.; Ezek. 16:1ff., 23:1ff.; Isa. 50:1ff., 54:1ff.), so too Paul, in the New Testament, pronounced marriage a holy means (*mysterion* or sacrament) of Christ's grace. The marriage of man and woman participates in the marriage of Christ and the church.

Eastern Orthodox theologians view the relationship between God and human beings as a creative collaboration. It is our freedom that makes us co-creators with God in the world, and co-legislators with God in the moral order. As creatures, we are obliged to obey the law set down by the Creator, but insofar as our obedience is an expression of our freedom, we are not passive objects of God's law, but rather creative agents of it. Our reason is joined to God through the Logos (the Divine Reason). When we choose to exercise our reason in the moral life, we cooperate with God's creative work on earth. This cooperation or collaboration the Greek Fathers spoke

of as synergism (*synergeia*). The person and work of Jesus Christ is the fullest embodiment of this synergistic union of God and humanity.

It is in the light of the synergistic union between God and humanity that the Eastern church understands and resolves the problems of contraceptives, especially the use of the pill.

I could interrupt more to ask many more questions like, "Is this what the Eastern Church should teach to be faithful to her tradition, or what Zaphiris wants the framing metaphor for the Eastern teaching to be as a change to its prior tradition?"

The question we should ask now is: Does our freedom to devise and employ contraceptives, including the pill, violate "natural law" as Roman Catholic teaching states? We are compelled to answer that the encyclical of Pope Paul VI (*Humanae vitae*) is lacking because it does not acknowledge the role of man and woman as God's co-creators and co-legislators on earth. The Eastern Orthodox view of contraception, unlike that of the Latin church, is that our capacity to control procreation is an expression of our powers of freedom and reason to collaborate with God in the moral order. A human being is viewed not only as a subject which receives passively the "natural law," but also as a person who plays an active role in its formulation. Thus the natural law, according to Eastern Orthodox thinkers, is not a code imposed by God on human beings, but rather a rule of life set forth by divine inspiration and by our responses to it in

freedom and reason. This view does not permit the Eastern Orthodox Church to conclude that the pill, and artificial contraceptives generally, are in violation of natural law.

There are a couple of things that are significant here.

First the argument being made about being co-legislators is a point of cardinal importance and one that should *ideally* be supported by at least *one* footnote. There is an *absolute* lack of footnotes or even mention of names of authors or titles of text in this section's quite significant assertions about the Eastern Church. (This raises to me some questions about the refereeing here. My teachers usually complain and lower my grade when I make sweeping claims without adding footnotes.)

Second, to employ a Western image, Christian freedom is comparable to a sonnet: total freedom within boundaries. Hence, in a slightly paraphrased version of one of the sayings of the Desert Fathers, "A brother asked an old monk, 'What is a good thing to do, that I may do it and live?' The old monk said, 'God alone knows what is good. Yet I have heard that someone questioned a great monk, and asked, "What good work shall I do?" And he answered, "There is no single good work. The Bible says that Abraham was hospitable, and God was with him. And Elijah loved quiet, and God was with him. And David was humble, and God was with him. Therefore, find the desire God has placed in your heart, and do that, and guard your heart.'"" (

http://jonathanscorner.com/christmas_tales/christmas_tales10.html , as seen on 14 May, 2007) There is great freedom in Orthodoxy, but freedom within bounds. Things

such as "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," and "Do not steal," are boundaries absolutely consistent with the Desert Fathers saying above. There is great freedom within boundaries, and in fact the boundaries *increase* our freedom.

What Zaphiris presents is a great, stirring, poetic hymn to our cooperation with the Creator as co-creators, presented as a reason not to require a certain bound. (It is my experience that sophistry is often presented more poetically than honest arguments.) Perhaps this would be a valid move if there were no serious issues surrounding contraception, but as it is, it follows the logical fallacy of "begging the question": in technical usage, "begging the question" is not about *raising* a question, but improperly taking something for granted: more specifically, presenting an argument that assumes the very point that it is supposed to prove. It is begging the question to answer the question, "Why is contraception permissible?" by eloquently proclaiming, "Contraception is a *magnificent* exercise of Orthodox freedom, because Orthodox freedom is magnificent and contraception is permissible within the bounds of that freedom." The whole point at issue is whether contraception is permissible; to argue this way as a way of answering that question is sophistry.

(I might suggest that it is an "interesting" exercise of our status as co-creators with God to try hard to shut down the creative powers God built into sex. Perhaps the suggestion is not indefensible, but it is in *need* of being defended, and Zaphiris never acknowledges that *this* interpretation of our status as co-creators needs to be defended, or buttress his specific interpretation.)

686 The conception of natural law in *Humanae vitae* contains a deterministic understanding of human marital and sexual life. According to this understanding, any and every human (or artificial) intervention into the biological processes of human being constitutes a violation of God's law for humanity. Hence, contraception as an artificial interruption or prevention of the natural event of procreation is inherently a violation of God's law. *Humanae vitae*, moreover, goes on to state that each act of coitus is, according to the law of nature, an "actus per se aptus ad generation."

While the Eastern Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of this act as expressed by *Humanae vitae*, which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Indeed, this love is viewed by the Eastern church as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love which is also a paradigm of Christ's love for the church. Finally, one must say that the deterministic Roman Catholic conception of marital sexuality, rooted as it is in scholastic medieval teaching, cannot very well deal with crucial contemporary problems such as over-population, food shortage, poverty, and insufficient medical resources.

The Roman Catholic position on human sexuality and procreation is based on the teachings of St.

Thomas Aquinas, and these in turn are decisively influenced by Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle's view was that every object in the physical universe possesses an intelligible structure, a form which is composed of an intrinsic end and the means or "drive" to realize that end. When a thing is behaving, or being used, according to its end—as a frying pan used to fry fish—then that thing is acting properly or "naturally"; however, when a thing is not acting, or being used, according to its intrinsic end—as when a frying pan is used to prop open a faulty window—then that object is acting, or being used, improperly or "unnaturally."

There is a much bigger problem than a singularly unflattering illustration of the distinction between natural and unnatural use.

Unless one counts Zaphiris's example above of a theologian saying that marriage is intended for procreation, with footnoted clarification that this is "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy," (*in my experience, one of the cheapest ways to dismiss a Church Father is to allege that the poor sap was under the influence of Greek philosophy. This allegation is, as here, almost never adorned with a footnote; nor is it specified anywhere where under the umbrella term of "Greek philosophy" the distortion in question came from*) the surrounding passage (about Thomas Aquinas's discussion of whether contraception is unnatural) is the first time that Zaphiris mentions a theologian presenting an argument against contraception. And it is a Latin after the Great Schism interpreted in terms of Scholastic influence.

The following inference is not stated in so many words,

but the trusting reader who is trying to be sympathetic will naturally draw an understandably wrong conclusion: "Arguments that contraception is an unnatural vice enter the picture when Aquinas as a Latin Scholastic imported Aristotelian philosophy." Again, this is not stated explicitly, but much of sophistry, including this, is the impression that is created without technically saying anything false. (This is how sophistry works.)

