A Bed Undefiled:

Foundations for an Orthodox Theology and Spirituality of Same-Sex Love

by

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Abstract

The present thesis explores possibilities for a more affirmative Orthodox theological and pastoral response to sexual diversity in human nature. Despite numerous modern articulations of an Orthodox theology of erotic love, and a more general emphasis on the radical otherness of the human person, no contemporary Orthodox author of note makes any allowance for same-sex love known to me.

Yet the greatly revered priest, theologian, and martyr, Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), establishes a solid traditional foundation for men to form a lifelong, monogamous, sacramental union which bears essentially no difference from the spiritual content and unitive function of the marital bond between a man and a woman. His essay, “Friendship,” serves as an interpretive lens through which to discern a subtextual thread running through multiple layers of Holy Tradition, bearing eloquent testimony to the inherent receptivity of same-sex love to transfiguration through the collaborative action of human asceticism and divine grace.
Acknowledgments

I have been blessed by the presence of several very generous spirits in my academic life, men and women who have never failed to cheer me on even if they have not always understood or agreed with me. I am profoundly grateful for them, and to them. From York University’s School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies I wish to thank especially Ms. Celeta Irvin, Dr. Frances Latchford, and Dr. Amar Wahab. From the University of Toronto’s Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, I remain deeply indebted to Dr. Mari Ruti for her praise and encouragement. From the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto, I wish to single out for special gratitude my patient readers, Dr. Jaroslav Skira and Dr. Charles Fensham, as well as Dr. Ephraim Radner and Dr. John McLaughlin for their encouragement during my short time with them. Dr. Gilles Mongeau, S.J. has emerged over the past three years as so much more than a thesis director: friend, mentor, and much greater spiritual support than he can ever imagine. Thank you with all my heart and soul, Gilles.

I owe special thanks to Mr. Nicholas Zymaris of New York for steering me towards an important liturgical text, and to Ms. Nada Conic for translating that text and others because of my own rudimentary knowledge of Greek.

Eric Iliff stepped into my life as a cherished friend, brother in Christ, and fellow struggler far too briefly. He had great hopes for this work that I have wanted to do since before he and I met. We spoke of devising some way to collaborate. The sense that he urges me on, gently but persistently, even from beyond the grave, has never left me. I offer this
thesis as a very small token that he has not lived and died in vain. Thank you, Eric, for the gift of yourself to the world and to the Church, and for always inspiring me to persevere.

Whatever errors of fact, interpretation, or judgment are found in this thesis belong solely to me.
For Eric J. Iliff


St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary

Class of 2006

M.Div. Thesis: *Homosexuality and the Eastern Orthodox Christian Tradition*

May his memory be eternal.
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Preface

To do theology is a fearful task. I undertake the present thesis painfully aware of my shortcomings. The theologian, to paraphrase Evagrius, is the person whose very being has been transfigured by uncreated grace into a flame of prayer burning ceaselessly before the presence of God. One need not be particularly pious to become an academic theologian, but the words of a true theologian flow like a stream of life-giving water from his purity of heart.

I have never even begun to pray. Therefore I offer in the following pages no more than the dross of my impoverished reflections. May our Saviour in His compassion send brothers and sisters far worthier than I to take up this work where I leave off and to transform it into a thing of holiness and beauty for the glory of God, and for the life in abundance of His sons and daughters made in His image and so tenderly beloved of Him.

PJS
April 5, 2015
Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem
After many centuries of a predominant monastic preoccupation with complete sexual abstinence in the theological and spiritual literature of the Orthodox Church—even while the ordination of married men to the priesthood and the permanent diaconate as the norm for parish ministry underwent no decline—the modern and postmodern eras have witnessed a felicitous reclamation of erotic love in the writings of non-monastic Orthodox theologians, both ordained and lay. Apart from the recurrent theme of human *eros* as a metaphor worthy of God’s love for mankind in both the Old and New Testaments, this development traces its roots at least as far back as the preaching of John Chrysostom on marriage. A late 4th/early 5th-century contemporary of Augustine and celibate himself, Chrysostom astonishes modern readers who encounter for the first time his positive valuation of human sexuality independent of its procreative function.

This in no way posits an artificial dichotomy between monastic and non-monastic life. The one embodies complementarily with the other an indivisible ecclesial life animated by the Gospel addressed in its plenitude to all alike, and by the outpouring of uncreated grace in its plenitude upon all alike. The unity of life of the Orthodox monk or nun in the monastery and the believer in the world derives not only from their immersion in the same liturgical tradition and their participation in the same holy mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist, but also from the ascetical character of life in Christ for all. This bears immeasurable importance for our topic. Any discussion of sexuality in the Orthodox Church misses the mark from the outset that fails to account for the intrinsically ascetical nature of the Christian’s daily striving for mystical union with God, and for the corollary centrality of a continuous cultivation of chastity in a life receptive to the deifying action of
The ascesis of Orthodox life for men and women living in the world differs from that of the monk or nun perhaps in degrees of intensity, certainly in some of the details of its bodily performance, but nowise in its inner essence. This constitutes an indispensable subtext throughout this thesis.

While the articulation of a positive theology of sexuality remedies a longstanding lacuna in Orthodox thought, the Church’s work in this area remains far from complete. Our renewed focus on the beauty of erotic love, coupled with a concurrent flowering of Orthodox theological insight into the radical alterity of each human person, suggests avenues of exploration rich with possibilities for a more nuanced approach to the ubiquitous phenomenon of sexual and gender variance in human nature. My thesis represents, on a topic whose pastoral urgency we can hardly exaggerate in today’s social environment, an appeal from within the Orthodox Church for a dialogue of fraternal charity in which we no longer silence by threat of ecclesiastical censure the voices of our brothers and sisters most directly affected by its outcome. In a manner at once faithful to the spirit of Holy Tradition and attentive to the testimony of human persons to the reality of their lived experience, I seek to sketch some general contours within which we might begin to envision a more encompassing doctrine of human sexuality, one that recognizes the innate holiness and redemptive potentiality of same-sex love. I also hope to offer a framework to Christian communities and individuals outside of the canonical bounds of the Orthodox Church who value a more traditional basis for their reflections on this subject than a facile correlationist approach to theology and culture can provide: our task is not to festoon our churches with rainbow buntings and away we go to the Pride parade, but prayerfully and soberly to plumb the depths
of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Tradition for what it may yet reveal to us in this time and in this place.

The irreplicable mystery of each human person’s innermost self, known to God alone and unveiled by degrees through the gradual acquisition of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s liturgical, mystical, and ascetical life, can never be distilled to one’s sexual identity. Yet the erotic power embedded as a mark of the divine image within the deepest recesses of a person’s psychosomatic being, latently germinal from his or her earliest innocent memories, represents an unquantifiably momentous determinant of human nature and personhood created by God as “very beautiful.” Both the ontological roots and eschatological end of human sexual desire, however marred by sin in its fallen state, reside in the divine impetus eternally to consummate the ecstatic union of love within the Trinity of uncreated divine Persons, and likewise in the impetus of this triune God to seduce the innumerable multiplicity of created human persons into that same uncreated union of joyous love. Insofar as human nature in general and its erotic aspect in particular, mysteriously resemblant to divine nature and divine love in their creation and teleological vocation, never subsist in abstracto—anterior to or apart from their specific, multiple, individual, concrete enhypostasizations—a person’s sexual orientation, wherever it manifests along the spectrum between exclusively opposite-sex and exclusively same-sex, whether one becomes sexually

2 Because of the range of meanings of “mysterious” and “mystical” in English, in order to avoid ambiguity I reintroduce the somewhat obsolete mystical (see Oxford English Dictionary) as a direct synonym for the adjective “sacramental.”
3 Gen 1:31 (LXX): “…καὶ οὐδὲν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα, ὅσα ἐποίησεν, καὶ ἵνα καλὰ λίαν.”
4 Hos 2:14-16; Jn 17:21-26.
5 “Kinsey’s Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale,” The Kinsey Institute, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-hhscale.html. This scale was developed in 1948 and subsequently modified by the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid and the Storms Scale, among many others. See “Selected References on Other Measures of Sexual Orientation” at the bottom of the web page referenced here.
active or remains abstinent by free choice or compulsion, comprises from the earliest stages of life a singularly formative dimension of personal identity in the vast range of conscious and unconscious influences it exerts on one’s self-knowledge from early childhood to the end of life. Irreducible to a catalogue of verboten carnal “acts”—acts which very young children incipiently aware of their attraction to their own gender cannot even begin to imagine—same-sex orientation subsumes, qualitatively no less than opposite-sex orientation, a person’s entire capacity to grow spiritually, socially, intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, sexually, and soteriologically into authentic personhood, “to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

The Ascesis of Erotic Love

Joyful asceticism as the defining paradigm of Orthodox life assumes a variety of outward forms contingent upon and appropriate to the particularities of each person’s unique circumstances. Yet Justin Popovich—priest, monk, recently canonized saint—enumerates five “ascetic virtues” for which the inward struggle must remain common to all in the Church, whether monastic or parochial, partnered or single, cleric or lay: first, “the effort of faith,” through which one is “given up to Christ as having no reservations and being without compromises,” knowing “that for someone to believe in Christ entails their [sic] waiting on Christ, and only on Christ, with every event of their lives [sic];” second, “prayer and

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7 “Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat,” the Church sings on the eve of Great Lent, the most ascetical period of the liturgical year. See Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, trans., The Lenten Triodion (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1978), 181. (Cf. “For behold, through the cross joy has come into all the world” [from matins of Pascha and every Sunday of the year].)
fasting” performed “for everyone and everything (‘in all and for all’\(^9\))...for friends and for enemies, for those who persecute us and those who put us to death;”\(^10\) third, the “love which knows no bounds, which does not question who is worthy and who is not, but loves them all; loving friends and enemies, loving sinners and evildoers;”\(^11\) fourth, “meekness and humility,” which constitutes “the obligation of every truthful Christian...when he turns his heart of hearts [to] the Lord Jesus, humble and meek;”\(^12\) and fifth, “patience and humility: [w]hich is to say, to endure ill-use, not to render evil for evil, to forgive in total compassion all assault, slander, and hurt.”\(^13\)

Tito Colliander for his part names “the cleansing of the heart;”\(^14\) the “transfer of love from the self to Christ;”\(^15\) obedience as “the grave of your own will;”\(^16\) fasting “neither above nor below your ability...[as] an expression of love and devotion;”\(^17\) care to avoid “extravagant” feats of asceticism, “quietly taking into account one’s own resources of strength;”\(^18\) and a reverence for and proper use of the materiality of creation and our own corporeality: in a passage of sheer poeticism he moves seamlessly from white snow, blue skies, and “the jewelled eye of the fly” to the eucharist, Scripture, icons, flickering tapers, incense, and the voices of liturgical singing among the innumerable material bearers of immaterial grace to assist in the Christian’s unceasing reorientation towards God.\(^19\)

\(^9\) Intoned by the bishop or presbyter at the elevation of the gifts immediately prior to the epiclesis in the Byzantine anaphora: “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all [men] and for all [things]” in the Slavonic recension of the Liturgy known to St. Justin.
\(^10\) Popovich, 26-27.
\(^11\) Ibid., 27.
\(^12\) Ibid.
\(^13\) Ibid., 28.
\(^15\) Ibid., 20.
\(^16\) Ibid., 42.
\(^17\) Ibid., 75-76.
\(^18\) Ibid., 78.
\(^19\) Ibid., 81-82.
Here we have no desiccated, spiritually vacuous bourgeois moralism—of interest to no sentient human being in a postmodern world grown weary of Christian conventionalism—no religious gloss of social respectability on an otherwise egocentric and consumeristic existence masquerading as evangelical life; but rather, a blueprint for the complete transfiguration of the inner person into a “new creation” after the likeness of the crucified and glorified God-man Jesus Christ. “It is by the ascesis of faith,” Popovich explains, “that a man conquers egotism, steps beyond the bounds of self, and enters into a new, transcendent reality…led and guided by prayer; he feels, thinks, and lives by prayer.” Theophan the Recluse counsels, “Think as little as possible about external ascetic feats. Although they are necessary, they are nothing but a scaffolding inside which the building is erected. They are not the building itself; the building is in the heart. Turn all your attention, then, on what is to be done in the heart.” In this we hear an echo of Maximus the Confessor: “Do not devote all your time to your body but apply to it a measure of asceticism appropriate to its strength, and then turn all your intellect to what is within.” The Christian soul feels deeply with Augustine that her heart can find no peace until it rests at last in God. “My soul yearns after the Lord,” weeps Silouan the Athonite, “and I seek Him in tears. How could I do other than seek Thee, for Thou didst first seek and find me…and my soul fell to loving Thee.” If we sometimes speak of life in Christ as our “Christian walk,” the spiritual fathers and mothers of Orthodox Christianity teach with one voice that this “walk” leads us not outward, but ever more inward, into the interior hermitage of our own heart—a heart “full of worship, of

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20 2 Cor 5:17.
21 Popovich, 127.
concern for others” where the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit come to take up Their abode. Nicholas Cabasilas observes, “Yet the Lord did not promise merely to be present with the saints, but to abide with them—nay, more than this, to make His abode in them.” Slowly purified of all dross through ascetical collaboration with divine grace in the crucible of the heart, the Christian becomes by corresponding degrees a bit of salt, a hidden leavening, an ember of divine love shimmering subtly unto the transformation of the little patch of earth allotted to each of us by God for the place of our communion with Him and with our fellow sojourners. The ascetic struggler practices the “art of being precisely in one’s place”—whether in the monastery, the desert, the parish, the family home, the shopping mall, the workplace, the sickroom, the street corners of the homeless, the prison, the virtual spaces of social media, the undefiled bed of nuptial embrace.

For two united in Christ, the ascesis of erotic love both subsumes and resignifies the external behavioural restraint—the “morality,” so to speak—commanded by the Law: Do not commit adultery. With the intuition of the rich young ruler we perceive that the life of “grace upon grace,” offered to us in the Church by Christ through the Holy Spirit, utterly eclipses mere morals and good behaviour: “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?” In reply the Lord’s voice beckons, If you would be perfect.... The “perfection” to which the

25 Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh, Living Prayer (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1966), 89.
26 Jn 1:14, 14:16-17, 23; Rev 3:20.
28 Cf. Mt 5:13; Mt 13:33; Mt 5:16.
30 Ex 20:14.
31 Jn 1:16.
32 Mt 19:20.
Gospel invites us—τελείωσις—“even as your heavenly Father is perfect,”33 signals not the achievement of a morally upstanding life (a category absurdly inapplicable to God), but an infinite progression of theandric collaboration, a mystically synergistic dynamism through which the human person moves continuously by grace towards the greater existential and ontological completion of personal being—“even as” God actualizes without beginning or end the completeness of His tri-personal being. Teleiosis—“even like God’s”—conveys a dimension of theosis, our endowment through the deifying operation of the Holy Spirit with all that the Son possesses by reason of His divine and human natures immiscibly united. This pneumatizing force,34 never imposing itself on the unwilling or uncooperative, permeates in the Church’s mystical life everything proper to human nature, including our sexuality.

