"ONE FLESH": THE SPOUSAL SYMBOLOGY IN ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS (5,21–33)[1]

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The Letter to the Ephesians is considered to be the most mature fruit of the Apostle's reflexion on the mystery of the Church. In this regard the passage Eph 5,21–33 draws attention of theologians especially for its interconnection of ecclesiological and anthropological

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Basic bibliography: (1) Commentaries: ALETTI, Jean Noël. Saint Paul épître aux Éphésiens. EtB 42, Paris: Gabalda, 2001; BARTH, Markus. Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6. AB 34A, New York: Doubleday, 1974. GNILKA, Joachim. Der Epheserbrief. HThK 10/2, Freiburg: Herder, 1971; LINCOLN, Andrew T. Ephesians. WBC 42, Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990; MACDONALD, Margaret Y. Colossians and Ephesians. Sacra Pagina 17, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000; O'BRIEN, Peter T. The Letter to the Ephesians. Grand Rapids – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999; PENNA, Romano. Lettera agli Efesini. Introduzione, versione, commento, SOCr 10, Bologna: EDB, 1988; SCHLIER, Heinrich. Der Brief an die Epheser. Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1957; SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf. Der Brief an die Epheser. EKK 10, Zürich – Neukirchen: Benzinger Verlag – Neukirchener Verlag, 1982. (2) Monographies and Articles: DAWES, Gregory W. The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21–33. Leiden: Brill, 1998; GIELEN, Marlis. Tradition und Theologie neutestamentlicher Haustafelethik. Bonner Biblische Beiträge 75, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Anton Hain, 1990; HEIL, John Paul. Ephesians. Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ. Studies in Biblical Literature 13, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007; MACDONALD, Margaret Y. Marriage, NT, in: The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible. vol. 3, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008, 812–818; MARTIN, Francis. The New Feminism: Biblical Foundations and Some Lines of Development. In MARTIN, Francis (ed.), Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word. Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006, 193–225 (a previous version originally appeared in SCHUHMACHER, Michele M. (ed.). Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, 141–168; MILETIC, Stephen Francis. One Flesh': Eph 5.22–24; 5.31. Marriage and the New Creation, Analecta Biblica 115, Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1988; OSI-

terminology. Some exegetes valuate this text as a high point in the New Testament anthropology.[2]

Among many exegetical and theological problems of Eph 5,21–33 I will focus on the character of the terms σῶμα, σάρξ and κεφαλή, to what extent they serve as symbols for the reality of Christ and the Church and of man and woman in the Christian marriage.[3] My opinion is that Paul exploits the rich anthropology of Gen 1–3 more than any other Hellenistic concept of man and woman does. A hint for this is the quotation Gen 2,24 on an institution of marriage, where the Hebrew term "flesh" is used for the new intimate relation of husband and wife.

Before we deal with the particular themes the apostle articulates in Ephesians 5,22–33, we should determine the flow of his thought. Paul ties his previous discussion to his treatment of husbands and wives with a summary preview: "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (v. 21). Then he addresses the respective parties: wives (vv. 22–24) and husbands (vv. 25–31). He asks wives to submit to their husbands as their heads as the church submits to Christ as Her head. He asks husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to that between Christ and the Church (notice the comparatives "as" [ὡς] and "just as" [καθώς] in vv. 22, 23, 24, 25).

Paul not only compares marriage to the relationship between Christ and his Church but also expands on the latter. Thus, some verses focus almost exclusively on Christ and the Church (e.g., vv. 26, 27). After these instructions and comparisons, Paul cites Genesis 2,24 in v. 31 and makes a final reference to the relationship of Christ and His church in verse 32. He concludes by summarizing his instructions in v. 33 with two key concepts: a husband is to love (ἀγαπᾶν) his wife and a wife is to respect (φοβεῖσθαι) her husband.

EK, Carolyn – MACDONALD, Margaret Y. – TULLOCH, Janet H. A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006; DE LOS SANTOS, Edmundo. La novedad de la metáfora *ΚΕΦΑΛΗ – ΣΩΜΑ* en la carta a los Efesios. Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000; SON, Sang-Won. Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology: A Study of Selected Terms, Idioms, and Concepts in the Light of Paul's Usage and Backrground. Analecta Biblica 148, Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001.

[2] Cf. MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 204.