This will lead the trusting reader to expect another further conclusion: since (so it appears) arguments against contraception, and especially the idea of contraception being unnatural, *enter* the picture with Latin Scholasticism, any Orthodox who brings such argument against contraception is under Western influence. People who have fallen under Western influence should perhaps be answered gently and charitably, but the Western influence is not something one should listen to and accept. Again, this is *not* stated in so many words, but it is precise the rhetoric appears to be aimed at.

Incidentally, whatever Aquinas may have gotten from Aristotle, the Greek Fathers had ideas of unnatural vice *without* the help of Latin Scholasticism. There is a firmly embedded concept of unnatural vices, including witchcraft as well as "unnatural vice." Jude 7 charges the men of Sodom with unnatural lust (*sarkos heteras*). The salient question is not whether the Greek Fathers have an understanding of *some* sins as unnatural, but whether contraception is a sin and, if so, whether it is among the sins classified as unnatural. But it is *not* automatically due to Western influence for an Orthodox to make claims about unnatural sin.

St. Thomas attempted to synthesize Aristotle's logic of means-ends with the biblical story of the divine creator of the universe. For Aquinas, God is the author of the intelligible structure present in each finite or earthly object. When a finite being behaves according to its intrinsic end, it acts "naturally" as Aristotle thought, but according to Aquinas it also acts in accord with the divine will for that creaturely being. So it is with human sexuality and procreation. Aquinas believed that the intrinsic end of all sexuality (human and non-human) is procreation. Procreation may not necessarily result from each act of coitus, but this does not mean that the sexual (human) partners have disobeyed God for, if their aim in sexual union was procreation, they have behaved in accord with the divine will governing this creaturely reality. But if that intrinsic aim of sexuality-procreation is subverted, either by substituting pleasure for procreation as the aim, or by introducing artificial devices or means to inhibit or prevent procreation, then sexuality is practiced "unnaturally" or sinfully, and God is disobeyed.

The wedding of Aristotle's means-ends logic to the biblical Creator meant for Aquinas that sexuality, as every other earthly vitality, is governed by laws setting forth God's intention for each creaturely being, which are knowable to every creature for 686 the proper conduct of its life on earth. When the law governing sexuality and procreation is disobeyed, then, according to Aquinas' theology, the Creation itself is undermined and God's own creative will is defied.

* * *

If a fuller anthropological understanding of human beings is advanced, such that people are viewed as free, rationally and spiritually, as well as biologically, a different judgment on contraception must then be made, one certainly different from that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Zaphiris is driving his persuasive effect further. He is driving home further the impression that if a misguided fellow Orthodox tells you that contraception is sin, he is presumably one of those poor saps, an Orthodox who has fallen under Western influence, and if this misguided fellow Orthodox perhaps specifies that this is because contraception frustrates the purpose of sex, this is someone under the spell of the Roman Church, who is to be dealt with as one ordinarily deals with the pseudomorphosis of Western influence yet again corrupting Orthodoxy.

It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology is consistent with the dignity the Bible bestows on humans as *imago Dei*.

Note that earlier some of what Zaphiris said *earlier* was presented as a "theological opinion," not necessarily binding on the consciences of other Orthodox Christians even if he was trying to make a case for it. But here we seem to have shifted to something that is binding on all Orthodox Christians: "It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology," apparently meaning the anthropology implied in the last section which makes at

least one sweeping claim without footnotes or even the name of an author or text, that is binding on the consciences of Orthodox Christians. Earlier, perhaps the view of St. John Chrysostom might have been acceptable, at least as a theological opinion. Here it begins to look like a blunt declaration implying that Chrysostom's position is heretical. Is the implication, "If anybody disagrees with this, let him be anathema?"

This dignity is revealed afresh by Jesus Christ who, as both divine and human in freedom, reason, spirit, and flesh, incarnates the complex anthropology of all human beings.

Speaking from this anthropological conception of humanity, we should distinguish three principle aspects in the use of contraceptives—the psychological, the medical, and the moral. From the psychological point of view, contraceptives are permissible only when their use is the result of a common decision reached by both partners. The imposition of contraceptives by one partner in the sexual act must be regarded as immoral inasmuch as it abridges the freedom and possibly violates the conscience of the other partner. Any use of contraceptives which does not respect the psychological condition of both partners and of the sexual act itself must be judged immoral. What should guide sexual partners in the use or non-use of contraceptives is their freedom and reason, their spiritual dignity as creatures of God.

Zaphiris's footnote:

15. [Footnote not recorded in my copy.]

From the medical point of view, we have mentioned above the conditions under which contraceptives are permissible. It is important to emphasize here that moral questions are not part of the technical judgments made by medical doctors about the use or non-use of contraceptives.[15] As we have said, the use of the pill is not a permanent sterilization but a temporary state of sterility induced for reasons that may be social or economic or psychological or demographic or physiological.

Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, the pill does not violate natural law. Its function is not to bring about a permanent state of sterilization but rather a temporary suspension of fertility. And this decision to suspend fertility, when made by both marital partners with reason and freedom and spirit, is a decision made perfectly consistent with God's will for human beings on earth.

* * *

688 There is an authentic moral question in the use and non-use of contraceptives. It is no less true that marriage as a sacramental mystery contains a powerful moral dimension. When marital partners engage in contraception, the Orthodox Church believes that they must do so with the full understanding that the goal God assigns to marriage is both the creation of new life and the expression of deeply felt love.

Note: Love is something you deeply *feel*. I do not find this notion in the Bible nearly so much as in the literature of courtly love. This conception of love is (one infers from Zaphiris) not only permissible but mandatory.

Moreover, the Orthodox Church believes that the relationship of man and woman in marriage is essentially a relationship of persons. This means that sexual life must be guided by the meaning of relationship and personhood.

Though it is obvious that procreation is a physical phenomenon, the Eastern church understands the decision of the married couple to have a child to be a moral, even more, a spiritual decision. The Pope's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, in our judgment, committed a significant error. The authors of the encyclical sought to distinguish our procreative power from all other powers that make us human but, in fact, they isolate our procreateness and set it apart from the human personality. Such an isolation does little justice to the complexity. If conjugality has as its goal *per se aptitude for procreation*, then this is a virtual denial that sexual is permissible during a woman's infertile periods. We have said, and now repeat, that conjugality can and should[sic] continue, whether or not procreation is a practical possibility. In contrast to *Humanae vitae*, Orthodox thinkers do not believe that human beings are subjects bound by "natural law" in the deterministic Roman Catholic sense, but rather persons living and acting freely in the natural world.

It now appears, at least to the uninitiate or those liable to misconstrue things, that existentialist personalism is the teaching of the Orthodox Church. And apparently not just a theological opinion: one is bound to subscribe to it.