The perfectibility of sexual desire, by creation reflective of the divine image and by redemption acquisitive of the divine likeness, resides in its capacity to be purified of all carnality through the co-ascesis of equally yoked partners35 and returned to them, sanctified and ever fresh, as the divine gift of eros. In the voluntary nailing of carnal passion to the joyful cross of asceticism,36 holy eros springs to life and flourishes in the hearts and bodies of the two. The very physicality of their relationship transforms itself, both for the couple and prophetically for the whole body of the Church, from a mark of egocentric gratification, sin, and death into a life-giving sacrament, a sign and foretaste of the future aeon, a holy mystery through which created human love becomes truly pleasurable for body and soul, luminous with the interpenetration of uncreated divine love; and truly unitive, not of mere bodies (as

33 Mt 5:48.
34 I am grateful to Dumitru Stăniloae for his introduction of the word pneumatize in his writings, semantically more explicit as a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit than the more generic spiritualize. If others have used the word theologically before Stănîloae, I am not aware of it.
35 2 Cor 6:14.
postmodern thought would have it), but of embodied persons. The boundless range of tactile and psychic intelligibility proper to sexual love, communicated in a language known only to the two—and inviolable to the voyeuristic intrusion of regulatory scrutiny by any “authority”—itself undergoes by grace a transformative refinement the more each partner perceives in the other no longer an object for mutual gratification, but a subject in whose spiritual beauty the face of Christ reveals itself more radiantly day by day.

Anthony Ugolnik writes, “We must not hesitate to characterize sex theologically.” In order to nurture the theological characterization of same-sex desire and the formulation of a spiritual vision for its purification by grace—no different from the need of opposite-sex desire to be continuously purified—the Orthodox Church’s same-sex oriented children implore their archpastors and pastors, shepherds after the likeness of Him who left the ninety-nine in search of the one, to make the Church a safe space for this dialogue to unfold. Same-sex orientation differs from no other dimension of natural human life either in its susceptibility to sin or in its inherent receptivity to grace. The inexhaustible spiritual potentiality of same-sex love to reflect and participate in divine love, like that of all human love, opens the door to the full inclusion of persons of same-sex orientation in the Church’s life and to the sanctification of their faithful relationships in grace and truth. Orthodox Christians of same-sex orientation—youths as well as adults, lovers of Christ and of their mother the Church—seek ways to work out their salvation honourably that cohere with the ascetical ethos of Orthodox life and the spirit of Holy Tradition, and just as crucially, that ring true in the depths of their hearts.

38 Jn 1:17.
Olivier Clément remarks that “the Christian message…is not a law that is imposed but something attractive that is proposed”:

But more needs to be said. Even to her own children, the Church must be a merciful mother, not an impersonal juridical power. Her teachings about human love must be adapted, with immense care, to the circumstances of each person [emphasis mine], by ‘spiritual fathers’ and bishops with the gift of discerning spirits. Among Eastern Christians this merciful adaptation, called ‘economy,’ is actually a basic principle in the regular life of the Church.39

My prayer is that the following pages be accepted as a humble offering by our merciful mother, and as an attractive proposal by her same-sex oriented sons and daughters, who are infinitely precious in the Lord’s eyes. Once this manuscript leaves my hands it belongs no longer to me but to the Church, and to God, to do with it as “seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” May our holy Church in her compassionate exercise of Christ’s loving economy lay upon no child of hers a burden greater than necessary, greater than he or she can bear.40

Chapter 1  
Same-Sex Orientation and the Orthodox Church Today

The localized ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church does not lend itself to producing an “official doctrine” on same-sex orientation. Yet the overwhelmingly negative consensus of individual hierarchs, episcopal synods, and theologians who feel free to speak openly on the issue seems symptomatic of a profound malaise throughout the Church to address questions of sexual diversity except to condemn it. The weight of a nearly unanimous denunciation poses a formidable deterrent to archpastors, pastors, and laity predisposed to explore a more holistically soteriological approach to same-sex love. This perpetuates, in turn, the false perception that same-sex oriented Orthodox Christians have no advocates in the Church. Stigmatized by the Church as sexual deviants and objects of derision or pity, consigned to crushing loneliness in a life of compulsory pseudo-monasticism as a precondition for Holy Communion, constrained by fear to conceal one of the most fundamentally defining aspects of their identity from their brothers and sisters at the Lord’s Table, and often from their own father confessor, Orthodox children, youths, and adults of same-sex orientation are made to endure the heartbreak of maternal abandonment by the Church, and ultimately the despair of perceived abandonment by their Father in heaven.

Response and Counter-Response: A Brief Pastoral History

To my knowledge, the earliest instance in which same-sex orientation surfaced as a public pastoral issue in the North American Orthodox Church occurred in the late spring or early summer of 1977 at St. Seraphim of Sarov mission parish in Long Beach, California. Samuel Garula, a freshly ordained priest acting under orders from Archbishop John

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41 My use of the word “consensus” in no way suggests that anything like a consensus fidelium can possibly have been reached on a question that the Church has hardly begun to examine.
(Shahovskoy) of the Diocese of the West of the Orthodox Church in America, excommunicated en masse the dozen same-sex oriented members at his new parish assignment within weeks of his arrival in May. The excommunicants’ appeal for pastoral understanding, mailed to priests throughout Southern California and signed “Your gay Orthodox brethren in Christ” was met with howls of laughter.\textsuperscript{42} The congregation of some seventy weekly worshippers, largely supportive of their same-sex oriented brothers and sisters, quickly began to dwindle. The parish folded after a protracted death, and Long Beach’s once vibrant, rapidly growing English-language Orthodox mission became a distant memory.\textsuperscript{43}

Out of the ashes of the Long Beach conflagration Axios\textsuperscript{44} eventually arose, an attempt to form an Orthodox counterpart to the Dignity movement for Roman Catholics. Some forty members met once a month for Vespers, potluck, and discussion. Two members betrayed the group after three years by sending its confidential mailing list to Bishop Basil (Rodzianko), who had succeeded Archbishop John in 1980. Basil instructed his priests to deny Communion to Axios members and to discontinue the practice of general confession for fear that it allowed those of same-sex orientation to evade detection. This effectively sounded the death knell for Axios on the West Coast.\textsuperscript{45} From the group’s website its current level of

\textsuperscript{42} I personally remember my parish priest’s derisive reaction to their letter when he shared it with me. For a first-hand account of this episode see “Founding and Experience of Axios at Los Angeles, California,” AXIOS - Eastern and Orthodox Gay and Lesbian Christians, accessed May 14, 2015, http://axios.org/doku.php?id=st_seraphim_axios.


\textsuperscript{44} Greek for worthy (ἄξιος), used liturgically to proclaim a man’s worthiness during the vesting ceremony at his ordination.

\textsuperscript{45} Cannon, 79-80. In “general confession,” used in some places and contexts as a supplement to, or even instead of, private confession, the priest pronounces absolution over the congregation after a brief interval for internal reflection on one’s sins.
vitality there or in other regions is impossible to ascertain.\textsuperscript{46} The site commends its visitors to the controversial scholarship of John Boswell as a legitimate resource for Orthodox of same-sex orientation.\textsuperscript{47}

In an effort to provide a spiritual home for Orthodox Christians of same-sex orientation, the establishment of a few congregations under one or another bishop of unknown provenance ensued. One of these bishops shepherded a flock called the Rainbow Orthodox Church. An internet search uncovers no clues to whether any of these churches has survived to the present. Various platforms of online support have also come and gone over the years. Some individuals with no connection to the Orthodox Church have undertaken online outreach to same-sex oriented Orthodox Christians, with predictable doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesiological irregularities.

I mention the uncertain orthodoxy or uncanonical status of these groups and individuals in no way to disparage the sincerity of their efforts where the Orthodox Church has frankly failed, but to emphasize the extreme urgency of bringing this conversation and ministry into the very bosom of the canonical Church.

**Episcopal Actions and Statements**

In late 2014 Robert Arida, a senior priest of the Orthodox Church in America,\textsuperscript{48} posted an essay on the OCA website’s Wonder blog\textsuperscript{49}—a platform for discussion among Orthodox young people of high school and university age—in which he proposes for

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\textsuperscript{47} I engage more directly with Boswell and his critics in subsequent chapters.

\textsuperscript{48} Hereinafter “the OCA.”

reflection a wide range of pressing social, cultural, and political issues. Metropolitan Tikhon (Mollard), primate of the OCA, ordered the removal of Arida’s essay and the substitution of his own. Tikhon’s response makes three things clear: first, many of the comments following Arida’s essay had entailed an exchange of views on same-sex orientation, a topic not directly named by Arida himself; second, Wonder must not host a discussion of same-sex orientation for Orthodox of high school and university age; and third, the Holy Synod of the OCA has resolved once for all time the matter of human sexuality in three documents to which Tikhon directs his young readers.

The first, “Encyclical Letter of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America on Marriage” and released in 1976, articulates the Church’s theology of marriage without reference to same-sex issues. The second, “Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life” and dated July 1992, states that “[h]omosexuality…is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God’s image and likeness,” and that unrepentant same-sex oriented persons “may not participate in the Church’s sacramental mysteries.” The last, “Synodal Affirmation of the Mystery of Marriage” and drafted in response to the June 2013 decision of the Supreme Court on same-sex marriage, reiterates that “the Church does not, and cannot, condone or accept marriages apart from those involving one man and one woman….”

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52 OCA archivist Alexis Liberovsky supplied the year, missing from the online version of the document.
In September 2009 Metropolitan Jonah (Paffhausen) and Bishop Basil (Essey) signed the Manhattan Declaration,\(^\text{56}\) a testimony to a peculiarly American brand of conservative Christian political activism containing no trace of a uniquely Orthodox contribution. Its signatories from groups as disparate as the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, various Protestant denominations, and the National Organization for Marriage\(^\text{57}\) proclaim, “No one has a civil right to have a non-marital relationship treated as a marriage. …[T]he religious liberty of those for whom this is a matter of conscience is jeopardized.”\(^\text{58}\) This non sequitur fails to consider the religious liberty of those who, as a matter of conscience, disagree with the Declaration.

In September 2013 the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America (subsequently reconstituted the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America), released its “Statement on Marriage and Sexuality,” expressing its “deep concern over…the legalization of same-sex unions.”\(^\text{59}\)

Denunciations of same-sex orientation echo around the Orthodox world. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople gave voice to the Lord’s and the Church’s condemnation in a homily in Estonia in September 2013: “To our Lord Jesus Christ…and to His Body, the Orthodox Church, the partnering of the same sex is unknown and condemned.”\(^\text{60}\) In June 2012 Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, during a visit to Finland, expressed his displeasure with the


\(^{57}\) See http://manhattandeclaration.org/man_dec_resources/list_of_religious_leaders.pdf, accessed May 24, 2015, for the list of signatories. See pg. 9 of the Declaration itself for the names of the drafting committee members.

\(^{58}\) “Manhattan,” 6.

\(^{59}\) http://assemblyofbishops.org/about/documents/2013-assembly-statement-on-marriage-and-sexuality, accessed May 16, 2015. The URL gives trouble every time I try to access it. One may have to search for this document under “News” and then “Press Releases.”

Finnish Lutheran Church’s endorsement of same-sex unions.\textsuperscript{61} In a January 2013 interview he named “alcoholism, drug addiction, lust, prostitution, homosexuality”\textsuperscript{62} as equivalent evils. In a homily in July of the same year he characterized the advance of same-sex marriage throughout the West as “a very dangerous sign of the apocalypse” and “a path of self-destruction,” and applauded the criminalization of all public expressions of same-sex orientation in Russia.\textsuperscript{63} Patriarch Daniel of Romania, addressing the Committee of the Orthodox Churches’ Representatives to the European Union in May 2014, lamented the “increasing number of those who treat marriage as a simple contract or partnership between two people of different genders or of the same gender.”\textsuperscript{64} That same month, the Holy Synod of Cyprus issued a lengthy condemnation of same-sex orientation in anticipation of an impending Pride parade in Nicosia.\textsuperscript{65} Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, in April 2015, issued a strongly worded rebuke to a Greek website for its insinuation that the upcoming Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church might consider the “approval or acceptance of [the] lifestyle” of “sexual minorities.”\textsuperscript{66}

Many Orthodox bishops consider the issue an insurmountable obstacle to ecumenical dialogue. The Moscow Patriarchate “severed all relations” with the Lutheran Church of

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Sweden over its blessing of same-sex unions in 2005.\textsuperscript{67} In May 2011 Orthodox hierarchs meeting in Athens from around the globe conveyed their position to the Lutheran World Federation that “we consider the issue of homosexuality to be very serious and potentially Church dividing.”\textsuperscript{68} In September 2014 the Russian Church suspended doctrinal dialogue with the Finnish Lutheran Church over the latter’s refusal to pre-approve a joint condemnation of same-sex orientation as a precondition to holding the very session in which the topic would have come up for discussion.\textsuperscript{69} As recently as June 2015 the Russian Church terminated “formal contacts” with the United Protestant Church of France and the Church of Scotland on the grounds that “[c]hurches that have deemed homosexuality morally acceptable have rejected Christianity and are preparing their followers to accept the Anti-Christ.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{The Orthodox Church of Finland}

The Church of Finland has demonstrated an unusual willingness to allow uncensored debate on the question of same-sex orientation. This makes for a fascinating counterpoint to the uncompromising stance of the Orthodox Church in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} “Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation: An Inter-Orthodox Evaluation of the Dialogue (1981-2011),” Ecumenical Patriarchate, accessed May 17, 2015, https://www.patriarchate.org/search?p_p_id=3&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&_3_struts_action=%2Fsearch%2Fsearch&_3_redirect=%2Fsearch%3Fp_id%3D3%26p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_state%3Dmaximized%26p_mode%3Dview%26_3_groupId%3D0&_3_keywords=homosexuality&groupId=32008.
The activities of Orthodox priests and laypersons—unhindered by the hierarchy—to promote the acceptance of same-sex orientation in national and church life figured prominently in the mass media as early as 1990. The ecumenical organization *Community*, launched in 2003 to work for the social and ecclesiastical equality of persons of same-sex orientation, boasted a disproportionately high Orthodox representation on its founding committee. In 2006 a group dedicated to the same aims was established under the name Orthodox Rainbow Society. In late 2007 the Episcopal Synod sent a memorandum to the Ecumenical Patriarchate stating “that sexual ethics represented by the movement *Community* doesn’t fight against Orthodox tradition, and there is no need to prohibit Orthodox priests from participating in the activities of the movement.” In an interview published in December 2008 Metropolitan Leo (Makkonen), primate of the Finnish Church, states that the “Orthodox Church is cautious and do [sic] not take up a strong position in the question of sexual ethics,” but he affirms that the “foundation of the sexual ethics of the Church is anyway always the family.” He implies an unwritten don’t ask, don’t tell policy towards Orthodox same-sex couples in legally registered relationships, but states unambiguously that “a person living in a registered homosexual relationship cannot be a member of the clergy.”