[3] Hermeneutical approach to the anthropological symbology in Ephesians, see esp. DAWES, Gregory W. The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21–33, Leiden: Brill, 1998.

Verse 21 acts as a sort of "hinge" verse, concluding a list of five participles with imperatival force that make more precise what it means to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5,18), pointing out aspects of community life in the Spirit. This last recommendation then leads to a particular aspect of community life, namely life in a Christian family.

It calls for "mutual submission" in the fear of Christ. Both of the key terms will figure largely in following argumentation. Especially the first one bears on specific anthropology revealed in this passage, so we try to clarify it briefly.

The participle ὑποτασσόμενοι is a middle form of the verb ὑποτάσσω, and has the notion of "to subordinate, to submit oneself". It is found in four of the six New Testament passages that contain domestic codes.[4] Even within the New Testament the middle form of the verb has a rather large range of meanings, but they can be reduced to a general sense of voluntary self-subordination to the divine order whether this be that of the providential order of the state (Rom 13,1–10; 1 Pet 2,13–17), that of the human institution of slavery (1 Pet 2,18–20; Tit 2,9), that of young people to their elders (1 Pet 5,5), the community to its leaders (1 Cor 16,16), and perhaps that of women to the established order in the community (1 Cor 11,3; 14,34). It is also used of Jesus' relation to his parents (Luke 2,51) and of his self-subordination to the Father after the last enemy (i.e. death) has been destroyed (1 Cor 15,28).

Given the fact that ὑποτάσσεσθαι is, with the one exception of φοβεῖσθαι in Eph 5,33, the only verb used in the New Testament exhortations to wives, and that this verb, with two exceptions, is never found in extant Graeco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish literature that discusses wife/husband relationship, we are entitled to see in the New Testament usage evidence of a conscious Christian choice to find a suitable word and fill it with a content proper to Christian marriage.

Commentators define the meaning of ὑποτασσόμενοι here and in similar New Testament passages as "a voluntary attitude of giving in, of cooperating, assuming responsibility and carrying a burden".[5] The majority of translations and of exegetes understand the Greek

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[4] In Eph 5,21, 24; Col 3,18; Tit 2,5; 1 Pet 3,1. The other two texts alleged as domestic codes, 1 Tim 2,8–15 and 6,1–10, do not contain any specific verbs describing the relation between husbands and wives and, in any case, are not "codes" in any usual sense of the term.

[5] BARTH, Marcus. *Ephesians*, s. 710.

expression ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἀλλήλοις as a mutual reciprocal submission. However, there are opinions that the verb ὑποτάσσεσθαι means in the New Testament always submission to an authority. The meaning of this verb is only one-directional.[6] Then even Eph 5,21 cannot be understood as a general exhortation to mutual submission of all Christians, but only subordination of those who are under any legal authority.

Among them are the women who got married. Their situation is specified explicitly in v. 22. Here the previous general advice to the community is applied to the household. It seems, however, that the Christian use of ὑποτάσσεσθαι is still too strong to be applied on married women so that the verb is not explicitly mentioned in v. 22, but only silently supposed in continuity with v. 21. The self-subordination of wives to their husbands is given its proper context with the phrase "as to the Lord" (v. 22b). The foundation of the woman's attitude is found in her faith: Her acts of love and self-giving are such that they look to the Lord and terminate in him.

The description of the husband as the "head" of his wife in v. 23a is contextualized by giving the relation between Christ and the Church. The headship of the husband participates in the headship of Christ precisely under this aspect: Christ is "the savior of the Body". Among the scholars there was a long discussion on the meaning of κεφαλή, in this context. The attempts to promote the meaning "source" for the Greek term κεφαλή, were not successful,[7] so that it must be understood as a designation of real authority. The fact that the term "head" is applied to the husband and not to the wife, and that the verb "to subordinate oneself" is applied to the wife and to the husband leads to the legitimate

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6 See especially GRUDEM, Wayne. The Myth of Mutual Submission as an Interpretation of Ephesians 5,21. In GRUDEM, Wayne (ed.). *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002, 221–232. History of interpretation of this verse srov. DORIANI, Daniel. The Historical Novelty of Egalitarian Intepretations of Ephesians 5,21–22. GRUDEM, Wayne. *Biblical Foundations*, s. 203–220.