* * *

Zaphiris's footnote:

16. For one Orthodox discussion of the question of insemination, see the excellent book of Prof. Chrysostomos Constantinidis, *Technete Gonipoesis kai Theologia in Orthodoxy*, XXXIII (1958), 66-79, 174-90, 329-335, 451-468; XXXIV (1959), 36-52, 212-230.

Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes that men and women can only truly be God's co-creators on earth through the responsible use of freedom and reason. The question of responsibility becomes crucial in such cases as permanent sterilization, artificial insemination,[16] and euthanasia. The Eastern Orthodox Church cannot and will not legislate vis-à-vis the enormously important and complicated questions raised by these cases.

I'm at this point imagining the Battle Hymn of the Republic playing in the background: "Glory, glory, Hallelujah! His truth goes marching on!" This is very stirring rhetoric, but sits ill with some of my sources and seems to be something he doesn't document well.

These questions are regarded by the Orthodox Church as *theologoumena*, that is, theologically discussable issues. The Eastern church seeks always to respect one's freedom of decision, but it also seeks through its own ethical inquiry to guide people in making responsible decisions.

There is a lot of great rhetoric for this perspective in Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. I am suspicious of this rhetorical version of growing to autonomous adult responsibility in its Catholic forms, and I don't see why it needs to be incorporated into Orthodoxy.

The Eastern church's refusal to provide specific answers to some concrete moral questions is based on a fundamental theological principle—the belief that no one can specify where human freedom ends and divine will begins.

Notwithstanding that Zaphiris has done *precisely* that, *not* by forbidding contraception altogether, but by specifying multiple lines which contraception may not pass. And, apparently, specifying a line where Orthodox condemnation of contraception may not pass. But this is impressive rhetoric none the less.

Synergism means the collaboration of human beings with God in the continuing creation of the world. We must struggle to understand the right and wrong uses of our freedom, guided by the divine spirit. Our freedom is a mystery of God's own will and freedom. Therefore, no theologian—Eastern Orthodox

689 or otherwise—can specify what finally constitutes the divine-human collaboration. Practically speaking, we can know when any given act, having taken place we can never be certain of the responsible and creative use of our freedom. We cannot determine *a priori* the movement of the human spirit any more than we can determine *a priori* the movement of the divine spirit. It is certain that, unless we recognize continually the Lordship of God in the world—the Creator judging all the actions of the creatures, we cannot speak truly of a divine-human synergism.

The church is an instrument of the work of the Holy Spirit on earth, and must seek to relate the scriptural revelation of God to the moral situation in life which we constantly confront. When the church accepts this responsibility, it enables the participation of human beings in the on-going history of salvation. In this fashion, the church witnesses simultaneously to the sacred will of God and to the urgency of human moral life. Thereby the church avoids both antinomianism on the one side and the moral reductionism of "situation ethics" on the other side.

Many ethical approaches are presented as meant to steer a middle course between problematic extremes, including ones we might like and ones we might like. See an attempted middle road between forcing queer positions onto the Biblical text and forcing conservative positions onto the Biblical text in Patricia Beattie Jung, "The Promise of Postmodern Hermeneutics for the Biblical Renewal of Moral Theology," in Patricia Beattie Jung (ed.), *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of*

Moral Theology, Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2001. I haven't seen this phenomenon before in Orthodoxy, but it is common in the liberal Catholic dissent I've read. The dissenter adopts a rhetorical pose of being eager to seek a measured middle course that doesn't do something extreme, and does not give unfair advantage to any position. But this is done in the course of agitating for change on a point where the Catholic teaching is unambiguous. Jung, for instance hopes for a versions Catholic ethics more congenial to lesbian wishes, but she always takes the rhetoric of moderate and reasonable efforts that will respect Scripture and Catholic Tradition. (Again, I am comparing Zaphiris to Catholic dissent because I have not seen what he is doing here in Orthodoxy before, but have seen it *repeatedly* in liberal Catholic dissent.)

Zaphiris's footnote:

17. This is an expression used by Nicholas Cabasilas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian of the Byzantine era. The notion of God's *maniakos eros* is discussed by Paul Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu* (Paris, 1973).

We must conclude here by saying that God's fantastic love for human beings—*maniakos eros*[17]—has divinised all creation. With this divinisation, God achieves the purpose of bringing all beings to God's own self. We play a role in this great work of salvation through the creativeness and freedom which God has bestowed on us. These dynamic capacities of our being cannot finally be identified and understood outside the scope of the Christian doctrines of humanity

(anthropology), of Christ (Christology), and of salvation (soteriology). The ultimate purpose of our synergistic relation to God is our own regeneration, as the New Testament states (cf. Rom. 8:28; Phil. 2:13; I Cor. 3:9).

Zaphiris's footnotes:

8 I Cor 2:7.

9 Rom 12:2.

Moreover, synergism has an ecclesiological dimension, and secondarily a moral dimension. Our role as co-legislators on earth with God can only fully be exercised in relationship to the church, which is the instrument of the communication of the Holy Spirit to humans in their creativeness. This means for Eastern Orthodoxy that the legislative and creative actions of men and women are a liturgy of the church itself. When we live in relation to the church's body, we live within "God's wisdom: a mysterious and hidden wisdom framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory." [18] The ecclesio-anthropo-soteriological value of this human liturgy is contained in the relation which exists between God's revelation and our activity. The harmonious cooperation between God and humans makes it possible for our legislative and creative acts to be "what is good, acceptable, and perfect." [19]

We have offered these remarks in the hope that they can contribute to a common basis for an

ecumenical discussion on the contemporary human problem of contraception.

Orthodox who are concerned with ecumenism may wish to take note of this statement of authorial intent.

690

Study and discussion questions

1. What view concerning marriage and sexuality do we find in the Scriptures? In the early Christian writers?
2. Discuss the author's interpretation of the biblical and patristic views of marriage, sexuality, and procreation.
3. What implication concerning contraception can be derived from biblical and patristic concepts of marriage, sexuality, and procreation?
4. What are the official teachings of the Orthodox Church on contraception?
5. How do these teachings compare with Protestant and Roman Catholic teachings?
6. Under what circumstances does the author believe contraception to be theologically permissible? Discuss.
7. What is synergism?

8. How is contraception linked with synergism?
9. How is the resulting view of contraception within Orthodoxy a contrast to the Roman Catholic view?
10. Why does the Eastern Orthodox Church avoid concrete and decisive answers to problems such as contraception?

I have never seen *The Secret* / Bible study / book discussions questions posed like this in a refereed journal before. I suspect that these will lead people to say things that will help cement the belief that the truth is more or less what has been presented in this account. This seems in keeping with other red flags that this is doing more than just providing a scholarly account of what Orthodox believe. Perhaps this is part of why this paper's label as a "theological opinion"—about as close as Orthodoxy gets to the idea of "agreeing to disagree" on spiritual matters—has been accepted as a statement of what the Orthodox Church believes, period.