Tolerance of same-sex orientation in the Finnish Church has not gone unopposed. Some have threatened to leave its jurisdiction. According to an unconfirmed report from

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73 The Church of Finland is an autonomous church under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
74 “Report,” 4-5.
75 Ibid., 69. The Orthodox Church typically holds the clergy to a higher standard than the laity in questions of marriage, remarriage, etc. It makes sense in this context not to extend the tolerance of same-sex relationships to the clergy or to candidates for ordination.
2007, the Moscow Patriarchate had contemplated establishing a rival diocese in Finland over this issue.76

Elizabeth Moberly, Thomas Hopko, Basil Zion

Elizabeth Moberly created a sensation at St. Vladimir’s Seminary in the late 1980s when, as a guest lecturer, she claimed a success rate so high in curing men of same-sex orientation through reparative therapy that it strained the limits of credibility even before a sympathetic audience. Universally discredited by the medical, psychiatric, and psychological professions both before and after, her theories on the pathology of same-sex orientation, if not its reparability through psychoanalysis, nevertheless went on to bear some influence on better known Orthodox writers, among them Thomas Hopko and Basil Zion.77

Moberly situates the aetiology of “the homosexual condition” in an early childhood deficit in the relationship with the parent of the same sex: “In this sense, the homosexual love-need is essentially a search for parenting.”78 Here fissures began to appear in her argument at her St. Vladimir’s lecture: her unflinching insistence that—in every case—both of the male lovers seek a father, both of the female lovers a mother, even with an age difference of decades between the two, provoked glances of open disbelief around the auditorium. For her, the sexualization of same-sex love is inappropriate not because immoral, but because inadequate to the task of fulfilling a legitimate but unmet childhood need for same-sex parental love. She infantilizes same-sex oriented persons as “psychologically pre-adult even though they have attained adult years.”79

77 Neither Hopko nor Zion was convinced of the effectiveness of Moberly’s reparative therapy.
79 Ibid., 49.
Thomas Hopko, late dean *emeritus* of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, naturally commands a wider readership than the little known Moberly. His 1980s “The Homosexual Christian,” posted on the OCA website since May 2012,\(^8^0\) commends those who “identify the source of their sexual orientation in faults and failures in their family experiences, particularly in early childhood, and perhaps even before that, which contribute to their sexual makeup…. [T]he Orthodox Church identifies solidly with those Christians…who consider homosexual orientation as a disorder and disease, and who therefore consider homosexual actions as sinful and destructive.” Some twenty years later, he writes of “sexual desires for carnal relations with persons of one’s own sex…that have been produced in them by their biological, psychological, and cultural inheritance, and by the way they have been treated by others, particularly family members….\(^8^1\)

Basil Zion brings to our discussion a much greater breadth of scholarly engagement, nuance, and pastoral insight. His voice of moderation and his willingness to accept at face value the reality of same-sex experience serve as a bridge, whether intended by him or not, from an intransigent inability to acknowledge anything redeemable in same-sex desire to the possibility of a theology and spirituality of same-sex love.

Zion concedes the difficulty of discovering the precise meaning of some of the Hebrew and Greek nomenclature that refers to and censures one aspect or other of same-sex practice known to the biblical authors. He notes, for example:

…[W]e must admit that the positions taken vis-à-vis homosexual acts in the New Testament do not condemn homosexuality as such. […] What we find in the Bible is a condemnation of behavior which was a particular form of Greco-Roman


decadence…. This does not involve a clear interdiction against all forms of homosexuality…. 

His underscoring of the significance of the sociohistorical context of biblical and patristic texts, and his reluctance to extrapolate moral absolutes where textually none exist, suggest possibilities for a measured dialectical engagement between Orthodox thought and the postmodern attention to the social construction of sexuality and sexual deviance.

Concerning the Fathers, Zion writes:

It may be that modern psychology and the awareness of cultural relativity have somewhat modified the negative moral judgments made by the Fathers on homosexual acts. That is something which we must investigate…if only because their understanding of homosexual acts apart from emotional orientation [emphasis mine] cannot be sustained in the light of modern clinical evidence.

His resistance to adopting a facile posture on questions of sexual diversity presents a refreshing contrast to most other Orthodox commentators.

In the main, Zion accepts Moberly’s identification of same-sex orientation with a deficit in the formative period of the same-sex parent-child relationship. Yet her work falls short:

…Moberly misses the point that eroticization has occurred in the search for love from and for persons of the same sex. Such eroticization can scarcely be reversed in most cases. This may be the most significant fact about homosexuality, despite Moberly’s opinions to the contrary. …[Sexual acts] are a fact of life for most older (that is over the age of eighteen years) homosexuals. …[They] will claim that affection and erotic experience are as closely tied together as heterosexuals find them to be.

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83 Zion, 302-03.
84 Ibid., 311-17.
85 Ibid., 316. Incidentally, Hopko admits that Moberly finds him insufficiently “optimistic” about the curability of same-sex orientation (Christian Faith, 70, n. 2). In a great paradox, on this point Hopko, Zion, and persons of same-sex orientation are in full agreement!
From this we can infer Zion’s acknowledgment of same-sex orientation in minors and children, long before any kind of overt sexual activity has begun or even been visualized by the child.

The significance of recognizing the fact of childhood sexuality resides in its predication on the *orientational* nature of sexual orientation. This deliberate tautology serves to illustrate the principal flaw of most Orthodox discourse on same-sex orientation: its reduction to a list of inadmissible acts—from having sex to getting married to holding a parade—none of which has any applicability to the Orthodox child on the receiving end of thundering condemnations from our hierarchs or misplaced sympathy from a Moberly or a Hopko because he likes the boy or she likes the girl next door. Zion alone, of those surveyed here, tries to come to terms with the full import of the priority of *orientation over acts*, and with our inability to articulate a theological and pastoral response not doomed to fall on deaf ears. Thus he alone can affirm—if somewhat ambivalently with respect to an acceptable range of bodily expression—the need of Orthodox Christians of same-sex orientation to form not only friendships, but *couples*:

It is not an open option for an Orthodox Christian to accept homosexual activity of a genital variety as morally acceptable. Yet, on the other hand, if we accept the view that expression of affection by physical means is permitted, we cannot draw exact lines as to what may or may not be permitted [emphasis mine]. Gestures exist as a language of physical expression of meaning, and though genital activity may not be morally acceptable, the exchange of affection must be acceptable between homosexual persons. The eros of friendship [!] makes such gestures as holding hands or exchanging an embrace entirely good and moral.... Love is for the other as a unique person. The sexual project to which every person is called involves the transformation of libido into an eros which seeks the other as other, affirms the other as a friend, and ultimately calls for a self-sacrificing gift of oneself as it was revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. […] The struggle against possessiveness is a struggle whose ascetic nature will be self-evident to those who comprehend the intensity of desire.  

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86 Zion, 317-19.
Here he presages the underlying principle of this entire thesis: the vocation of Orthodox same-sex couples—nowise different from that of opposite-sex couples—to labour co-ascetically for the transfiguration of natural desire for an impersonal body into holy *eros* for an embodied person.
For a long time we muddled along in search of explanations [notes a friend’s diary in July 1909], then Pavel stumbled upon the following hypothesis. A man seeks an object sufficiently passive to receive his energy. For the majority of men, such objects are women. There are insufficiently masculine natures who seek their complement in masculine men, but there are also hyper-masculine men, for whom the feminine is too yielding, as yielding as a cushion, for instance, to a steel blade. That kind seeks and loves simply men, or insufficiently masculine men. 87

Thus did one of Russia’s most revered priests, theologians, and martyrs of the 20th century—at the age of twenty-seven, a scant thirteen months before he impulsively married “to fulfil the will of God” 88 and “without any sign of being in love” 89 with his bride, and less than two years before his ordination to the priesthood—attempt to account for the “indifference to ladies and frequent falling in love with young men” 90 and the “aversion to marriage” 91 for which he was known to his peers. Pavel Florensky’s lyrical paean to the love that binds two Orthodox men together in sacramental union, covering two chapters of his magnum opus, 92 published four years into his marriage and three into his priesthood, must be read against the background of the extraordinary personality from whose heart and soul it flowed. 93
The eldest child of a Russian father and an Armenian mother, Florensky was born in Azerbaijan in January 1882 and baptized at the Orthodox cathedral in Tbilisi. As he passed from infancy to young boyhood, he conceived “a fundamental grudge against human life,” namely, that he had not been born a girl. “…[A]ll the pretty things he coveted, the floating silks and chiffons, the complex pleats and delicate, pastel colours, the flowery scents and opalescent jewellery, and the dazzling prospect, when grown up, of a hat with a humming-bird—were to fall to the lot of his younger sister…who had no fine feeling for such things.” He finally found an outlet to indulge his “consuming desire for a humming-bird” when his aunt took him to the milliner’s shop in Batumi to help her select one for her new hat, a project that he prolonged until closing at nightfall. Even from his own children, in memoirs written in snatches now and then for their eyes, Florensky did not hide the ways in which “the feminine side of his own nature” manifested in his earliest childhood memories, “all the brides within me, the princesses, the crowns, the deaths.”

His mother’s tacitly distasteful reaction to the girlish sentimentality of a painting he made for her, at the age of five or six, prompted him to feel so “consumed by burning shame” that he strove to toughen himself from that moment. “Balked of fairytales and romance,” the child immersed himself in the wonders of the natural world around Batumi.

In adolescence Florensky discovered his first great love in the person of his handsome schoolmate Alexander Elchaninov, a year older and like himself a future priest of considerable renown. Elchaninov’s inability to reciprocate the intensity of Florensky’s

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94 Pyman, 6.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 7.
98 Elchaninov is the author of The Diary of a Russian Priest, trans. Helen Iswolsky (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1967).
feelings brought their relationship crashing to an end with all the melodrama of any teenage romance.\[^99\] It was some ten or twelve years later, close to their thirties and once again on speaking terms, that they “muddled along” trying to explain Florensky’s enduring attraction to men in adulthood.

A week after Florensky’s marriage—a “rude shock”\[^100\] to all who knew him—a friend visiting the newlyweds wrote home:

Pavlusha [a diminutive for Pavel] is quiet, calm and merry, natural and tender with his wife without any sign of being in love…. Nothing tragic. Everything very simple and good…. [I]t seems he took this step without forcing himself. There will be children to whom they will be devoted and there will be one more close-knit family in Russia…. But, in spite of everything, I was a bit sad for Pavlusha. There is so much self-abjuration and humility in what he has done…. [T]here’s something vulnerable about him…and through the quiet merriment glimpses of deep sadness.\[^101\]

**Same-Sex Love, Salvation, Ecclesial Life**

Reading “Friendship” and “Jealousy”\[^102\] through the lens of Florensky’s personal history, we have no grounds to dispute his untroubled acceptance of two correlatives: first, some men happen to love men instead of women; and second, love between two Orthodox men supplies the natural “element” upon which the Holy Spirit descends in the Church to accomplish a sacrament, the transformation of their relationship for the perfection of its efflorescence and fructification in Christ.\[^103\] Florensky regards these sanctified relationships as no less essential to the salvation of the conjoined partners and to the fulness of the Church’s life than those of sacramental marriage. Speaking to us from an era not so far removed in time from our own, yet light years from the present contagion of culture war fever, his gentle voice beckons us to another way of looking, not at questions of ideology or

\[^99\] Pyman, 16-17.
\[^100\] Ibid., 86.
\[^101\] Ibid.
\[^102\] See n. 90 above.
\[^103\] Since this chapter serves to summarize Florensky’s teaching, its applicability to female couples must remain implicit at this point in order not to do violence to his text.
even “morality,” not at an entire swath of the human population damnable *en masse*, but into the individual hearts and souls of real, living human persons, bearers of the divine image, children, youths, women, and men created transparent to the irradiation of uncreated grace.

If it seems doubtful that a meditation devoted to “Friendship” can have any bearing on what we call same-sex love, let us draw our attention to the engraving selected by Florensky himself at the head of the chapter: two laughing cupids, naked, shooting playfully at each other with their bows and arrows, and a caption that reads, “*Faustum praelium. Бой счастливой. Happy battle.*”

From this we proceed to an intuition gleaned from diachronic linguistics. Owing to the casual usage of the term “friend” in everyday English, and to its deceptively apparent lack of cognation with anything related to love, our apprehension of the exclusivity inherent to friendship—might we say its monogamy—has been lost to us in the mists of distant etymological history. But not entirely lost: we preserve something of this sense in the compound forms *boyfriend* and *girlfriend*, and in the nuance that distinguishes *my friend* from *a friend of mine*. Our English word derives from the Old Dutch and Old High German (both prior to the 12th century) *friunt*, lover, and ultimately from the Gothic (4th–6th centuries) *frijōn*, to love. This permits Alan Bray, for instance, to name his study of male coupledom in the medieval Western Church, *The Friend*.

Two considerations justify having commenced with this brief excursus into the domain of philology: first, our vitiated understanding of friendship must inevitably compromise the way in which our subconscious schematizes Florensky’s chapter just from

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104 Florensky, *Pillar*, 284; *Столпъ*, 393. According to Pyman (72), Florensky borrowed this and most of the other engravings for his book from *Symbola et Emblemata* (Daniel de la Feuille, 1705).
105 See the Oxford English Dictionary and dictionary.com for *friend*.
its title; and second, Florensky himself devotes no little space to analyzing the Greek and Russian terms for friend in order to discover the spiritually unitive nature of an exclusive relationship qualitatively little different from—if not superior to—that of marriage.

Florensky grounds his sense of the quasi conjugal unitiveness of male friendship in the cognates φίλος, φιλία, and φιλέω, and the distinction between these and ἀγάπη. While ἀγάπη represents the universal love that a Christian must exercise towards all the brethren, φιλέω means not only I love but I kiss. A man’s φίλος, his Friend, thus connotes the brother in Christ whom he kisses, whom he loves in a singular and not a universal way. From this Florensky moves seamlessly to the etymological connection between the verb to kiss and the adjective whole in Russian—целоваться and целый—as he asks:

But when are friends closest to each other, if not when kissing? The very word for “kiss” in Russian (поселуй) is close to the Russian word for “whole” (целый), and the Russian verb for “to kiss” (целоваться) signifies that friends are brought to a state of wholeness (целостность) or unity. A kiss is the spiritual unification of the persons kissing. Its connection with friendship, namely with philia, is seen from the Greek word…. [P]hilein [the infinitive of φιλέω]…means “to kiss.”