7 The foundational study of this scholar stream was that of BEDALE, Stephen. The Meaning of κεφαλή, in the Pauline Epistles. *JTS* 5–6 (1954–55), s. 211–215; recently is this approach defended by CLARK KROEGER, Catherine. The Classical Concept of *Head* as 'Source'. In HULL, Gretchen Gaebelein. *Equal to Serve*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991, s. 267–283. For the critical valuation of this approach see esp. COTTERELL, Peter – TURNER, Max. *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, London: SPCK, 1989, s. 141–145; GRUDEM, Wayne. The Meaning of Kephale ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies. In PIPER, John – GRUDEM, Wayne (ed.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991, 424–476; FITZMYER, Joseph A. Another Look at Kephale in 1 Corinthians 11,3. *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), s. 503–511.

question as to whether does not still linger in this text a remnant of the Hellenistic notion of the superiority of the man.[8] This conviction shares also Pope John Paul II. in his encyclical letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, saying: "The author knows that this way of speaking, so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a *'mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ'* (cf. Eph 5,21). [...] In relation to the 'old' this is evidently something 'new': it is an innovation of the Gospel. We find various passages in which the apostolic writings express this innovation, even though they also communicate what is 'old'."[9]

With the exception of v. 33c, verse 24 gives the last words addressed to the wives. The remaining 75% of the text is addressed to husbands. "Just as Christ's self-giving act of love ('he is the savior of the Body') is held up as the way in which the husband is to be 'head' of his wife, so now the loving self-subordination of the Church to Christ is held up to the wife as the exemplar of her relation to her husband 'as to the Lord'."[10] Again the verb ὑποτάσσεσθαι is not present in the second part of the sentence, with the result that the noun "wife" is never the direct subject of this verb in the whole passage. Her "subordination" can be lived only as participation on the submission of the Church to Christ. Any other worldly concept of this word is incomprehension of the Gospel. Thus, the expression "in everything" (ἐν παντί) is not a juridical norm, but "is measured by the confidence the husband inspires in her by the quality of his love."[11] Consequently, the marital relation is not defined with the terms command/obedience, but generosity/receptivity.

Just as ὑποτάσσεσθαι characterizes the attitude of the wife, so ἀγαπᾶν describes the virtue most needed in the husband.[12] The author of Eph goes farther than other household codes specifying what means "to love" in full meaning. Christ gave an example of love when he "gave himself over" (v. 25c; cf. Gal 2,20). The term παραδίδοναι evokes the whole passion process of Christ (cf. Rom 4,23–25). The husband,

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[8] But we should also come into question – after centuries of cultivating dominative power – if we dont read into this text "our own lingering pagan notion that human relations are determined by the structures of domination and coerction", MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 211.

[9] JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988, § 24, 93.

[10] MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 212.

[11] Ibidem, s. 212.

[12] In Col 3,19 explicitly, in 1 Peter 3,7 with analogical expression ἀπονέμοντες τιμήν and in Tit 2,6 σωφρονεῖν.

therefore, is called to love his wife in the power of the act of love in which Christ died and lives forever. This text thus "initiates a genuine *imitatio Christi* whose basic principle is one of participation in the present reality and activity of Christ."[13]

Verses 26–27 list three reasons for Christ's self-giving action in three ἵνα-sentences. This paragraph is not part of the anthropological teaching, but a theology of the passion of Christ viewed in the light of its effects. Since we focus mainly on the anthropological aspects of our text, we continue with the verses 28–30.

The position of husbands as "heads" in following Christ brings them to an "obligation". This is the first and only mention of obligation in the whole passage. Husbands are "obliged" (ὀφείλουσιν) to love their own wives as their own bodies. This obligation is rooted in God's love for us manifested in Christ.[14]

We may ask why the norm for the love of husband for wife is given not only as that of the love of Christ for the Church, but is also presented as "love for their own bodies". We saw that the author is reserved in appealing husband the head of wife and Christ the head of the Church. He does not accent this aspect here. Noteworthy is the fact that wife is never called "body" (σῶμα) of her husband implicitly. In v. 23 "the husband is the head of his wife" and only on Christ is said explicitly: "he is the savior of the body (σώματος)". In verses 28–31 there is an interesting alternation of σῶμα and σάρξ: v. 28: "so (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies (σώματα)"; v. 29: "for no one hates his own flesh (σάρκα)…"; v. 30: "because we are members of his body (σώματα)"; v. 31: "…and the two shall become one flesh (εἰς σάρκα μίαν)". The commentaries consider that the change of vocabulary is influenced by the quotation of Gen 2,24 (LXX). My opinion however is that behind these lines stands an Old Testament anthropology that looked upon unity between human beings as grounded on the fact that they share "flesh" (בָּשָׂר). The concept moved in concentric circles. Humanity

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13 MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 213.