I believe this document has problems, and if as I expect it is a major influence in the "new consensus" allowing some contraception in the Orthodox Church, this constitutes major reason to re-evaluate the "new consensus."

There could conceivably be good reasons to change the ancient tradition of the Orthodox Church from time immemorial to almost the present day. *Maybe*. But this is not it. (And if these are the best reasons Zaphiris found to change the immemorial tradition of the Church, perhaps it would be better not to do so.)

Advice to Orthodox Couples Who Are Childless: Christ is Born!

There was a private email conversation I had with a friend, when I really thought that what I had written should be adapted for public use.

What of the situation of people who may agree with me about contraception and believe that children are the crown and glory of marital relations, but while married they are childless? Let me say a few things.

First, I feel your pain, and I am praying for you, and I have held children born to childless couples. I would love to hear of a new life.

Second, if you were married before you joined the Orthodox Church, and have not requested to have your marriage crowned, ask for your marriage to be crowned. If you have received communion together after being received into the Orthodox Church, you are *married* in the Church, so no question of illegitimate relations. However, crowning

is a blessing on marriage that you should have.

Third, *St. Anna loves you!* In the story of Saints Joachim and Anna, they reached old age without having children, and Saint Joachim was not only childless but he was jeered at because, people thought, he and his wife were childless as punishment for their sins. In fact they were not being punished for their sins; they were just childless. While repenting of sin is almost always good for all of us, in their old age God granted Saints Joachim one single child: a daughter, who bore one single grandson for them to rejoice in: the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

And my point is not just that you are in good company, although you are in *excellent* company here. My point is that Saint Anna is friend and intercessor *par excellence* to childless couples. And I would encourage you, if you do not already have a devotion to St. Joachim and Anna, to discern whether you might seek a devotion to her, reading her life, and keeping an icon of her. Church hymns you might pray to Saint Anna include:

Troparion — Tone 4

Today the bonds of barrenness are broken,
God has heard Joachim and Anna.

He has clearly promised them that beyond hope,
they would bear a divine child,

by whom the uncircumscribable One was born as
a mortal Man,

Who commanded the angel to cry to her:

“Hail, O full of grace,
the Lord is with you!”

Kontakion — Tone 4

(Podoben: “You have appeared today...”)

Today the world keeps festival
at Anna’s conceiving, wrought by God;
for she bore her who inexpressibly conceived the
Word of God.

Troparion — Tone 4

Divinely-wise Anna, you carried in your womb
the pure Mother of God, who gave life to our Life.
Therefore, you are now carried joyfully to the
inheritance of heaven,
to the abode of those who rejoice in glory,
where you seek forgiveness of sins for those who
faithfully honor you, ever blessed one.

Kontakion — Tone 2

We celebrate the memory of the progenitors of
Christ,
and with faith we ask their help,
that deliverance from every affliction be granted
to those who cry out:
“Be with us, O God, who in Your good pleasure
glorified them.”

There is a saying in some Orthodox forums, “As
always, ask your priest,” and if you want to pray one or
more of these hymns in your morning or evening prayers, or

something else like that, ask a blessing of your priest or spiritual father, whose prayers and blessings are ever relevant.

I was at a parish where one wonderworking icon of Saint Anna was passed from one formerly childless couple to another, and I gave a well-received birthday gift, a plastic horse with wheels, to the son of one couple that had had the icon. Furthermore, this is not specific to St. Anna, but my best friend's wife had medical treatment that in an attempt to save her life was expected to destroy her ability to bear a child. My friend saw this as a sadness, but said,

Fourth, there is a miraculous vine on Mount Athos whose raisins are given, along with ascetical instructions for their use. The sample letter below is not any specific required or special form; it's just something I wrote; but I offer it for people who wouldn't know what to say or what the address is. One possible letter is as follows:

[Your name]

[Your postal address, including your country]

Monks keeping St. Symeon's Vine
Chilandar Monastery
Mount Athos
GREECE

Dear Monks Keeping St. Symeon's Vine;

My wife and I have been married for [such-and-such amount of time] but have not yet been blessed with children.

We would like to have raisins from St. Symeon's vine and ascetical instructions for their proper use.

By way of thanks, please accept the enclosed freewill offering [Note that this is not required; it's just a nice gesture.]

Sincerely,
[Signatures of wife and husband.]

Fifth, and on a more minor secular note, while I classify "Natural Family Planning" as contraceptive timing for people not honest about committing contraception, the principles of "Natural Family Planning" can be used to time intercourse so as to make it less likely that a child will be conceived, but they can also be useful to time intercourse to make it *more* likely for a child to be conceived. On that note, if you've prayed and you and your priest or spiritual father think this is something you want to pursue, check with a doctor. In a word, the advice is "Try to make a baby at the times of month that it would be most delightful for her."

This is submitted in respect and love, and with the hope that you may welcome a little one!

* One question which some people have is, "Am I being punished for my sins?" and there is a natural human tendency to think that people deserve what good and bad things happen to them. I don't know whether God is chastening you to bring you closer to him, and that question is above my pay grade; it's something a clairvoyant elder

might answer. Nonetheless, I would like to offer a word of advice that is in season whether or not God is trying to bring you to a better condition. (And in any case God does not want to *punish* sin; he wants to heal it, sometimes through hard measures when we do not mend after gentler correction.) And there is one point I would make clear: God does not *punish* for the sake of punishment. He disciplines, chastises, and speaks through painful circumstances when we do not obey the gentler voice of our conscience. C.S. Lewis said, “God whispers in our pleasures and shouts in our pains,” and sometimes he shouts where we need the message but don’t hear a whisper. God may use childlessness to help you grow spiritually, to seek him and experience even greater blessings. Or he may not; Saints Joachim and Anna were childless so that God could do something that changed everything. I don’t know, if you are having trouble having children, whether God is speaking with a hammer to give you good, or whether you are just childless for the glory of God. **But in any case God is not *punishing* you in the sense of gleefully saying, “You tripped up, sinner, and now I get to make you suffer.”** God provides things so that you may grow close to him, and this is true whether this is God chastising you to help you reach higher ground, or God has some other reason,

Repentance is Heaven’s best-kept secret, and it is joyful and hopeful, an opportunity to be freed from spiritual dead weight and enjoy what it’s like to let go of one more thing that is a miniature Hell. All of us need repentance, and if we take one step closer to God in repentance, God steps a million miles closer to us.

So whether or not you are being disciplined for your

sins, certain advice is always in season. *Repent, for the Kingdom of God draws nigh*, and repentance is a privilege. Make repentance part of your entreaties to God to bless you with little ones, a bit like you make prayers that God would bless you with little ones. Offer God asceticism. Offer God efforts to seek his heart. And you may find yourself blindsided by reward, and not just pregnancy. And this is not just a principle for childless couples; it is a principle for life and for all of us sinners, of whom I am chief.