Thus a man’s Друг—his Friend, but literally in Russian his other, his second, similar to one’s “other half” in English but interpreted by Florensky as his other self—signifies for Florensky the one man with whom alone the bodily act of kissing reproduces between the two a mode of spiritual oneness, and for the two together and each individually, their

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107 Florensky often uses the majuscule when referring to one’s partner in an exclusive male relationship (Pillar, 319; Столпъ, 446).
108 Florensky, Pillar, 286-295. I have condensed to a few sentences what Florensky parses very thoroughly over several pages.
109 The apparent link between the two obtains also in Ukrainian: целувати and цілий.
110 Florensky, Pillar, 316.
111 Ibid., 314. Notably the Ukrainian одружитися—to marry—also has другий, друга (second or other) as its root.
restoration to a state of wholeness, to which I would add a state of healing.  

Here we begin to grasp with greater clarity the paradoxical inner logic of Zion’s “eros of friendship.”

Florensky finds it natural to use friend and lover interchangeably, often in the same sentence, and to describe the union of two friends as constitutive of a single being, in language astonishing for its resemblance to a Christian treatise on the love of husband and wife:

Between lovers the membrane of selfhood is torn. And, in a friend, one sees oneself, as it were, one’s most intimate essence, one’s other I. But this other I is not different from one’s own I. A friend is received into the I of the lover, is profoundly agreeable, or acceptable, to the lover. A friend is admitted into the organization of the lover, is not alien to him in any way, is not expelled from him. The loved one is received by his friend and nestles, like a mother’s child, beneath his heart.

…The soul’s reception of a friend’s I unites two separate streams of life. This living unity is achieved not as the enslavement of one person by the other, and not even as the conscious slavery of one person in relation to the other. Nor can a unity of friends be called a concession. It is precisely a unity. One feels, desires, thinks, and speaks not because the other spoke, thought, desired, or felt in the same way, but because both feel one feeling, desire with one will, think one thought, speak with one voice. Each lives by the other, or rather, the life of the one and the other flow from a common center, one in itself, placed by the friends above themselves by a creative act.

This holy love between two men “erases…the bounds of selfhood’s separateness, which is aloneness. In a friend…one finds the source of hope for victory and the symbol of what is to come…preliminary consubstantiality and therefore preliminary knowledge of the Truth.”

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112 In Slavonic (as indeed in English), whole (цѣлъ) is also cognate with to heal (цѣловать). In our context we might then speak not only of the unifying power of the kiss, but also of its healing power, indeed of the healing power of sanctified coupledom itself.

113 Here Florensky draws on the cognation of another word for friend—пріятель—with the adjectives agreeable and acceptable—пріятный and пріемлемый—and with the noun reception, the act of receiving—прият оние. (Столпъ, 433. Readers of Russian will note the pre-Revolution orthography.)

114 Florensky, Pillar, 310-11. Because of Orthodox Christianity’s heightened sense of the Holy Trinity as the archetype of all human sociality and its transfiguration by grace into ecclesiality, this unity of feeling, desire, thought, and speech must be understood not as a reduction of the couple to a depersonalized, insipid sameness, but as the charismatic fruits of their “preliminary consubstantiality” (286) after the likeness of the Holy Trinity’s consubstantiality.

115 Ibid., 286. The inseparability of Truth from love constitutes a foundational theme in Orthodox theology, spirituality, ecclesiology, and liturgy. The Nicaean Creed is introduced at every eucharistic liturgy by this
Yet they experience this in the prosaic uneventfulness of their shared daily life, made “golden” by their “mystical unity.” A man’s love knows his Friend “by his smile, by his quiet talk, by his weaknesses, by how he treats people in ordinary human life, by how he eats and sleeps.” A man knows his beloved by his humble piety in church, by how he lights candles and venerates the holy icons, by how he stands at prayer and makes the sign of the cross during divine services, by how he approaches the Chalice of the Lord’s Body and Blood. The “sacrament of love” that Florensky envisions uniting two Orthodox men …requires palpable, concrete manifestations, including physical closeness. It is necessary not only to “love” one another but also to be close together, to attempt, as much as possible, to come closer and closer to one another. But when are friends closest to each other, if not when kissing? …It is necessary to live a common life, it is necessary to illuminate and suffuse everyday life with closeness, even outward, bodily closeness.

“This person stands in a crowd, but I summon him and, from the city square, I lead him into the cozy room of my heart. […] I make myself in relation to the chosen person such that this person becomes Thou for me. Friendship, I repeat, is exclusive, just as conjugal love is exclusive.” He enunciates the analogy between marriage and monogamous friendship more clearly still: “…[T]he wife of a brother must, for every man, be the wife of a brother, but only the wife of this particular brother and not the wife of every man…. In the same

dialogue between deacon and congregation: “Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess / the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity consubstantial and undivided.”

Florensky, Pillar, 297.
Ibid., 313.
Ibid., 308. See also Столпъ, 428-29: here the Russian original reads таинство любви, the mystery of love, followed by sacramentum caritatis in Roman characters. It will not be lost on the Orthodox reader that, some sixty-five years later, Paul Evdokimov applies this expression to marriage. See Paul Evdokimov, The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985). Florensky (Pillar, 308; Столпъ, 428) cites Augustine’s non-marital use of the expression.
Ibid., 316.
Ibid., 335.
way…for each member of the Church, the friend of a brother must be the friend of a brother, but only the friend of this particular brother, not the friend of everyone….”

Again he writes:

Faithfulness to a once-established friendship, the indissolubility of friendship, as strict as the indissolubility of marriage, firmness to the end, unto the “blood of the martyrs”—that is the fundamental commandment of friendship, and the whole force of friendship lies in the observance of this commandment. There are many temptations to turn away from a Friend, to remain alone or to start new friendships. But a person who has broken off one friendship will break off another, and a third, because he has replaced the way of ascesis with the desire for psychic comfort. …[A]scesis lends strength to a friendship.”

“Friendship gives the loftiest joy but it also demands the strictest ascesis.” For the nurturance and growth of a “love full of grace” between two men, it does not suffice simply to fall in love. That marks only the beginning, the initial revelation to one another, the moment of mutual discovery and attraction. In order to know and to experience in their love something of the nature of the Church herself and of the promises of the world to come, the two must apply themselves to the perpetual refinement of their love through the task of lifelong co-ascesicism, the “constantly burning patience that lasts a lifetime…the quiet flame of holy oil:”

The spiritual activity in which and by which knowledge of the Pillar of the Truth [the Church] is given is love. This is love full of grace, manifested only in a purified consciousness. It can only be attained by a long (O how long!) ascesis. In order to strive to attain love—unimaginable for creatures—it is necessary to receive an initial impulse and then to be sustained in one’s further motion. Such an impulse is the so common and so rationally incomprehensible revelation of a human person, a revelation that manifests itself as love in the receiver of the revelation…. Love

122 Ibid., 318.
123 Ibid., 326.
124 Cf. 1 Sam 18:1-4. Florensky notes (*Pillar*, 299) how every man must react to the narrative of David and Jonathan’s love: “Written as if for me.”
125 Florensky, *Pillar*, 312.
126 Cf. 1 Cor 2:9. In this context we can speak of how unforeseeably glorious natural love becomes when rooted sacramentally in Christ through the Holy Spirit, cultivated through ascetical synergy with divine grace in the mystical life of the Church.
shakes up a person’s whole structure, and after this “earthquake of the soul,” he can seek. Love opens for him the doors of the worlds on high, whence drifts the cool of paradise.  

To what can “the cool of paradise” allude, if not to “the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden” — a sound perceived not with ears of flesh in a garden of trees and flowers, but mystically, in the garden of two human hearts fused into one, indwelt and purified by the Holy Spirit, now heard by all who strive two by two as helpmates for their mutual deification in the likeness of divine love?

The “pairedness of Spirit-bearing persons is unquestionable,” for “the mystical unity of two is a condition of knowledge and therefore of the appearance of the Spirit of Truth that gives this knowledge. …[T]his unity corresponds to the coming of the Kingdom of God…and the spiritualization [pneumatization] of all creation.” Here Florensky appeals to Clement of Rome: “For the Lord Himself, being asked by one when His kingdom would come, replied, ‘When two shall be one….’ Now two are one when we speak the truth to one another, and there is unfeignedly one soul in two bodies.” Florensky repeatedly characterizes monogamous male friendship as a “perfect unity of soul.” He states, “Therefore, friends form a dual-unity, a dyad. They are not they, but something greater: one soul.” The exclusive love of two men thus bears within itself, no less than marriage, a prophetic vocation in the Church and in the world as a sign and foretaste of the communion of love in the kingdom to come. Yet the exalted eschatological orientation of their love

127 Florensky, Pillar, 285.
128 Gen 3:8.
130 Ibid., 308-09. See also n. 112 above.
132 Florensky, Pillar, 309.
133 Ibid., 311.
becomes incarnate in the ordinary practicalities of their shared life: “The property of one becomes the property of the other, and the good of one becomes the good of the other.”

The Church seals and sanctifies this love sacramentally: “These relations blossom in sacramental adelphopoiesis and the co-partaking of the Holy Eucharist, and are nourished by this partaking for co-ascesis, co-patience, and co-martyrdom.” Florensky compares the essential ecclesiality of the relationship created in this sacrament to that of marriage: “In the Church there cannot be anything that is not pan-ecclesial, just as there cannot be anything that is not personal. […] Every phenomenon of church life is pan-ecclesial in its meaning, but it has a center, a point of special application, where it is not only stronger but even qualitatively wholly other than in other places. Take marriage as an example.”

The marriage of two members of the Church is

…the business of the whole universal Church…in the sense that, for everyone, this event has a certain spiritual significance and is not something indifferent. […] It embraces the other members of the Church…. [C]hurch life…is always universal and general in its significance and always personal and concrete in its application and appearance.

All we have said above holds also for adelphopoiesis.

The ecclesiality of the adelphopoietic relationship stems, in part, from the “antinomic character of the two sides of love,” indivisible from each other, the universal and the particular. “In fact, in order to treat everyone as oneself it is necessary to see oneself at least in one person, to feel oneself in him; it is necessary to perceive in this one person an already achieved—even if only partial—victory over selfhood.” For this particular love between two Orthodox men “not to degenerate into a peculiar self-love…not to become merely the

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134 Florensky, Pillar, 310. Chrysostom exhorts virtually the same co-ownership of property and money to husbands and wives.
135 Florensky, Столпъ, 411: “въ сакраментальномъ брато-творенїи.”
136 Florensky, Pillar, 296.
137 Ibid., 329.
138 Ibid.
condition for a comfortable life...to have a depth,” they must turn their inward love outward as a centripetal spiritual force to draw the whole world into its orbit. Without particular love “there is no ferment, no creativity of church humanity, no movement forward, no pathos of life;” conversely, without universal love “there is no incorruptibility, collectedness, purity, or wholeness of this life...no harmony of life.”

The dynamic spiritual tension between the equally essential introversion and extroversion of this monogamous male relationship echoes that of marriage: “Fill their houses with wheat, wine, and oil, and with every good thing,” reads one of the prayers of our marriage rite, “so that they may give in turn to those in need.”

The wider sociohistorical matrix that gave birth to “Friendship” and “Jealousy” must necessarily have the same relevance for us as Florensky’s life story. Richard Gustafson notes:

> The new visibility and sometimes tolerance, if not acceptance, of homosexuality, which was spawned by the late-nineteenth-century homosexual liberation movements in Germany, had a strong impact on Russian cultural life in the beginning of the twentieth century....

In this context Florensky’s notion of friendship has a decided homophilic, if not homoerotic, tinge. All dyadic friendships in his discussion are same-sex unions. And this is what is significant theologically, even in our own era. Florensky decents heterosexual marriage in his presentation of ecclesiality in order to privilege pairs of friends. He moves the discussion of Christian life away from the union of the flesh [and also away from monasticism] to the union of the spirit. [...] Florensky’s *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is the first Christian theology to place same-sex relationship at the center of its vision.

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139 Florensky, *Pillar*, 297.
141 Richard F. Gustafson, “Introduction to the Translation,” in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xx. Although a detailed study of *Pillar* falls far beyond the limited scope of this thesis, Gustafson’s assertion that Florensky has placed “same-sex relationship” at the very centre of his theological vision may not be far off the mark. The title page contains an engraving selected by Florensky and borrowed from the 17th-century *Amoris Divini Emblemata* (Pyman, 72). At the top of a pillar representing the Church we find two identical cherubs in a tender embrace, their heads leaning against each other, with Cupid’s quiver and bow laid aside at the base of the pillar, no longer needed. The caption reads, in Latin and Russian: FINIS AMORIS, UT DUO UNUM FIANT. ПРЕДЪЛЪ ЛЮБВИ—ДА ДВОЕ ЕДИНО БУДУТЪ. THE LIMIT OF LOVE: TWO ARE ONE. The Russian
The turn of the last century also saw the rise and fall of Oscar Wilde and the ascendency of André Gide, events that cannot have escaped the notice of Russia’s Europhile intelligentsia. If we encounter in Florensky—as the biographical and literary record suggests—the first modern attempt to articulate an Orthodox theology and spirituality of same-sex love, a love sanctified and made worthy of Christ and His Church, the sublime value of his seminal contribution resides in his radiant vision of the divinely endowed spiritual potentiality of love between two men.

To the question of what demarcates the acceptable limits of bodily expressivity for two Orthodox men who love each other, Florensky provides no answer. (Nor do our theologians who write on marriage exhibit any taste for doing so.) If we wonder whether Florensky could have possibly meant sexual love, it becomes extremely difficult to draw a tidy line between what does and does not constitute the sexualization of love when two men who express theirs by kissing presumably also share a bed. (How else should they rejoice in watching each other sleep?) We have already noted this quandary in Zion, who sees even the holding of hands (which he condones in same-sex relationships) as a “sexual act” \(^{142}\) between lovers.