14 Cf. 1 John 4,11: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought (ὀφείλομεν) to love one another"; 1 John 3,16: "In this we have come to know love: he laid down his life for us. And we ought (ὀφείλομεν) to lay down our lives for the brothers." Similar attitude is requested in Eph 5,1–2, which lies in the background of our passage: "Be, then, imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love just as Christ loved us, and gave himself over for us, an offering and sacrifice to God unto a fragrant odor." In Romans 13,8 the obligation of love binding all Christians is expressed in this way: "Owe (ὀφείλετε) nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves has fulfilled the law," in the sense: he has more than satisfied all his obligations.

as a whole can be called "all flesh", and this outer circle becomes progressively denser until the immediate family is considered to be sharing the same flesh. Thus, the laws against incest in Leviticus 18 begin with the enigmatic phrase: "No one shall approach any flesh (שְׁאֵר) of his body/flesh (בְּשָׂרוֹ) to uncover nakedness (= have sexual relations)" (Lev 18,6). This is further specified by specific instances of what "flesh of his body/flesh" may mean.[15] It is clear that there are degrees of what we would call consanguinity, which the Hebrews considered as "con-fleshness." The source of this is marriage. That is why a man marries a woman they become "one flesh". From their total union there arises a "new flesh" and those born to them are one flesh with them and with each other. In this sense a man's wife is his flesh: Their commitment has given rise to a new entity. The notion that a wife is the "flesh" of her husband is found in the first century *Life of Adam and Eve*, 3: In response to Eve's plea that Adam kill her in order to placate God, Adam says, "How is it possible that I should let loose my hand against my flesh?"[16] Again can we read in Sirach 25,26: "If she [an erring wife] walks not by your side, cut her away from your flesh with a bill of divorce."[17] In addition, members of the same family are described as being "flesh" of each other. Judah dissuaded his brothers from killing Joseph "for he is our brother, our own flesh" (Gen 37,27). And Isaiah 58,7, after urging kindness in general to those in need, adds, "and do not turn you back on your own flesh."

A development of this notion is found in the phrase "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" and similar expressions, which, as we have seen, indicate the familial bonds: either very close, intimate relations between the members of family in the narrow sense, or at least among Israelites. This concept of familiar bonds then forms the basis for a covenant.[18] Both expressions – "one flesh" and "bone of

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15 E.g. "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness" (Lev 18,7). "You shall not uncover the nakedness of the wife of your father, she is your father's nakedness" (Lev 18,8). "You shell not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister because she is your mother's flesh" (Lev 18,13).

16 CHARLESWORTH, James H. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 2, New York: Doubleday, 1985, s. 258.

17 In reference to Gen 2,24 "Ben Sira uses the strong language […] when he refers to divorce", SKEHAN, Patrick W. – DI LELLA, Alexander A. *The Wisdom of Ben Sira.* AB 39, New York, Doubleday, 1987, s. 349.

18 See GILBERT, Maurice. 'Une Seule Chair' (Gen 2,24). *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 100 (1978): 66–89.

my bones and flesh of my flesh" – occur in Gen 2,23–24, texts alluded to in the Ephesians passage we are considering.[19] To this fact we can add that there is no current word for "body" in Hebrew. Then we realize that the substitution in Greek of the word σῶμα (body) where σάρξ (flesh) might be expected would occasion no surprise. So Paul when he alludes on Gen 2,24 in 1 Corinthians 6,16, speaks of "one body": "Do you not know that anyone who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body [with her]? For it says, 'the two will become one flesh.'"

When we search for the fundamental source of our passage, we can claim that the author of Eph is rendered more explicit the equation body/flesh = bride that Paul had already exploited in 2 Corinthians 11,2–3: "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

In vv. 31–32 the apostle is quoting a biblical text Gen 2,24, with slight variations from our present Septuagint text.[20] Instead of ordinary introducing formula he begins simply: "for this reason". The reason which the text of Genesis supposes is Adam's astonishment when he finds in woman a human being connatural to him. In the Ephesians text, the reason referred to is that "Christ provides and cares for his own flesh, the Church, because we are members of his body."[21] This is a basis for the comparison.