I would like to close this section with a poem someone sent me when I was having a really rough time. It applies, I believe, for any situation where you have a holy desire to welcome a child, and God hasn't answered "Yes" to *yet*:

"Life's Tapestry"

Behind those golden clouds up there
 the Great One sews a priceless embroidery
 and since down below we walk
 we see, my child, the reverse view.
 And consequently it is natural for the mind to see
 mistakes
 there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
 where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
 and you shall see the embroidery of God
 from the good side
 and then... everything will seem to you to be a system
 and order.

Appendix: “Fire in the Hole”

In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments which he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The*

Symbolic Theology. The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument this downward path from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.

Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involves assertions, we begin now from the lowest category involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to truth to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air or stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought?

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can be neither seen nor touched. It is

neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of this can either be identified with it nor attributed.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or any other being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name or knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of

its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial.

Prof. Sarovsky slowly and reverently closed the book.

“St. Dionysius says elsewhere that God is known by every name and no name, and that everything that is is a name of God. And in fact in discussing symbols which have some truth but are necessarily inadequate to reality, crude symbols are to be preferred to those which appear elevated, since even their ‘crassness’ is a ‘goad’ spurring us to reach higher.”

“So now I’d like to have an exercise. Could somebody please name something at random, and I can tell how it tells the glory of God?”

A young man from the back called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “Ha ha, hysterical. Could I have another suggestion?”

Another young man called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “I’m serious. Porn, when you start using it, seems to be a unique spice. But the more you use it, the more it actually *drains* spice from everything else, and eventually drains itself, and when pornography can only go so far, you find yourself not only jailed but charged with *rape*. Lustfulness is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. And much as I disagree with feminists on important points, I agree with a feminist dictionary: ‘Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.’ Could I have a *serious* suggestion?”

A couple of cellphones started playing, “Internet is for porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky called on the class's most vocal feminist. "Delilah! Would you pick a topic?"

Delilah grinned wickedly and said, "I'm with the boys on this one. *Porn*."

Prof. Sarovsky paused briefly and says, "Very well, then, porn it is. The famous essay 'I, Pencil' takes the humble pencil up and just starts to dig and dig at the economic family tree of just what resources and endeavors make up the humble lead pencil. So it talks about logging, and all the work in transporting the wood, and the mining involved in the graphite, and the exquisite resources that go just to make the blue strip on the metal band, and so on and so forth, and the 'rubber' eraser and whatnot. The conclusion is that millions of dollars' resources (he does not calculate a figure) went into making a humble wooden pencil, and he pushes further: only God knows how to make a pencil. And if only God knows how to make a pencil, *a fortiori* only God knows how to make a porn site...

"And, I suppose, a pencil must be a phallic symbol."

Then he paused, and said, "*Just kidding!*"

The room was silent.

Prof. Sarovsky bowed deeply and grinned: "I'll see you and raise you."

And this is what he said.

I, Porn, want to tell you about myself. There are options that eclipse me, but I can make my point more strongly if I speak for myself, Porn, who represent myriads of wonders.

It is not my point in particular that only God knows how to make a Porn site. The point has been well enough made that only God knows how to make a pencil, and is a

less interesting adjustment to acknowledge that only God knows how to make a Porn site.

Nor do I suggest that the straight-laced print off a Porn image and frame and hang it on the wall. Though if they understood my lineage, the question would then become whether they were worthy to do so.

I have a magnificent and vaster lineage than “I, Pencil” begins to draw out. A brilliance in economics, the author simply underscores a great interdependent web of economic resources in the humble pencil’s family tree. Equipment, mining, logging, transportation: the economic underpinnings of a humble pencil amount to millions of dollars, and the details mentioned only scratch the surface even of the economics involved.

I have a vaster lineage, including such things as war in Heaven. Now the war in Heaven is over, and was over when the Archangel Michael only said his name, which in the Hebrew tongue says, “Who is like God?” and with that, the devils were cast down, sore losers afflicting the Royal Race one and all. And even then, it was only angelic spirits that could come anywhere close to their war against God. Even then, they are limited. They are on a leash. Perhaps someday I will tell you of why you are summoned to a holy and blinding arrogance towards that whole camp.

What is the Royal Race? I get ahead of myself.

I, Porn, don’t merely share a universe with the divine virtues. In my production there is the cutting off of self-will, long suffering, and as little lust as might be found in a monastery. Dostoevsky offers the image of the chaste harlot; I can add only that if Christ were walking today, Porn models would be among the first he would associate with.

The core impulse I, Porn, draw on, is good. It is a testament to the human spirit that nine months after a natural disaster, there is a wave of babies born. The core impulse is the impulse for the preservation of the species, the possibility by which a community of mortals has itself no automatic end.

It is closer to my point to say that God is not just good and divine; he has created a world that in every way reflects his grandeur. There are no small parts: only actors who are not really small. Every superstring vibration in the cosmos is grander and vaster than all the pagan gods of all worlds put together.

Or as G.K. Chesterton said, “Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.”

It is still closer to my majesty to observe Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag that Hitler sent observers for inspiration for Nazi concentration camps, “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either — but right through every heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unuprooted small corner of evil.”

The Heavens declare the glory of God—*and so do I, Porn.*

Perhaps the most beautiful doctrine in Origen that Orthodox must condemn is the final and ultimate salvation of all Creation: that the Devil himself will be a last prodigal

son returning to home in Heaven. But the Orthodox teaching is more beautiful: a teaching that every spiritual being, every man, every fallen or unfallen angel, is given an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell and not one of these will God rape, however much he desires their salvation. To quote *The Dark Tower*: “A man can’t be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.” God has made a rock he could not move, and that rock is man and angel.

The rising crescendo that practically seals C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” is:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Which brings us to the messy circumstances of your

lives.

George Bernard Shaw said, “There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get it.” We can see it, perhaps in a fantasy setting, in a passage from C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as Lucy tiptoe to a room with a spellbook and see a singular spell:

Then she came to a page which was such a blaze of pictures that one hardly noticed the writing. Hardly—but she *did* notice the first words. They were, *An infallible spell to make beautiful she that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals*. Lucy peered at the pictures with her face close to the page, and though they had seemed crowded and muddlesome before, she found she could now see them quite clearly. The first was a picture of a girl standing at a reading-desk reading in a huge book. And the girl was dressed up exactly like Lucy. In the next picture Lucy (for the girl in her picture was Lucy herself) was standing up with her mouth open and a rather terrible expression on her face, chanting or reciting something. In the third picture the beauty beyond the lot of mortals had come to her. It was strange, considering how small the pictures had looked at first, that the Lucy in the picture now seemed quite as big as the real Lucy; and they looked into each other’s eyes and the real Lucy was dazzled by the beauty of the other Lucy; though she could still see a sort of likeness to herself in that beautiful face. And now the pictures came crowding on her thick and fast. She saw herself throned on high at a great tournament in Calormen and all the Kings of

the world fought because of her beauty. After that it turned from tournaments to real wars, and all Narnia and Archenland, Telmar and Calormen, Galma and Terebithinia, were laid waste with the fury of the kings and dukes and great lords who fought for her favor. Then it changed and Lucy, still beautiful beyond the lot of mortals, was back in England. And Susan (who had always been the beauty of the family) came home from America. The Susan in the picture looked exactly like the real Susan only plainer and with a nasty expression. And Susan was was jealous of the dazzling beauty of Lucy, but that didn't matter a bit because no one cared anything about Susan now.