Florensky quotes from the diary of a deceased friend, who had himself been in an exclusive friendship:

Sexual abstinence, if it is not accompanied by an excited state, is not harmful physiologically or, in any case, not especially harmful. And in the occult and mystical respect, it even serves to develop new capabilities. But abstinence connected with a state of excitedness, i.e., with the imagining that one can transcend oneself through sex, is harmful, and the more vivid is the imagining, the more harmful such abstinence will be. The soul becomes foul and rots, in the same way

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\(^{142}\) Zion, 289. See also p. 22 above.
that the body perishes. Perhaps the chief harm is from a constant lack of satisfaction.\textsuperscript{143}

The unnamed diarist attributes the same harm to involuntary solitude when one yearns to be in a relationship with another man: “Not obtaining spiritual satisfaction [of such a relationship] but eternally running after it and near it, one teases oneself with the dream of one’s imagination, and one’s spiritual powers are spent on it.”\textsuperscript{144}

Zion nudges the door ajar to another way of looking when he foregrounds the emotional orientation of same-sex desire. Florensky pushes the door wide open when he establishes the fundamentally \textit{spiritual} orientation of a Friend to his Friend, a lover to his lover, an orientation fully receptive in the Church to the operation of divine grace towards the transfiguration of earthly desire into a foretaste of heaven.

\textsuperscript{143} Florensky, \textit{Pillar}, 325.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 326.
Chapter 3
Adelphopoiesis: The Sacrament of Love

What is a sacrament? On what basis can we recognize with Florensky, in the liturgy of adelphopoiesis and in the sanctified relationship that it creates between two men, a sacrament, a holy mystery?

These two questions inform the present chapter. In this way I propose to move the discussion of adelphopoiesis beyond the impasse of the uncritical acceptance of John Boswell’s flawed scholarship versus the equally uncritical dismissiveness of his detractors who ridicule his underlying motive: namely, to explore the possible range of meanings of male pairs in the scriptural, liturgical, and hagiographical witness and their application for us today. This differs in no way from the impetus behind Florensky’s project eighty years earlier, despite the painful contrast between Boswell’s brashness and Florensky’s almost delicate subtlety. Yet to Boswell we owe a debt of sincere gratitude for catapulting this forgotten sacrament into the ecclesiastical, scholarly, and popular consciousness.

Others have addressed the problems rife in Boswell’s study more thoroughly than lies within my competence. His injudicious manipulation of primary sources, questionable translation of key texts, and misrepresentation of the historical record have been thoroughly dissected. Among the more nuanced voices from his phalanx of critics, Philip Lyndon Reynolds discerns—“buried” in Boswell’s book—the “interesting and plausible thesis” that the Church’s “institutionalized or otherwise socially recognized same-sex relationships, such

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146 A substantive body of late 19th-century scholarship on adelphopoiesis exists in Russian. See Pillar, p. 571, n. 809 and Столпъ, p. 788, n. 808 for an extensive Russian bibliography.
as the brotherhoods studied here, provided scope for the expression of what we would now regard as homosexual inclinations.”¹⁴⁸ As we noted above, Bray stumbled upon a similar “scope for expression” in some parts of the Latin Church.¹⁴⁹ While neither Reynolds nor Bray leaps to the oversimplified inference that ἀδελφοποίησις in the East and the ordo ad fratres faciendum in the West represented an exact equivalent of marriage, their shared instinct that the Church of an earlier era acknowledged on some level, and provided structure for, men who felt as deeply drawn to each other as a man to his wife seems eminently justified.

We can now return to our question of what is a sacrament. Before the “Western captivity of Orthodox theology”¹⁵⁰ and our widespread capitulation to a Tridentine sacramental schema in various catechisms and professions of faith, the Orthodox Church never felt a pressing need to formulate a scholastic definition or to establish a permanently fixed number for them. The very notion of “defining” mysteries and delimiting them numerically seems like a patent oxymoron. The fact that those Greek Fathers who attempted to systematize them seldom agreed, either on the number or on what to include and exclude, demonstrates the difficulty of the endeavour.¹⁵¹

Our reluctance to reduce the sacraments to an inflexible taxonomy owes to the Orthodox Church’s understanding of herself as “Sacrament,” as “Mystery,” not at discrete moments in “visible signs of invisible grace,” but in every aspect of the life bestowed on her by the Son of God in whom humanity has already risen from the dead, ascended into heaven,

¹⁴⁹ See p. 26 above.
¹⁵¹ In sharp contrast with this, the Council of Trent states: “If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or, that they are more, or less, than seven…let him be anathema.” The Council of Trent, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch7.htm.
and seated itself on the throne of equality with the Father. Not only does the Son’s imperishable divine-human life become communicable to us, participable by us, through the ceaseless outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Giver of life here and now in the Church, but the Church herself is His everlasting divine-human life, imparted to all creation as the first fruits of the future Kingdom already in our midst: the Church as the Sacrament or Mystery of communion between God and man, God and the cosmos, man and man, and man and the cosmos, inaugurated in the present age and fulfilled in the age to come, at the final transfiguration of every human person and every created thing “called apart” to concorporate as the cosmic ἐκκλησία of the Son’s incarnate, crucified, and glorified body through the insufflation of the Holy Spirit, the full pneumatization into Christ of all human beings and of all things. Dumitru Stǎniloae writes:

…[T]he general meaning of the mysteries [or sacraments] is the union of God with the creature, and the most comprehensive mystery [or sacrament] is the union of God with the whole of creation. This is a mystery [or sacrament] that contains everything, and there is absolutely no part of reality not contained within it. This [mysterial or sacramental] union begins with the very act of creation and is destined to find its fulfilment through the movement of creation toward that state in which “God is all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). Is there anyone who can explain the meaning and the depth of this union, the way in which the Word [Λόγος] of God is present within the reasons [λόγοι] of created things and the way He is at work, sustaining and governing them toward their goal of complete union with Him? 

152 Cyril of Jerusalem writes that in the Eucharist we become “made of the same body and the same blood with Him...because His Body and Blood are diffused through our [bodily] members; thus it is that, according to the blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature.” Lectures on the Christian Sacraments, ed. F.L. Cross, trans. R.W. Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 68.

153 With respect to the expectation of “inclusive” language in academia today, the English term man by definition is an inclusive noun. I retain the prerogative to preserve its traditional, linguistically correct use when no other term suffices to convey the notion of personified humanity, “God” (divinity personified) and “humanity” or “humankind” (man unpersonified) are inequivalent terms.

154 ἐκκλησία derives from ἐκκαλέω, to call out or apart for a common purpose.

155 See p. 5, n. 9 above. The offering of bread and wine is upraised to the Father on behalf of everyone and everything. Also, the epiclesis at the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom asks the Father to “send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here offered,” manifesting an equivalent transformation by the action of the Holy Spirit upon bread, wine, and human bodies.


Stǎniloae’s translator explains it thus: “…[T]he “reasons” or “inner principles”...of created things corresponds...
This internal affinity with the uncreated Logos—built into the very structure of each one of the innumerable logoi created by Him, in an inexpressible manner bridging the unbridgeable chasm between uncreated and created being—constitutes the natural soil, so to speak, instilled as an organic component at the very heart of nature instantaneously with its creation by the Logos, from which the reciprocal efflorescence of the incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son by the Holy Spirit, and the deification of a countless multitude of adopted sons, male and female, by the same Holy Spirit, germinates and reaches the full fruition for which He creates all human persons and all things. From this natural foundation, this “logical” (λογικός) kinship between the Logos and His creatures, the edifice of the cosmic church of His glorified body rises up and assumes within the structure of its immortal life the totality of human existence and of all creaturely existence. In this consists the indelible mark upon creation of the Holy Trinity’s teleological design from all eternity, since before God ever called all things ex nihilo into being.157

Alexander Schmemann writes of the created order that “to be ‘symbolical’ belongs thus to its ontology, the symbol being not only the way to perceive and understand reality, a means of cognition, but also a means of participation. It is then the ‘natural’ symbolism of the world—one can almost say its ‘sacramentality’—that makes the sacrament possible and constitutes the key to its understanding and apprehension.”158 Rather than introduce something “supernatural” and thus foreign into the midst of the natural order—rather than annihilate the “whatness” of some small particle of nature through transubstantiation—the mystery or sacrament at once reveals and fulfils the hidden nature of nature: the mystery of

157 Cf. the anaphora (eucharistic canon) of St. John Chrysostom.
158 Schmemann, 139-40.
nature and nature as mystery, the sacrament of nature and nature as sacrament, the cosmic unification in the Son for which He created the whole natural order, both human and nonhuman. Out of a superabundance of love the Logos creates all things beautiful for the express purpose of making Himself consubstantial with His whole creation, and His whole creation consubstantial with Himself.  

Only by starting out from this φρόνημα, this “mindset,” within which the Church perceives in her holy mysteries a continuous unveiling of the divinely endowed sacramentality of all human life and experience, indeed of all things, can we arrive at an apprehension of the sacramental character of adelphopoiesis and of the love between two men within which it sows the seed of their transfiguration.

Adelphopoiesis as Sacrament: Some Rubrical and Textual Considerations

Without in any way compromising the foregoing observations, the Orthodox Church acknowledges an internal hierarchy among her several liturgical actions that most fully manifest and actualize the all-embracing sacramentality of her being, of human life, of the whole universe. We too speak of “the sacraments.” If the Eucharist stands forth as the very summit of our ecclesial experience of cosmic communion with God and our fellow creatures both human and nonhuman—the summit to which and from which all else flows in a joyous choreography of unending circularity in the Church’s life—we accord corresponding importance to those other sacramental actions connected to the Eucharist in their very essence. To Baptism, Marriage, and Holy Orders, Florensky adds Adelphopoiesis.

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159 The teleological and eschatological worldview of Orthodox theology suggests fascinating areas of dialogue with the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.
160 Chrismation is administered by the priest as an integral part of Baptism.
161 Florensky, Pillar, 296; 327. For historical reasons beyond the scope of this thesis to examine, only Holy Orders retains its direct connection with the Eucharist. Baptism, Marriage, and Adelphopoiesis nevertheless preserve important rubrical and textual reminders of their proper fulfilment in the reception of Holy Communion.
The first sign of the proper place of Adelphopoiesis within the Eucharist comes at the very beginning, in their shared opening doxology: *Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* This signals that the Church incorporated Adelphopoiesis historically into the eucharistic Liturgy and sealed the newly sanctified relationship in the pair’s reception of Holy Communion with the whole assembly of the faithful. (Baptism and Marriage begin with this doxology for the same reason.) With these words the Church proclaims the same “destination” for Adelphopoiesis as for the Eucharist, and by extension, for Baptism, Marriage, and Holy Orders. Schmemann writes of this doxology,

> From the beginning the destination is announced: the journey is to the Kingdom. This is where we are going—and not symbolically, but really. ...[T]o bless the Kingdom is not simply to acclaim it. It is to declare it to be the goal, the end of all our desires and interests, of our whole life, the supreme and ultimate value of all that exists. To bless is to accept in love, and to move toward what is loved and accepted. The Church thus is the assembly, the gathering of those to whom the ultimate destination of all life has been revealed and who have accepted...to follow Christ in His ascension to His Father, to make this ascension the destiny of man.

For the Church to situate the sanctification of both the marital and the adelphopoietic relationship within the eucharistic Liturgy represents immeasurably more than the mere blessing of a natural human bond in order to impart “sacramental grace” as a “supernatural aid” for the couple to face the practical, emotional, and relational challenges of their shared

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162 Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 312 (English), 351 (Greek). See n. 163 below for possible variants on the opening doxology of Adelphopoiesis.

163 See John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1970), 25. Every non-eucharistic service in the Orthodox Church begins with *Blessed is our God*, with the exception of Matins, which begins with *Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Creating, and Undivided Trinity*. As stated in n.159, Baptism and Marriage anomalously ceased to be celebrated during the eucharistic Liturgy but retain the eucharistic opening doxology. Boswell (*Same-Sex Unions*, 327) cites a variant of Adelphopoiesis that begins—in his English translation—with “Blessed is our God” followed by the Trisagion Prayers, rather than “Blessed is the Kingdom;” however, the Greek from which he made his translation (356) simply gives this rubric: Ποιεῖ ὁ ἱερεύς εὐλογητὸν, τρισάγιον...., i.e. “The priest does the blessing [without specifying which formula], the Trisagion...” For his other versions that begin with “Blessed is our God” in English (332, 335) Boswell does not provide the original Greek or Slavonic.

164 Schmemann, 29.
life. Each couple, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, emerges from the Chalice *immiscibly one* and *indivisibly two*—the “one soul” of adelphopoiesis, the “one flesh” of marriage—transfigured ineffably by the Holy Spirit not merely into an existentially new, but into an *ontologically* new reality, a life of the deepest possible interpersonal *consubstantiality* between the two partners, blossoming forth from the entrance of human life into the uncreated sanctuary of the Holy Trinity’s inner life and love through the death and glorification of the incarnate Son of God and pioneer of our deification.\(^{165}\)

Florensky remarks that the two men take turns holding a candle during the Cherubic Hymn, sung during the Great Entrance in the Divine Liturgy, yet goes on to say that they partake of the Presanctified Gifts.\(^{166}\) This discrepancy may indicate that Adelphopoiesis followed the same historical trajectory as Marriage: once detached from the Divine Liturgy, it retained the eucharistic opening doxology and saw the couple communed from the Presanctified Gifts.\(^{167}\)

Other rubrical details noted by Florensky\(^{168}\) further show Adelphopoiesis to belong to the same “family” of sacramental acts as Baptism, Marriage, and Holy Orders:

1. The elder male stands to the right of the younger before the tetrapod\(^{169}\) in the centre of the nave. This corresponds to the respective position of the man and the woman in Marriage, and may suggest an idea of headship in the adelphopoietic relationship

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\(^{165}\) Heb 12:2.  
\(^{166}\) Florensky, *Pillar*, 327.  
\(^{167}\) Meyendorff, 31. Eventually, Holy Communion was dropped entirely from the Orthodox marriage rite, and only the Common Cup is now given to the couple. Meyendorff acknowledges that “the Roman Catholic Church has preserved the ancient Christian tradition in its liturgical discipline” because “a marriage between two Roman Catholics still occurs in connection with a mass” (26).  
\(^{169}\) A four-legged, movable table used for purposes other than the Eucharist.
analogous to that of marriage. The two men place their right hand on the Gospel Book and hold a candle in their left hand. In Marriage the couple also holds a candle in their left hand.

2. The priest ties the two men together at the waist with a single belt. This action does not occur in Marriage. Sometimes their right hands are also tied together, which can also occur in Marriage according to local tradition.

3. Following the two men’s reception of Holy Communion, the priest joins their hands and leads them thrice around the tetrapod to the singing of Psalm 80:14-15. This circular procession occurs around the font in Baptism to the singing of Galatians 3:27; and in Marriage (with the same joining of hands) around the tetrapod, and in Holy Orders around the altar table, both to the singing of a hymn based in part on Isaiah 7:15/Matthew 1:23. In Baptism and Holy Orders this takes place well before Communion; in Marriage and Adelphopoiesis, immediately following Communion.