The first half of the Genesis text on leaving father and mother is ignored by Paul[22] who puts the accent on man's being joined to his wife so the two become one flesh. The physical union between Christ and the Church is precisely the great Mystery. Even if some commentators explain the word "mystery" on semitic background as the secret

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[19] Cf. in Eph 5,30 some manuscripts add to the sentence "because we are members of his body (σώματος)" either "from his bones" or "from his flesh and from his bones"; for textual witnesses see Nestle-Aland (eds.), *Novum testamentum graece*, or ALAND, Kurt et alii (ed.), *The Greek New Testament*.

[20] Typical for LXX in this verse is that Hebrew word אִישׁ (= "mature man, bridegroom, husband") is rendered by ἄνθρωπος = "man in general", rather than by the more precise ἀνήρ. On other places in Eph this distinction is made (2,15; 4,13, 22, 24; 5,22, 28, 33; cf. 1 Cor 11,3–12).

[21] MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 217.

[22] The attempts to interpret this as the Christ who leaves heaven and his Father in the mystery of his Incarnation overload the text with meaning.

meaning of text,[23] the theological context of Eph points better to the μυστήριον as an aspect of God's plan now revealed. In this light every union of husband and wife, as they are themselves members of the body of Christ, is "a share and a symbol of what is still ineffably mysterious because it is to abundantly real."[24]

At the end the author concludes with the short exhortation, mentioning the husband first this time. He gives a practical word to each party. The husband should "love" and the wife should "fear". The order to love his own wife as himself is an echo of Leviticus 19,18. Already the rabbis used it in their teaching on marriage.[25] But we have this injunction already adopted by Jesus as a characteristic Christian rule (John 15,12 and so on).

We would expect that in this final summary the author will use the verb ὑποτάσσεσθαι for the wife as he used ἀγαπᾶν for the husband. But once again he avoids making the wife the explicit subject of this verb and using verb "to fear" (φοβεῖσθαι) he alludes on the "fear of Christ" in 5,21, i.e. the general subjection of all Christians to Christ.

From this brief paper the following may be noted: (1) In the new life in Christ the marriage finds its new order. (2) The Christian marriage is not a model for the union of Christ and the Church but rather the relation between Christ and the Church is a model and source of inspiration and vitality for every Christian marriage. (3) Even if the equality of man and woman in Christ is preserved (cf. Gal 3,28), in Christian marriage, the husband and the wife express a similarity to Christ and to the Church in a relation of asymmetrical reciprocity, which is conveniently expressed with the biblical term "one flesh". (4) The husband is the "head" of his wife in similarity to Christ in His relation to the Church. His headship, therefore, should be accepted as a service of love. Reciprocally, the wife has to be "submitted" to her husband; her "submission", however, has not source in a civil juridical subordination but in the reverent obedience of the Church towards Christ.

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[23] They are referring to Semitic terms אֶחָד and סוֹד, see esp., BROWN, Raymond. *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, s. 65.

[24] MARTIN, Francis. New Feminism, s. 218.

[25] "Our rabbis taught: Concerning a man who loves his wife as himself, who honors her more than himself […] Scripture says, 'And you shall know that your tent is in peace' ", bYebamoth 62b.

ABSTRAKT

JAROSLAV BROŽ
„Jedno tělo“: Symbolika manželství v eklesiologii Pavlova listu Efeským (5,21–23)

Ef 5,21–33, část „řádu domácnosti“ vymezující úlohu muže a ženy v křesťanském manželství, dává autorovi epištoly podnět k metaforickému objasnění snoubeneckého vztahu Krista a církve. Obecná křesťanská zásada „vzájemně se podřizovat jeden druhému“ (v. 21) se aplikuje na manželství v helénistické společnosti a ve stávajícím řádu do něho přináší Kristova ducha. Klíčovou úlohu v interpretaci textu hraje citát z Gn 2,24 a pojetí slova בָּשָׂר (= „flesh“) coby vztahového označení. To napomáhá vysvětlit vztah Kristus–církev a manžel–manželka jako „asymetrickou reciprocitu“.

Klíčová slova
pavlovské listy, christologie, ekleziologie, manželství, tělo