The temptation, patterned after real temptation of the real world, is to want a horror. It is because Lucy is bewitched that she even wants what the spell promises. The destruction of kingdoms when lords vie for her beauty? Women may want to feel like the most beautiful woman in the world, but the count in stacking dead bodies like cordwood is no true metric for beauty. As a faithfully portrayed temptation by C.S. Lewis, what is being desired is not something Heavenly. *It is a vision of Hell, pure and simple.* While in the grips of temptation, she could not be happy without casting that spell until she let go of it from a strong warning from Aslan. But even if she succeeded, she would be even more unhappy. Her success would rival world wars or nuclear wars in its destruction of beautiful worlds, and if it didn't bring her death, she would live on in a wrecked world, knowing for the rest of her life that it was her petty self-absorption that obliterated the majesty of worlds.

Even if we scale from back from undisguised fantasy, we can look at what is a practical possibility for some people in the real world. Cameron Russell's "Looks Aren't Everything. Believe me, I'm a model." The TED talk eloquently explains that being a supermodel is not all sunshine and not the solution to all life's problems. For that matter it isn't even the solution to *body image* problems, and the final point she shares is that as a model she has to be *more*, not less, insecure about her body, no matter how lovely she may appear to others. It turns out that supermodels are intimidated by... other supermodels. Being a model is not a way to be exempt from body image struggles.

And this is in no way a solely a phenomenon about body image. There is one man where professional opinion is that he is smarter than most geniuses, and that the average Harvard PhD has never met someone so talented. And his work history, given that he's tried to give his best? Here's something really odd. One job assistant said, "You don't want your boss figuring out you're smarter than him." When he hands in his first piece of work, only some bosses respond kindly to work that is beyond the boss's wildest dreams. Most of them find themselves in unfamiliar social territory, and strike out or retaliate. He's been terminated a dozen times and is now retired on disability, the best financial arrangement he has had yet. It may be true, up to a point, that there's something likable about being smart. That doesn't mean in any sense that the smarter you get, the more people like you, or that your life is easy.

There is a portal that far excels entering another world, entering Narnia, Hogwarts, or Middle Earth. And this portal is much harder to see or look for than Narnia. It is entering

the here and now you have been placing.

Spiritual masters have said to want what you have, not what you don't have, and want things to be for you just the way they are. Now there is such a thing as legitimately seeking to solve, lessen, or improve a problem, and wishing you had a better-paying job, a car, or a nicer house. Wishing never runs out, and if you get the Apple Watch you want, wishing will just wish for newer or different things. Buy something you don't need but will make you enchanted for a month. *I dare you.*

Oh, and by the way, I, Porn, know all about wishing. I know *everything* about it, and I know everything it *can't* do.

When you let go of escape, soon you may let go of relating the here and now as the sort of thing one should flee, and some thick, sticky grey film will slowly melt away from your eyes and they will open on beauty all around you, and you will have crossed a threshold no fantasy portal even comes close. And you will have every treasure that you have. And perhaps, in and through ancient religion or postmodern positive psychology, cultivate a deep and abiding gratefulness for all the blessings you have.

In the Way of Things, there are two basic options one can pursue. One is the Sexual Way, and the other is the Hyper-Sexual Way. Let me explain.

Study after study has been launched to investigate which group of mavericks has the best sex, and they have been repeatedly been dismayed to find that the overlooked Sexual Way has the most pleasure. The overlooked Sexual Way is that of a contest of love, for life, between one lord and one wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, grateful for children, and knowing that the best sex *ever* is when you are trying to make a baby. After the first year or

two some outward signs get quiet and subdued, but the marriage succeeds because the honeymoon has failed. It deepens year after year and decade after a decade, and a widowed senior can say, “You don’t know what love is when you’re a kid.” And here, like no other place, *beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder*. Here, unlike fashion magazines, sweaty fitness regimens, and dieting, and weighing, and accursed “bodysculpting,” a woman can and should be made to feel like she is the most beautiful woman in the world, to a husband to whom she really is the most beautiful woman in the world, as naturally as the Church on Sunday. As Homer and Marge humbly and quietly sing to each other, “You are so *beautiful* to me!”

If the sexual impulse is spent wisely in the Sexual Way, it is invested at exorbitant interest on the Hyper-Sexual Way. Wonder what all that curious monastic modesty about? It compounds an essential sexual condition, by which a monastic, man or woman, becomes a transgendered god and his sexual desire is entirely fixed on God. Does this seem strange? Let us listen to St. Herman of Alaska:

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a

position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?'

Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and

that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?'

"All said, 'Why, yes! That's self-evident!' Then the Elder asked, 'But do you love God?' They all answered, 'Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?' 'And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,' Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. 'If we love someone,' he said, 'we

always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?' They had to admit that they had not! 'For our own good, and for our own fortune,' concluded the Elder, 'let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!' Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.'

Fr. Herman had something better than pixels on a screen. *Much* better.

Perhaps the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy is by Anselm of Canterbury, who said, "If God exists, nothing greater than him could exist. Now God either exists in reality and also in our minds, or only as a concept in our minds. But to exist in reality as well as our minds is greater than to exist only in our minds. Therefore, God must have the higher excellence of existing in reality as well as our minds."

I am not specifically interested in bringing agreement or disagreement to this argument. First, most people first meeting this argument feel that something has been slipped past them, but they can't put a finger on where the error is. However, I did not exactly include this argument to discuss what it *asserts*, but what it *assumes*: if God is greater than anything else that can be thought, then we have something that pierces deeply into the Christian God.

The joke is told that four rabbis would get together to

discuss Torah, and one specific rabbi was the odd man out, every single time. And they said, “Three against one.” Finally, the exasperated odd rabbi out knelt down, prayed, “Gd, I’ve worked very hard, and they never listen. Please send them a sign that I’m right.” It was a warm day out, but a sudden chilly wind blew by, and some clouds appeared in the sky. The other three rabbis said, “That’s odd, but it’s still three against one.” Then the rabbi knelt down, prayed, “Please make a clearer sign,” and the wind grew more bitter and it began sleeting. The rabbi said, “Well?” The other rabbis said, “This is quite a coincidence, but it’s still three against one.” Then before the rabbi could begin to pray, bolts of lightning splintered a nearby tree, there was an earthquake, the earth opened, and a deep voice thundered, “*HE’S RIGHT!*” The rabbi said, “Well?” Quick as a flash, another rabbi said, “Well? It’s still three against two!”