4. After the procession, the two men exchange a kiss to the singing of Psalm 133:1. The rubrics for Marriage do not prescribe anything to be sung when the husband and wife kiss.

5. An 11th-century manuscript concludes with the removal of the men’s crowns, but lacks any indication of when the priest places them on their heads. By any measure this makes for an astonishing point of resemblance to Marriage.

If we entertain the hypothesis that the adelphopoietic relationship represents a Christianization of the Platonic erastes-eromenos (ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος) model of exclusive male relationships, the headship of the elder over the younger makes eminent sense.

Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 331.

At a hierarchal Divine Liturgy the bishop recites these verses as a blessing over the congregation during the singing of the Trisagion. This expresses liturgically Florensky’s insistence on the pan-ecclesial significance of the adelphopoietic relationship.

Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 298 (English); 346 (Greek).
The sequential structure of Adelphopoiesis—litany, prayers, Epistle and Gospel readings, the Lord’s Prayer, Holy Communion, threefold circular procession—follows that of Marriage closely, but with its own prayers and Scripture readings. The rubrics prescribe the reading of 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:8 and John 17:18-26.

We find no correspondence to Betrothal, with its exchange of rings.  

Following the pattern of the Eucharist itself, Orthodox liturgical tradition typically employs a bipartite anamnetic/epicletic formula to establish the identification of the present sacramental action with its scriptural prototype: “O Lord who didst do that then, come do the same now.” A prayer from the same 11th-century manuscript that mentions crowns illustrates this structure in a quite unexpected way. However we conceptualize the nature and expressivity of exclusive love between two Orthodox men, here the anamnesis situates the sanctification of their relationship “in the beginning,” within a clearly Edenic context:

"Ὅτι ἐλεήμων καὶ φιλῶν δέσποτα κύριε, ὃ ποιήσας τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατεἰκόνα σήν καὶ ὀμοίωσίν, ὃ εὐδοκήσας τοὺς ἁγίους σου ἀποστόλους Φίλιππον καὶ Βαρθολομαίον ἀδελφοὺς γενέσθαι οὐ δεσμουμένους φύσεως ἀλλὰ πιστέως καὶ πειόματος τρόπω, ἔσσατος καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους σου μάρτυρας Σέργιον καὶ Βάχκον ἀδελφοὺς γεγενέσθαι ἐξίωσας: αὐτός εὐλόγησον τοὺς δούλους σου ὁ δεῖνα καὶ ὁ δείνα, οὐ δεσμουμένους δέσμῳ φύσεως ἀλλὰ πιστέως καὶ πειόματος τρόπῳ, δορώμενος αὐτοῖς εἰρήνην καὶ ἀγάπην καὶ ὀμόνοιαν.… [Δ]ὸς αὐτοῖς τὸ ἄγαπάν ἀλλήλους ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἀσκανδαλίστως πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῶν."

Since Thou are merciful and loving, O Master [and] Lord, who hast made man according to Thine image and likeness, and who didst think it good that Thy holy apostles Philip and Bartholomew should become brothers, bound not in the manner of nature but of faith and the Spirit, and didst likewise count Thy holy martyrs Sergius and Bacchus worthy to become brothers: Thyself bless Thy servants, N. and N., not bound with bonds of nature but in the manner of faith and the Spirit,
bestowing upon them peace and love and oneness of mind…. [G]rant them to love each other without hatred and without scandal all the days of their lives.  

Whatever Augustine may have meant by calling the pairing of apostles “the sacrament of love,” here the relationship becomes a sacrament in the “technical” sense: a liturgical act that sanctifies the natural human love between two men and transforms it according to the divine image and likeness bestowed upon the man and the woman in the Garden. The association of “the cool of paradise” with the love that two men bear for each other proves to be no mere flight of romantic fancy on Florensky’s part, but a principle enshrined in the liturgical text itself.

Paradoxically, the Roman Catholic theologian constrained by the parameters of Tridentine sacramental theology can argue for the sacramentality of *fratres faciendum* and its “institut[ion] by Jesus Christ, our Lord” more persuasively than for marriage, with no less than Augustine and Jerome to testify in its favour.

Schmemann writes, “It may be asked why, of the many ‘states’ of human life, in the great variety of man’s vocations, only this ‘state’ [marriage] has been singled out as a sacrament?" Florensky disagrees. Adelphopoiesis possesses all the markers of a sacrament: its eucharistic opening doxology and its culmination in Holy Communion; its anamnesis and epiclesis; its similarities with Baptism, Marriage, and Holy Orders. From a

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177 Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 295. I have modified Boswell’s translation somewhat. He renders ἀδελφούς γενέσθαι respectively as “be united” and “be united together” (295), rather than “become brothers.” This may seem relatively harmless until compared to his name for the service: “Office for Same-Sex Union” (294) for Ἀκολουθία εἰς ἀδελφοποίησις (345), rather than “Service for Brother-Making.” It seems to me that scholarly research of this nature and any theological disquisition thereon are best served by translations as literal as possible.


179 See p. 30 above.


182 Schmemann, 81.
more Latinized perspective—to which some Orthodox adhere—it possesses even the requisite institution by Christ during His earthly ministry.

We hold in our possession a precious inheritance, bequeathed to us by our own Holy Tradition: a sacrament, a holy mystery, not identical to, but not entirely dissimilar from, that of Marriage. The rediscovery of Adelphopoiesis in our day opens the door to a “third way”—after that of Monasticism and Marriage—for an Orthodox Christian to consecrate his or her life to Christ, to contextualize concretely and formally the consecration bestowed upon all in Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist.
Chapter 4
Type, Antitype, Prototype: Fulfilment in the Church of the Saints

The most deeply moving love stories known to Holy Tradition involve three pairs of men. In one case, they love each other more than women; in the other two cases, instead of women. If David and Jonathan serve as a type of Jesus and John, this antitype establishes in its turn the prototype destined for fulfilment through the Holy Spirit in homologous relationships in the Church of the saints in every age, for which Sergius and Bacchus stand out as a preeminent model. We have no cause for wonder that the Orthodox Church sanctified these relationships sacramentally in times past; the greater wonder lies in the tragic disappearance of this holy mystery from Orthodox praxis and consciousness.

In exploring the relevance of these three couples and of their typological genealogy for the topic of this thesis, the present chapter undertakes a delicate task. Glib characterizations of David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, and Sergius and Bacchus as “gay lovers” or “openly gay” have no resonance with Orthodox piety. The error of our friends in other faith communities lies in their anachronistic conflation of a heavily laden cultural, political, and social construct with a time and place far removed from our own.

Yet we err in the opposite direction if we fail to discern in these three couples a subtle affirmation of the place of same-sex love in human life created by God in the image and likeness of divine life, redeemed by the Son of God in the incarnation, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the Church’s sacramental economy. Examined on its own terms—apart from the global culture wars from which it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle ourselves, and from the looming spectre of the strident carnality of contemporary gay culture (which, like all cultures, manifests nonetheless much that resonates with the Gospel)—the partnering
of these three pairs of men constitutes within Holy Tradition a parallel narrative, complementary to that of opposite-sex coupledom, of yet another form of natural human love receptive to transfiguration by uncreated grace into a luminous reflection of divine love. “I have in mind,” Florensky writes of men who love each other exclusively, “the extremely touching friendship of David and Jonathan, depicted in just a few words, but for that reason almost painfully touching: ‘Written as if for me,’ everyone thinks.”

Our prophetic vocation in the world consists not in reimagining the love of David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, and Sergius and Bacchus in the image and likeness of our fallenness, but rather in recreating ourselves and our love in the image and likeness of their holiness. In the Orthodox Church we look to Christ and to His saints not so much for validation of what we already are, as for a revelation of “what we shall be...we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone having this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

David and Jonathan

Scripture paints a portrait of Jesse’s youngest son—shepherd, carpenter, lyrist, poet, the Lord’s anointed one, future king, slayer of the enemy—as a ruddy and handsome lad with beautiful eyes. In a scene reminiscent of Adam’s “At last!” when he beholds Eve in the Garden, the younger Jonathan loves David the instant that he lays eyes on him. Their

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183 Florensky, *Pillar*, 299.
184 1 Jn 3:2-3.
185 Ps 151:2 (apocryphal): “My hands made a flute, my fingers a lyre.”
186 1 Sam 16:11-13. The LXX παῖδαριον (v. 11) can mean anything from little boy to young man. The Slavonic renders this μικρός λαβανθρός, the little one; the Vulgate, parvulus, with a wide range of meanings including baby, child, and little. In another verse where the LXX reiterates παῖδαριον to describe David (1 Sam 17:42), the Slavonic gives младший (child), and the Vulgate, adulescens. The English stripling (1 Sam 17:56—puer [boy] in the Vulgate; юноша [youngster, youth, young man] in Slavonic; vss.55-58 missing from the LXX) connotes not nudity but a mere “strip” of a man, not old enough for his physique to have filled out and matured.
souls become immediately knit together as one. In that very moment they form a covenanted union, sealed when Jonathan disrobes and hands over all his clothes and weapons to David as a gesture of submission within their newly unified identity, for Jonathan places himself in second place to David and promises to do whatever David asks of him. The two live together in Saul’s house until it becomes unsafe for David to stay. Jonathan lies to his father to save David’s life. Alone in a field, he makes David renew their oath of love and fidelity, “because he loved the soul of him who loved him.” How they renew it, Scripture does not say. At their farewell two days later, alone once again in the same field, they kiss—fervently, passionately, repeatedly, tenderly—and weep over each other to exhaustion. When later David receives the news of Jonathan’s death on the battlefield, he cries out, “O Jonathan…my brother Jonathan, you were very beautiful to me, and your love was wondrous to me above the love of women.”

David and Jonathan’s oneness of soul (cf. Florensky) signifies between the two men a complete and indissoluble unity of being analogous to Adam and Eve’s oneness of flesh. In biblical anthropology, both “the soul” and “the flesh” subsume the totality of the human person’s indivisibly psychosomatic structure. Gen 2:7 reads (LXX): “Καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἷς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν,” And the man became unto a living soul. In 1:14 reads: “Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο,” And the Word became flesh. Neither did the first Adam as “soul” lack a body, nor did the second Adam as “flesh” lack a soul, but both possessed all things proper to the fulness of psychosomatic human being.

1 Sam 18:1-4.
1 Sam 23:17. Although some English versions render this “I will be next to you,” the LXX (ἐγὼ έσομαι σοι εἷς δεότερον), the Vulgate (ego ero tibi secundus), and the Slavonic (АЩЄХΟЮΣ ΤΕΕΒ ΔΡΟГҮΗ) all agree on the more explicit second, a subaltern role in their relationship. We shall see this reflected below in Sergius and Bacchus’ respective positions in the imperial horse guard.
1 Sam 20:4.
1 Sam 18:2.
1 Sam 20:6, 28-29.
1 Sam 20:17 (LXX): ὁτι ἤγάπησε ψυχὴν ἀγαπῶντος αὐτῶν. The Slavonic renders this literally: ἐγὼ έσομαι δούσων λογομαθώ εγο, for he loved the soul of the one loving him.
1 Sam 20:41. The LXX uses not the basic verb φιλέω in this verse, but the intensifier καταφιλέω, which implies all of the adverbs used above.
2 Sam 1:25-26 (LXX): Ἰονᾶθαν…ἀδελφό μου Ἰονᾶθαν ὀφραίωθης μοι σφόδρα, ἐθαυμαστώθη ἢ ἀγάπησίς σου ἐμοί ύπερ ἁγάπησιν γυναικῶν.
re-echoes in “the tremendous moans” of Psalm 88: *Lover and friend Thou hast put far from me*. David takes Jonathan’s crippled son into his home as his own.

Significantly, both Chrysostom and Bede see in the covenanted love of two men a typological image of Christ and the Church that differs nowise from Paul’s nuptial imagery in Ephesians: the older David in his headship typifies Christ, as does the husband in the marital bond, and the younger Jonathan in his submission to David typifies the Church, as does the wife. For Florensky, the love of David and Jonathan foreshadows that of Jesus and John:

…[T]he Prophet King builds a bridge from the Old to the New Testament. Thus, his friendship with Jonathan also rises above the level of the utilitarian friendship of the Old Testament and anticipates the tragic friendship of the New. The shadow of deep, inexorable tragedy lay upon the Ancestor of Christ. Owing to this shadow, honorable earthly friendship became infinitely deepened and infinitely sweet for our heart which has the Gospel.

Florensky identifies this “tragic friendship” of the Gospel, anticipated typologically by David and Jonathan, with the relationship that stands at the very centre of the “concentric layers” of people surrounding Christ during His public ministry.

**Jesus and John**

Around Christ there are several concentric layers, of increasingly greater and more profound knowledge as He is approached. On the outside are external “crowds of people”; then, the secret disciples and adherents, such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Lazarus and his sisters, the women who follow the Lord, and so forth; then, the chosen, the “seventy”; then, the “twelve”; then, the “three,” Peter, James, and John; and finally “one,” “whom Jesus loved.”

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200 Franke, 334.
201 Ibid., 276-77.
202 Florensky, *Pillar*, 300.
203 Ibid., 301.
Thus Florensky accounts for the Beloved Disciple’s “greater” and “more profound” knowledge that enabled him to write his extraordinary Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation, and that earned for him—alone among the four evangelists, and the first of only three in the entire history of the Church—the title Theologian: the unique love that bound him and Jesus exclusively to each other in the closest possible intimacy during the final three years of Jesus’ earthly life.

The iconographical tradition captures this distinction between John and the three synoptic evangelists. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, bearded but not elderly, each write their own manuscript, seated in an attitude of serenity, with their feet planted firmly on the ground. An aged John, by contrast, looks heavenward over his shoulder with a look of astonishment on his face, his feet flung off the ground as if he loses his balance in his seat at the height of his ecstatic vision. A hand blesses John from heaven, a beam of uncreated light descends on him, the same that signal the voice of God in icons of Jesus’ baptism. With the cave of Patmos in the background, the deacon Prochorus takes down John’s dictation: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, Βεγιαστιν, In the beginning was the Word. Just as no one but the Logos has ever seen God, no one else ever saw what the Beloved Disciple saw.

Four times John alludes to himself as the disciple ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς, and once as the disciple ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς—the one whom Jesus loved, to whom He was Friend, whom He kissed. At John’s very first appearance in his narrative, he demonstrates an

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204 See Eusebius of Caesarea in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., John 11-21, New Testament IVb, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Thomas C. Oden, General Editor (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 396. Despite modern scholarly consensus to the contrary, the Beloved Disciple is traditionally presumed to be the author of all five New Testament books bearing the name John.