The humor element in this element extends beyond, “If God has spoken, the discussion is over.” The humor element hinges on the fact that counting does not go from “one, two, three, four” to “one, two, three, four, **Five**”: there is infinite confusion in adding one God to four men. As written in “Doxology:”

Thou who art One,
 Eternally beyond time,
 So wholly One,
 That thou mayest be called infinite,
 Timeless beyond time thou art,
 The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 The Three who are One,
 No more bound by numbers than by word,

And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,
Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
Ο ΩΝ....

Wert thou a lesser god,
Numerically one as a creature is one,
Only one by an accident,
Naught more,
Then thou couldst not deify thine own creation,
Whilst remaining the only one god.

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,

Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
 To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
 Thou art not one god because there happeneth not
 more,
 Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be
 another beside thee.
 Thus thou spakest to Moses,
 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
 Which is to say,
 Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

And there can be no other god beside thee,
 So deep and full is this truth,
 That thy Trinity mighteth take naught from thine
 Oneness,
 Nor could it be another alongside thy divine Oneness,
 If this God became man,
 That man become god.

The Trinity does not represent a weaker or less
 consistent monotheism than Islam. The Trinity represents a
 stronger and more consistent monotheism than Islam, and
 that is why it can afford things that are unthinkable to a
 Muslim.

A Hindu once asked a Christian, "I can accept the truth
 of the incarnation, but why only one?" And in that
 conversation, where the Christian defended only one
 incarnation, both were wrong. Or rather, the Christian was
wrong; the Hindu was merely *mistaken*.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to BECOME him forever.

One theology professor tried to explain to a Muslim that the Trinity is how Christians get to the absolute Oneness of God. The men who first articulated the doctrine looked with some horror on the concept of using the word "Trinity" as a handle for the doctrine.

Regarding the Hindu mentioned, I would say that there have been many, many true incarnations of God, and they still continue. Now the Hindu concept of an Avatar can be what Christianity rejected as docetic, with Christ not recognized to have real flesh. However, what I would rather have been said is this: No one besides Christ enters the world with part or all of God as part of them. However, the reason for the coming of the Son of God is to destroy the devil's work. An ancient hymn states, "Trying to be god, Adam failed to be God. Christ became man, to make Adam god." And the vast company of Saints that God keeps on giving are in fact the gift of a company of Avatars; we just have a different understanding of how one reaches a very similar goal.

The Philokalia says, "Blessed is the monk who regards each man as God after God."

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Scripture: "We beheld," he says, "His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

Having declared that we were made "sons of God," and having shown in what manner namely, by the "Word" having been "made Flesh," he again mentions another advantage which we gain from this same

circumstance. What is it? “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”; which we could not have beheld, had it not been shown to us, by means of a body like to our own. For if the men of old time could not even bear to look upon the glorified countenance of Moses, who partook of the same nature with us, if that just man needed a veil which might shade over the purity⁷ of his glory, and show to them have face of their prophet mild and gentle; how could we creatures of clay and earth have endured the unveiled Godhead, which is unapproachable even by the powers above? Wherefore He tabernacled among us, that we might be able with much fearlessness to approach Him, speak to, and converse with Him.

But what means “the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”? Since many of the Prophets too were glorified, as this Moses himself, Elijah, and Elisha, the one encircled by the fiery chariot (2 Kings vi. 17), the other taken up by it; and after them, Daniel and the Three Children, and the many others who showed forth wonders; and angels who have appeared among men, and partly disclosed to beholders the flashing light of their proper nature; and since not angels only, but even the Cherubim were seen by the Prophet in great glory, and the Seraphim also: the Evangelist leading us away from all these, and removing our thoughts from created things, and from the brightness of our fellow-servants, sets us at the very summit of good. For, “not of prophet,” says he, “nor angel, nor archangel, nor of the higher power, nor of any other created nature,” if other there be, but of the Master Himself, the King Himself, the true Only-Begotten Son

Himself, of the Very Lord of all, did we “behold the glory.”

For the expression “as,” does not in this place belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition; as though he said, “We beheld glory, such as it was becoming, and likely that He should possess, who is the Only-Begotten and true Son of God, the King of all.” The habit (of so speaking) is general, for I shall not refuse to strengthen my argument even from common custom, since it is not now my object to speak with any reference to beauty of words, or elegance of composition, but only for your advantage; and therefore there is nothing to prevent my establishing my argument by the instance of a common practice. What then is the habit of most persons? Often when any have seen a king richly decked, and glittering on all sides with precious stones, and are afterwards describing to others the beauty, the ornaments, the splendor, they enumerate as much as they can, the glowing tint of the purple robe, the size of the jewels, the whiteness of the mules, the gold about the yoke, the soft and shining couch. But when after enumerating these things, and other things besides these, they cannot, say what they will, give a full idea of the splendor, they immediately bring in: “But why say much about it; once for all, he was like a king;” not desiring by the expression “like,” to show that he, of whom they say this, resembles a king, but that he is a real king. Just so now the Evangelist has put the word As, desiring to represent the transcendent nature and incomparable excellence of

His glory.

Elsewhere we are asked to consider what things would be like if a King were to take up residence in one of the houses of a city. Would not the entire city, and each house in it, be forever honored? And the Son of God is now one of our homeboys. He ascended into Heaven and brought us with him, enthroned in Heaven with him.

We are the Royal Race. We are made in the image of God, and made to reach unimaginable glory.

And there may be named three laws that are the Constitution of the Royal Race, three laws which are one and the same.

The first law is the Law of the Canoe, as C.S. Lewis summarized his friend Charles Williams:

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a

universal law. ‘He saved others, himself he cannot save’ is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow’s, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

The second law is the Law of the Long Spoon. As one telling goes from a liberal enough source:

One day a man said to God, “God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, “You have seen Hell.”

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man’s mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump,

laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand."

God smiled. "It is simple," he said, "These people share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves..."

The last law is the Law of Narcissus's Mirror. It states that the Royal Race are absolutely *forbidden* to stand and gaze at themselves in Narcissus's Mirror, entranced at their own beauty, and *commanded* to gaze at other members of the Royal Race, entranced at *their* beauty.

These three laws are one and the same. One joke, about "communio" theologians who hold the Trinity to mean that God himself is a community, ran:

Q: How many communio theologians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but he thinks he is a community.

But we are *not* communities. We are *part* of a community, and the full grandeur of being a member of the Royal Race is that you are no *island*, but a connected and beautiful part of a *continent*.

And furthermore, God has ordered Heaven and Earth for the benefit of us as the Royal Race.

Though this may be more subtle in the Sexual Way than in the Hyper-Sexual Way, but the behavior enjoined on the Hyper-Sexual Way is that of a spiritual miser, who constantly thinks his Heavenly wealth is too little and he must spare no effort to get more, and no matter how much treasure in Heaven he acquires, he never rests on his

laurels, but keeps on storing up more and more and more.