205 Acts 6:5.

206 Jn 13:23, 19:26, 21:7, 21:20. The Vulgate renders this quem diligebat; the Slavonic, ἐγὼ λογισμεν. The Vulgate renders this quem amabat; Slavonic cannot make this distinction and reiterates ἐγὼ λογισμεν.
astonishing degree of confidence in his unique relationship with Jesus when he claims a close parallel between them and the eternal relationship of Jesus with His heavenly Father:

Ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἦγαπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς. 208

There was reclining in the bosom of Jesus one of His disciples, the one whom Jesus loved.

We hear in this a deliberate echo of the closing words of the Prologue:

Θεὸν οὐδείς ἔδρακεν; μονογενὴς Θεός, ὃ ὤν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ Πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἔξηγήσατο. 209

No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God, who is into the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known.

The almost negligible nuance between the Son’s εἰς τὸν κόλπον of the Father and John’s ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ of Jesus establishes as close an analogy as possible between the two relationships without their being identical.211 The near exactitude of likeness between the two relationships, conveyed in the near exactitude of meaning between the two phrases, anticipates the doctrine of deification according to which man becomes by grace all that the Son of God is by nature. Origen writes that “John, by reclining on the Word and resting on more mystical things, was reclining in the bosom of the Word, analogous also to the Word being in the bosom of the Father.”212

The iconographical tradition portrays Jesus and John at the Supper with almost aching tenderness. A young, beardless John clings tightly to an older, bearded Jesus with both arms.

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208 Jn 13:23.
209 Jn 1:18.
210 This is the second instance in the Prologue where John uses a preposition of motion with a verb of stasis to describe the Son’s relation to the Father: καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν (1:1) literally translates, “And the Word was towards God.”
211 The parallelism between the two is completely lost, for instance, in the RSV’s “close to the breast of Jesus.” The Vulgate makes no distinction between the two: in sinu Patris (1:18), in sinu Iesu (13:23). The Slavonic, like the Greek, uses different prepositions—въ лонѣ Очи and на лонѣ Іисовѣ respectively—but the locative case of bosom in both instances, losing the sense of movement in 1:18.
212 Elowsky, 104.
In most icons, his entire upper body stretches across Jesus’ bosom; in some, he lies almost horizontal across Jesus’ lap, so that at a distance from the icon John’s place at the table appears empty: upon closer inspection, we see the two almost occupying the same seat. In many icons Jesus returns John’s embrace with one arm while blessing all the disciples with His other hand. In some, Jesus looks lovingly down at John, while in others He directs his gaze to the others. In every icon of the Mystical Supper, John shares centre stage with Jesus. From the sadness engraved on John’s countenance we can infer that Jesus has already announced the imminent danger to Himself.

The other disciples accept John’s unique status as a matter of fact. Jesus and John’s faces must nearly touch as John whispers, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus whispers in reply, for no one’s ears but John’s; hence the incomprehension of the others when He hands Simon Iscariot the morsel and sends him away.

Embracing John thus in His bosom, Jesus prays that all who believe in Him might follow Him into the bosom of the Father:

Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, which Thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one…that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us. The glory which Thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given me, may be with me where I am…that the love with which Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Only John, having known and loved Jesus during their short life together as no other did, having been loved by Jesus as no other, could have written this sheer poetry on what we now call theosis. Just as the Son’s relationship to the Father enabled Him alone to “exegete”

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213 Elowsky, 103. Chrysostom plainly identifies Peter’s recognition of Jesus’ special love for John as his reason for asking John to inquire of Jesus.
214 Ibid., 106-07. Chrysostom surmises that the Lord and John spoke too softly to be heard by the others.
215 Jn 17:11b, 21a, 22-24a, 26b.
Him,\textsuperscript{216} John’s relationship to Jesus enabled him alone to exegete Jesus in a manner unmatched by the other evangelists. Augustine writes that John’s Gospel distinguishes itself from the other three because he “soared above the clouds and soared above the stars, soared above the angels, soared above every creature and arrived at the Word through which all things were made.”\textsuperscript{217}

Like Jonathan before him, John never abandons the Lord’s Anointed. John alone of Jesus’ male disciples remains fearlessly at the foot of the cross. As with David and Jonathan, except with a reversal of roles, John becomes son to Jesus’ bereaved Mother as David became father to Jonathan’s orphaned son. The relationship between Mary and John, Origen writes, flows from the perfection of John’s union with Jesus, which in turn anticipates Florensky’s “other self” or “other I” that two men discover in a covenanted relationship of love:

For Mary had no son except Jesus (in accordance with those who hold a sound opinion of her). But Jesus says to his mother, “Behold your son,” and not, “Behold, this man also is your son.” If this is so, then Jesus has in effect said, “Behold, this is Jesus whom you bore” [when he presents John to her]. For indeed, everyone who has been perfected “no longer lives, but Christ lives in him.” And, since “Christ lives” in him [i.e., John], it is said of him to Mary, “Behold your son,” the Christ.\textsuperscript{218}

Our icons of the crucifixion show Christ, already “having bowed His head and [given] up His spirit,”\textsuperscript{219} flanked on either side by His Mother and His Beloved, their faces etched in sorrow.

Most versions of the icon known as the Lamentation at the Grave (Επιτάφιος Ὀρθόνος), or sometimes as the Deposition from the Cross, depict Jesus’ Mother—in contrast with her central position in Michelangelo’s Pietà and others like it—sitting to one side, cradling her Son’s head on her knees. At the centre of the icon crouches John, doubled over

\textsuperscript{216} Jn 1:18: ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.
\textsuperscript{217} Elowsky, 394.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{219} Jn 19:30.
in grief, delicately holding one of Jesus’ hands in both of his, raising it to his lips to kiss.\textsuperscript{220}

We hear the silent wail of John’s heart:

\begin{quote}
How is the Mighty One fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jesus lies slain upon the high place of Golgotha.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jesus; very beautiful have you been to me; your love for me was more marvelous than the love of women.\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

\textit{Your love for me was more marvelous than the love of women.} Bede cites an unsourced tradition according to which Christ had called John away from his own wedding, and “on that account He granted the more desirable sweetness of His own love.”\textsuperscript{222}

If we speak of the Eucharist as the marriage feast of Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church, at the first Eucharist He held in His arms, not a woman, but a young man as the embodiment of His bride.

**Sergius and Bacchus**

The historical record for the cult of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, put to death during the reign of Galerius Maximianus (305-11),\textsuperscript{223} attests to its antiquity and its growing diffusion over many centuries. Archaeological remains of the first church erected in Sergius’ honour at the site of his martyrdom in present-day Syria dates from before the Council of Ephesus.\textsuperscript{224} Their \textit{Passio}\textsuperscript{225} was written in the mid-5\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{226} and already establishes October 7 as the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{220}] Here the iconographical tradition rejects Chrysostom’s literalistic assumption that John had inexplicably departed Golgotha as soon as Jesus expired. See Elowsky, 333.
\item[\textsuperscript{221}] Cf. 2 Sam 1:25-26.
\item[\textsuperscript{222}] Elowsky, 318.
\item[\textsuperscript{223}] David Woods, “The Emperor Julian and the Passion of Sergius and Bacchus,” \textit{Journal of Early Christian Studies} 5.3 (1997), 335. The scholarly debate about the dating and even the historical existence of Sergius and Bacchus falls outside the scope of our discussion. For our purposes we accept the martyrology at face value.
\item[\textsuperscript{224}] Elizabeth Key Fowden, \textit{The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 28.
\item[\textsuperscript{226}] Elizabeth Key Fowden, \textit{The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 26.
\end{enumerate}
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day of Sergius’ martyrdom and its annual liturgical commemoration. Severus of Antioch delivered an encomium in honour of both Sergius and Bacchus (martyred on different days and buried in separate places) in October 514. Justinian built his Church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople between 527 and 536. Their earliest extant icon also dates from 6th- or 7th-century Constantinople. (Was it commissioned for Justinian’s church?) The liturgical texts for their annual commemoration show evidence of composition in the late 8th or early 9th century. St. Symeon Metaphrastes revised the 5th-century Passio for liturgical reading in the 10th century; in fact, a very small pericope appears in the Menaion during Matins.

During the iconoclastic era of the 8th century the icon of Sergius and Bacchus remained safe from desecration at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai. It now hangs in the Porphyrius Uspensky Collection at the Bohdan and Barbara Khanenko Museum of

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227 Boswell, Same-Sex Unions, 390.
228 Christopher Walter, The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company), 149.
229 More commonly known now as the “Little Hagia Sophia.”
230 Walter, 152.
231 The icon on the front cover of Boswell’s Same-Sex Unions. See n. 236 below for an online view.
233 “Μνήμη τῶν Ἁγίων Μαρτύρων Σεργίου καὶ Βάκχου [Commemoration of the Holy Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus].” Μηναίον τοῦ Ὀκτωβρίου [Menaion for October]. Venice, 1845. Pp. 37-40. (PDF received May 4, 2015 by email from Maria Pantelia, Project Director at Thesaurus Linguae Graecae®: A Digital Library of Greek Literature, http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/) The Menaia (sing. Menaion) are the twelve volumes (one for each month of the year) that contain the full text of the “propers” of the fixed feasts for every day of the year.
234 Ibid., 38. I have a strong hunch that the notation Ποίημα Θεοφάνους, at the head of the acrostic Ode 1 of the Matins canon, refers to St. Theophanes the Hymnographer (775-845), known for his acrostic hymns.
236 “Μνήμη,” 40.
237 Weitzmann, 28.
the Arts in Kyiv. Boswell betrays his ignorance of basic iconology and the canonical conventions that delimit the iconographer’s exercise of personal creativity when he suggests that this icon portrays the “marriage” of Sergius and Bacchus. Had he done even a little homework, he would have discerned a much more subtle, and thus more authentic, iconographical witness to the tender love that bound the two martyrs inextricably to each other in their death for Christ as in their life for Christ, and which continues to bind them to each other in the Church’s perpetual memory.

Kurt Weitzmann, widely recognized as one of the 20th century’s foremost art historians and a preeminent authority on the icons at St. Catherine’s, remarks that

…the two saints are not composed on strict geometrical axes, but that they turn slightly towards each other, Sergius rather more than Bacchus. Moreover, in spite of an intentional similarity between the two, there are subtle psychological differences: Sergius has a slightly more emaciated and thus more ascetic face than Bacchus, whose face is somewhat flesher. There are differences in the eyelids and the design of the mouths which can be interpreted along the same line and reveal the artist’s capacity for characterization within the self-imposed limits of an hieratic style.

…[T]he pale color [of their flesh]…is not merely an abstract convention but an indication of the tender age of adolescence.

Not only do they direct their gaze subtly towards each other, but their relative placement in the composition, pressed laterally against each other’s body, conveys the tenderness of their close relationship. The iconographer must certainly have known Severus’ encomium of October 514: “…[W]e must not separate those whom the crown of martyrdom has joined together. They were alike in build, in physiognomy, in grandeur. They were young in body and even younger in spirit. They were in agreement in the same spirit of piety.” The icon

240 Boswell, Same-Sex Unions, between pp. 192-93, caption for Figure 5.
241 Weitzmann, 29.
242 Walter, 149.
captures their “alikeness in grandeur” by clothing them in almost identical garb and torcs 
(μανιάκια; sing. μανιάκιον) to signify the high degree of imperial favour bestowed on 
them. In the near identicality of their appearance we recall once again Florensky’s other I, 
the oneness of soul that binds a man to his beloved Friend.

The respective positions of Sergius and Bacchus as Πριμικήριος and 
Σεκουνδικήριος—“First Lord” and “Second Lord” of the imperial horse guard—evoke 
Jonathan’s auxiliary status beside David. The Passio depicts them as two “stars shining 
joyously over the earth…græcing the palace,” and utterly inseparable from each other: 
“Being as one in their love for Christ, they were also undivided from each other… always 
singing and saying, ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together 
in unity!’”

Denounced to the emperor as Christians, Sergius and Bacchus are stripped of their 
military garb and tokens of imperial favour, and paraded through the city in women’s garb as 
they raise their voices in psalms and spiritual songs: “We rejoice in Thee, O Lord, for Thou 
hast clothed us with the garment of salvation, and hast covered us with the robe of 
righteousness; as brides Thou hast decked us with women’s gowns.” Thrown into prison, 
they see visions of angels come to encourage them.

Their tormentors lay Bacchus face down on the ground and flog him with rawhide 
whips from sunrise to sunset until he dies. The heartbroken Sergius laments the loss of his 
companion: “‘No longer, brother and fellow soldier, will we chant together… You have
been unyoked from me…and gone up to heaven, leaving me alone on earth…without comfort.”

At this point, Metaphrastes’ version recounts one of the most touching scenes in Christian hagiography:

Ὁ σύναθλος δέ Σέργιος ἀπολειψθεὶς λύπη τε διὰ τὸν χωρισμὸν καὶ ἡδονὴ πάλιν διὰ τά προσδοκόμενα ἐμερίζετο. Ἀλλ’ οὐ περιείδεν αὐτὸν τῷ χωρισμῷ κἀκεῖνα ὁ γλυκὺς ἐταῖρος καὶ ἐραστής; ἀλλ’ παθῇ τῇ ὀψιν θείος Βάκχος καὶ συνήθει τῷ τῆς στρατείας σχήματι νυκτὸς ἐπιφανειὰς καὶ διαλεχθῆς τῷ φίλῳ καὶ θάρσους ἐμπλήκτων, τὸ σκυθρωπὸν τε τῆς ἀθυμίας διέλυσε, καὶ ἀσφαλέστερον ἄμα καὶ γεναιότερον πρὸς τὰς μελλούσας τιμωρίας διέθηκεν.

But the fellow athlete Sergius, having been left behind, was divided between pain on account of the separation and again pleasure on account of the things looked forward to. But his sweet companion and lover [emphasis mine] did not leave him alone [overlook him] being wearied by the separation. But rather, the divine Bacchus appeared to him by night with shining face and in the usual fashion of dress of the army and spoke with his friend and filled him with valour [boldness], and dissolved the gloom of his despondency, and disposed him to be steadier and nobler with respect to the punishments to come.

Thus strengthened by the sight and voice of Bacchus, Sergius submits to gruesome torture and finally to beheading some days after Bacchus’ death.

That Metaphrastes wrote a liturgical book for public reading at divine services makes his portrayal of Bacchus as ὁ γλυκὺς ἐταῖρος καὶ ἐραστής of Sergius all the more remarkable.

While etairos not often bears an erotic connotation, erastes unambiguously signifies an erotic lover: it has a long history opposite eromenos (ἐρώμενος) to designate respectively the older and younger male lover in the institution of same-sex relationships in Plato’s time.

Metaphrastes’ conflation of etairos and erastes, and their juxtaposition with philos (φίλος, friend), to describe Sergius and Bacchus’ love for each other, anticipates Zion’s “eros of

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249 Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 385.
250 Metaphrastes, 1024.
251 This translation, deliberately literal at my request, was generously provided by Nada Conic of Toronto.
252 Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 388.
friendship;” that love which, for Florensky, “combines the aspects of *philia*, *erōs*, and *agapē*;” that *friendship* which, as “the preeminent repository of *erōs*,” opens itself to spiritualization in the sacramental life of the Church. Metaphrastes’ narrative weaves into the very texture of the Church’s liturgical life the eternal memory of these two young Christian men, saints, co-lovers of Christ and co-martyrs for Christ, deeply in love with each other in Christ.

When One of the Holy Trinity became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, the eternal Son and Word of God, Light from Light, true God from true God, through Whom all things were made, before Whose glory even the angels in heaven cover their faces; when He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men; when He became like His brethren in every respect, yet without sin; when He came down from heaven to subject Himself to every natural necessity, “to hunger, to thirst, to be weary, and to sleep;” it was not good that the Son of Man should be alone. In the fulness of human nature assumed and deified by Him, lacking nothing at all proper to humanity, the uncreated God experienced in His created life as man the very human need to overcome the existential loneliness of life face to face with “a helper according to Him” and “just like” Him. Like His ancestor a millennium before, the incarnate Son of God during His earthly

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254 See p. 22 above.
256 Ibid., 295.
258 Gen 2:18 (LXX): Ποιήσωμεν αὐτόν βοηθὸν κατὰ αὐτόν, *Let us make him a helper according to him*. The preposition *κατά* (according to) appears repeatedly throughout the creation narrative to designate identical resemblance between living things of the same kind and the close resemblance between God and man: 1:11, vegetation, plants, and fruit trees bearing seed *κατὰ γένος* καὶ καθ’ ὁμοιότητα; 1:21, fish and birds *κατὰ γένη*
life found His irreplaceable complement in the embrace of a man. Like David and Jonathan, and like Sergius and Bacchus after them, the souls of Jesus and John must have become inextricably knit together in love as soon as they first laid eyes on each other.

David loved Jonathan more than any of his wives; John abandoned his betrothed at the last possible moment to be with Jesus; Sergius and Bacchus could not imagine living a single day apart from each other. In all three cases, their love for each other flowed spontaneously and inseparably from their shared love for God. In Jesus and John, the tragedy of David’s untimely burial of Jonathan is conquered by the joyous victory of the empty tomb. In a night vision Bacchus brings the assurance of the victory of life over death to his beloved Sergius, comforting and strengthening him in anticipation of their imminent reunion in the kingdom of the resurrection.

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αὐτῶν; 1:24-25, all other animals κατὰ γένος; 1:26, man κατ’ ἑικόνα ἠμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν; and finally 2:18, a helper κατ’ αὐτόν; also 2:20, a helper ὁμοίος αὐτό, a helper similar to or resembling or just like him.
Conclusion

The limitations of a master’s thesis have allowed me to do no more than lay a foundation for a more fully developed theology and spirituality of same-sex love. Much remains unsaid, much unexplored in the foregoing chapters. For one thing, my sources represent an admittedly androcentric focus; yet my pastoral concern extends to girls and women of same-sex orientation no less than to boys and men. I hope to correct this imbalance in a much more thorough, more detailed future study. I undertook this task not under the illusion of offering anything exhaustive or conclusive, but in the more modest hope of fostering a conversation which the institutional church has proven singularly unwilling to have.

It becomes increasingly difficult to ignore the irrational fear that underlies much of the discourse in the Orthodox Church, incited by the imaginary existential and moral “threat” posed by same-sex oriented persons. Custodians of a Tradition known for the depth and nuance of its theology and scriptural hermeneutic, its spirituality and soteriology, its approach to the canons, contemporary trends in its theological anthropology, and its care for the human person, we would do well to ask ourselves why—on this one question of same-sex orientation alone—we flee for shelter under the cover of a literalist fundamentalism entirely foreign to the spirit of Orthodoxy and entirely inadmissible in any other domain of Orthodox theological inquiry.

Orthodox pronouncements rejective of the moral equivalence of same-sex and opposite-sex orientation—even within the context of a loving, covenanted relationship—betray an obsessive preoccupation with the graphically imagined sexual practices of same-sex couples. They reduce same-sex love to “acts,” isolating sex as a thing-in-itself, apart
from the communion of persons that it expresses and actualizes even at its most promiscuous. 259 They close their eyes to the heightened sense of inner communion experienced by same-sex partners through the bodily enactment of their spiritual love. They ignore the fact that same-sex couples, no different from their opposite-sex counterparts, commit themselves to lifelong fidelity not in order to have sex, but to devote themselves more fully to each other’s bodily, spiritual, emotional, and material care, and to forge a spiritual partnership within the asceticism of monogamy. An Orthodox same-sex couple’s love for each other and their shared love for Christ and the Church subsume each other indivisibly. Their relationship opens itself to the transformative action of divine grace, and becomes over the years of their life together ever more participant in, ever more reflective of, divine love. They experience ever more profoundly, in their shared trials and joys as in their reciprocal giving and receiving of bodily pleasure, the “knitting” of their two souls into one. The Orthodox same-sex couple becomes a “little church,” the “two or three” gathered in Christ’s name, a beacon of God’s luminous presence and a harbinger of the life to come in the little corner of the world given to them to inhabit.

The living testimony of human experience demonstrates that same-sex orientation, no more reducible to its sinful aspects than opposite-sex orientation, bears within itself the seed of the inscrutably and indelibly transcendent mysteriousness of erotic love, created very beautiful by God as a reflection of and participation in the unitive love of uncreated trinitarian being. Certainly, in the fallen conditions of human life, same-sex and opposite-sex orientation share the propensity to miss the mark in carnal pleasure for its own sake, in the objectification of sexual partners as instruments of self-gratification, in the perpetration of psychic and bodily violence. Yet they also share the innate capacity of the human person’s

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259 Cf. 1 Cor 6:16.
unitive impulse, whether oriented emotionally and spiritually towards one’s own gender or the opposite, to be purified through uncreated grace and lifelong ascesis into a more resplendent image and likeness of divine love.

For a few Orthodox Christians in every generation—whether same-sex or opposite-sex oriented—the ascetical struggle for the purification of eros assumes a strictly sublimatory form in a life of monastic abstinence, freely chosen and uncoerced. We revere monasticism as the “angelic life” because it anticipates here and now the future aeon of the resurrection, in which “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

Yet the great majority of Orthodox Christians—regardless of their sexual orientation—feel neither called nor suited to monastic life. For them the project of life transfigured in Christ seeks its proper locus within the asceticism of a covenanted relationship of spiritual, emotional, and sexual monogamy. We cannot stress this enough: in a world that promotes with increasing aggressiveness an unlimited range of sexual possibilities for persons of whatever orientation, where even the married find no lack of social and cultural inducements to gratify their desires and curiosities elsewhere when spouses do not share the same sexual tastes or interests, the fact that two Orthodox Christians of whatever sexual orientation should desire to consecrate their souls and bodies to a mutually sacrificial life of monogamous coupledom constitutes an ascetical commitment no less radical, no less heroic, no less chaste than that of monasticism.

Paradoxically, Moberly and Zion agree with the fundamental premise of this thesis: namely, that same-sex oriented persons enter into coupled relationships to fulfil legitimate spiritual and emotional needs. While Moberly sees a non-sexual same-sex relationship as a necessary stepping stone to “normal” opposite-sex relations through the remediation of early

260 Mt 22:30.
childhood deficits, Hopko and Zion express serious reservations that such an orientational reversal can occur. Moberly never makes clear whether her “healing” of same-sex orientation entails the actual eradication of same-sex desire or simply the ability to perform opposite-sex coitus to completion—an ability, incidentally, that a great many men and women who identify as same-sex oriented already possess. Zion affirms, more unambiguously than Moberly or Hopko, that sexual orientation represents a fundamentally emotional affinity to one’s own or the opposite gender from early childhood. He alone accepts, pastorally and pragmatically, the need of same-sex oriented persons to form permanent couples. He acknowledges the difficulty of making tidy distinctions between “sexual” and “non-sexual” gestures of affection in a coupled relationship, and recognizes that same-sex couples can be expected to desexualize their relationships no more realistically than opposite-sex couples. Yet he remains conflicted on the morality of bodily enactments of same-sex love much beyond holding hands, while he admits their inevitability.

Florensky wrote during an era in cultural history that had witnessed a growing awareness and even limited acceptance of same-sex orientation by the educated classes of Western Europe and Russia. Certainly he did not regard his own enduring attraction to men as problematic, but rather as the inspiration for a central aspect of his theology and ecclesiology. The product of a vibrantly creative intellectual and religious milieu vastly different from that of today’s culture wars, this married priest, theologian, pater familias, and eventual martyr for the Faith had the freedom to offer the modern Orthodox Church, without ecclesiastical censure, a pioneering theological vision of the beauty, holiness, and traditional foundations of monogamous Christian male coupledom. He portrays these

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261 To repeat, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth was originally written, and accepted, as a master’s thesis in Orthodox theology.
pairings as permanent spiritual partnerships, sealed in the rite of adelphopoiesis, indistinguishable from opposite-sex marriage in their inner spiritual content and the expectation of lifelong exclusivity. The principal and perhaps sole difference resides in the non-procreative nature of the same-sex relationship: whereas sanctified Christian marriage creates “one flesh,” sanctified Christian friendship creates “one soul.” Yet this “friendship” subsumes the mysteriously unitive force of eros between two men and entails no disembodiment of their love. Florensky describes as a matter of course a range of bodily expressivity for their oneness of soul that includes cuddling, kissing, and sleeping in the same bed. As spiritual paradigms for Christian male couples united in an exclusive, lifelong, covenanted relationship, he cites David and Jonathan, the organization of the Twelve and of the Seventy “two by two,” the frequent pairing of male saints in hagiography and liturgical commemorations, and ultimately Jesus and John.

The rite of adelphopoiesis, which Florensky calls uncontroversially a sacrament, has a complex history for which the existing record leaves many questions unanswered. Its use by the higher echelons of Byzantine society to solidify dynastic, military, and economic alliances offers few clues to the proper meaning and purpose envisioned for it by the Church. We find no evidence upon which to draw an exact analogy between adelphopoiesis and today’s ideas of same-sex marriage, nor to suppose that the Church ever condoned or even turned a blind eye to the full range of bodily expressivity associated with same-sex love, but much evidence to the contrary. Throughout this thesis I have sought to distance myself from the fanciful historical revisionism of Boswell, but equally from the wilful blindness of his detractors to the possibilities latent in this sacramental mystery for pastoral application today. In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, where Prosper of Aquitaine’s lex orandi
lex credendi est carries especially significant weight, the variant recensions of the adelphopoietic rite achieve the sacramental sanctification of extraordinarily close bonds of spiritual intimacy between two men, and presupposes an essentially ecclesial vision of their relationship. Several points of resemblance exist between the rubrical details of Adelphopoiesis and those of Baptism, Marriage, and Holy Orders. The sanctification of the male couple culminates in their partaking of Holy Communion together.

The ambiguities in both the historical record and the liturgical texts for Adelphopoiesis may prove paradoxically to be its greatest strength: it has shown remarkable adaptability to shifting pastoral needs over the course of its long history. It seems eminently feasible that the holy mystery of Adelphopoiesis might provide the vehicle for the Church to bless same-sex couples who wish to consecrate themselves to a vocation of faithful monogamy in sacrificial service to each other, to Christ, to the Church, and to the world.

Some church fathers view the love of David and Jonathan as no less a type of the nuptial union of Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church as St. Paul writes of marriage. The inauguration of this nuptial union at the first Eucharist sees Christ clinging not to a woman, but to John, the disciple whom He loved, whose Gospel depicts a close analogy between their relationship and that of the Son to the Father. This anticipates Florensky’s observation that exclusive Orthodox male friends and lovers, committed to lifelong co-ascesis, discover in their life together their “other self,” their “other I,” their “one soul,” the first fruits of consubstantiality to be perfected in the future kingdom already in our midst. The appointment of John 17:18-26 to the adelphopoietic liturgy—uttered by Christ while holding, or immediately after having held, John in His arms—further conveys the understanding that the male couple sacramentally united stands in a direct line of typological
and spiritually genealogical descent from David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, the paired apostles, and the paired male saints of every era, foremost among them Sergius and Bacchus.

In no way do we wish to represent David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, or Sergius and Bacchus as “gay,” or “married,” or “having sex.” Our friends in other churches who do otherwise miss the point entirely—and in the case of Jesus and John, they fail to grasp that, as perfect God and perfect Man, Christ anticipated even in His earthly life and relations that “angelic aeon” in which sexual desire as symbol transcends its momentum towards bodily climax in the fulfilment of ecstatic union in the heavenly kingdom. Yet this in no sense “emasculates” Christ. His human erotic energy remains not only intact but all the more empowered through being deified, purified, perfected unto the image and likeness of the passionless passion or passionate passionlessness of divine eros. Christ the Bridegroom loves His bride the Church erotically, unitively, ecstatically for all eternity; and as a foretaste of this during His time on earth, culminating in the undivided moment of the Supper and the Cross, He drew into the tenderness of His nuptial embrace the disciple whom He loved. As a man on earth, the eternal Son of God discovered His “other self,” His “other I,” His oneness of soul, in John.

Compulsory “gender complementarity,” predicated mechanically on an impersonal biological determinism, imposed externally as an inflexible law for all, regardless of personal factors, exposes itself as no more than a contrivance having no basis in Tradition. David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, Sergius and Bacchus bear eloquent testimony to the naturalness, the holiness, the divine origin of the phenomenon that some men discover their complement—the one who “completes” them spiritually and emotionally—not in a woman, but in a man. All three of these male couples enact their love with a range of bodily
performativity. All three follow a model of headship not unlike that of marriage, retained implicitly in the rite of Adelphopoiesis by the placement of the elder and younger partner in the positions assigned respectively to the husband and wife in the rite of Marriage.

Salvation for an Orthodox Christian entails not his or her behavioural compliance with external moral absolutes in order to “go to heaven when they die,” and much less the destruction of the self that he or she has gradually come to know, the self bestowed on him or her as a gift from God in the specific sociohistorical moment in which he or she is born and lives. Salvation consists rather in the ascetical refinement of the whole self—body, soul, and spirit—in synergy with uncreated grace unto the perfection of the divine image and likeness. Orthodox same-sex couples, united into a single soul in the sacrament of Adelphopoiesis, work out their common salvation in their inward imitation of Jesus and John. Thus may the Lord grant them a bed undefiled.

O holy martyrs Sergius and Bacchus, pray for us.
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Additional Reading