Men each have one interest, one *real* interest, and only *one* interest: a good answer before the Dread Judgment-Throne of Christ. This life is inestimably precious, and in treasures such as repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, we can only store up these treasures before this fleeting life is over. Now the Church Triumphant is no terrible place to be, but there are profound goods that are only open to us, the living, for as long as we live. And the various strange prescriptions of the Philokalia and the Orthodox Way, about believing oneself to be the worst of sinners, about giving oneself no credit for any good actions, about believing "All the world will be saved and I will be damned," about repenting as if one will die tomorrow but treating your body as if it will last for many years, are in fact braces to support being one hoarding spiritual miser for the rest of one's life, and crossing the finish line, in triumph, and with treasure after treasure after treasure in your hoard. It is explained that God conceals from us the day of our death, because if we knew we would not die for some decades, we would put off repentance and be incorrigible. Not that God is absolutely unwilling to reveal to people the day of their death: it is in fact considered a mark of holiness to know that, because a person is in a good enough state for the secret not to need to be hidden. But the Philokalia's discussion, perhaps here most clearly of all, explains that things are ordered this way because God has stacked the deck, in *our* favor. And as regards the Sexual Way, the path is said not to be an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for parents to grow up.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, fields an objection which was apparently on people's minds but I have not

heard brought up live in my lifetime. However, the answer says everything to a world in disintegrating economy, COVID, Jihad, and more:

I'd like to deal with a difficulty some people find about the whole idea of prayer. Somebody put it to me by saying: "I can believe in God alright, but what I can't swallow is this idea of Him listening to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment." And I find quite a lot of people feel that difficulty. Well, the first thing to notice is that the whole sting of it comes in the words "at the same moment." Most of us can imagine a God attending to any number of claimants if only they come one by one and He has an endless time to do it in. So what's really at the back of the difficulty is this idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time. Well that, of course, is what happens to us. Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what Time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series — this arrangement of past, present and future — isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that. I think it was the Theologians who first started the idea that some things are not in Time at all. Later, the Philosophers took it over. And now some of the scientists are doing the same. Almost certainly God is

not in Time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call "ten-thirty." Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames. That's difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I'm writing a novel. I write "Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door." For Mary, who's got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour's walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary. I know that's not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention, infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to take us in the line. You're as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He'd ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you'd been the only man in the world.

And God's Providence is not just Providence in great things. It is Providence in the small. It is not just Providence in a career, or entering the Sexual Way. It is also Providence when you are stuck in traffic and the light seems never to be turning green and that still, small voice urges you to grow

just a little as a person so you can be as happy in your car as in a lounge chair at home. And it is the mighty arm of Providence all the more powerfully revealed when we are persecuted, or lose money, or any number of other things. And it is a Providence that gives you the here and now, a here and now chosen for you from all eternity, and will, if you cooperate, help you appreciate the gift.

And if you are one of the many who believe that I, Porn, am the only interesting spice in a fatally dull world, I, Porn, can only say this:

Watch me when I am Transfigured.

To quote your own age's little reflection of *The Divine Comedy*:

I saw coming towards us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. Like all the Ghosts, he was unsubstantial, but they differed from one another as smokes differ. Some had been whitish; this one was dark and oily. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of him he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. 'Shut up, I tell you!' he said. It wagged its tail and continued to whisper to him. He ceased snarling, and presently began to smile. Then he turned and started to limp westward, away from the mountains.

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my body too (for there was heat coming from him as well

as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

‘Yes. I’m off,’ said the Ghost. ‘Thanks for all your hospitality. But it’s no good, you see. I told this little chap’ (here he indicated the Lizard) that he’d have to be quiet if he came—which he insisted on doing. Of course his stuff won’t do here: I realise that. But he won’t stop. I shall just have to go home.’

‘Would you like me to make him quiet?’ said the flaming Spirit—an angel, as I now understood.

‘Of course I would,’ said the Ghost.

‘Then I will kill him,’ said the Angel, taking a step forward.

‘Oh—ah—look out! You’re burning me. Keep away,’ said the Ghost, retreating.

‘Don’t you *want* him killed?’

‘You didn’t say anything about *killing* at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.’

‘It’s the only way,’ said the Angel, whose burning hands were now very close to the Lizard. ‘Shall I kill it?’

‘Well, that’s a further question. I’m quite open to consider it, but it’s a new point, isn’t? I mean, for the moment I was only thinking about silencing it because up here—well, it’s so damned embarrassing.’

‘May I kill it?’

‘Well, there’s time to discuss that later.’

‘There is no time. May I kill it?’

‘Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance. Please—really—don’t bother. Look! It’s gone to sleep of its own accord. I’m sure it’ll be all right now. Thanks

ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

'Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.'

'The gradual process is of no use at all.'

'Don't you think so? Well, I'll think over what you've said very carefully. I honestly will. In fact I'd let you kill it now, but as a matter of fact I'm not feeling frightfully well today. It would be most silly to do it *now*. I'd need to be in good health for the operation. Some other day, perhaps.'

'There is no other day. All days are present now.'

'Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill *me* if you did.'

'It is not so.'

'Why, you're hurting me now.'

'I never said it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't kill you.'

'Oh, I know. You think I'm a coward. But isn't that. Really it isn't. I say! Let me run back by to-night's bus and get an opinion from my own doctor. I'll come again the first moment I can.'

'This moment contains all moments.'

'Why are you torturing me? You are jeering at me. How *can* I let you tear me in pieces? If you wanted to help me, why didn't you kill the damned thing without asking me—before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had.'

'I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?'

The Angel's hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

'Be careful,' it said. 'He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he *will!* Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. How could you live? You'd be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn't understand. He's only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn't for us. Yes, yes. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren't they better than nothing? And I'll be so good. I admit I've sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won't do it again. I'll give you nothing but really nice dreams—all sweet and fresh and almost innocent. You might say, quite innocent . . .'

'Have your permission?' said the Angel to the Ghost.

'I know it will kill me.'

'It won't. But supposing it did?'

'You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.'

'Then I may?'

'Damn and blast you! Go on, can't you? Get it over. Do what you like,' bellowed the Ghost; but ended, whimpering, 'God help me. God help me.'

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

‘Ow! That’s done for me,’ gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solider, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that the something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinneying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse’s neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed into each other’s nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had

not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his seats he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

An Orthodox would realize in the Burning Angel a clearest reference to the fiery Seraphim, the highest of the nine angel choirs, and the one for whom St. Seraphim of Sarov came, the most beloved Orthodox saint in centuries, the St. Seraphim whose extraordinary conversation with the pilgrim Motovilov reveals the purpose of human life.

We live in interesting times. There is a singularity, or rather has been but keeps growing exponentially, and this singularity may turn in to the end of the world: a strange Ragnarok where the forces of Good resound with apocalyptic triumph. And I, Porn, am part of the singularity, an important part.

Did you know that I, Porn, am not the only thing in life?

Remember: "Every man who visits a Porn site is looking for God."

Delilah friend turned back. “Yep, dear, he does that sort of thing in practically every class.”