

Storge: Rethinking Gendered Emotion apropos of the Virgin Mary

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According to C.S. Lewis, *storge*, affection, is one of the four kinds of love, along with friendship, *eros* and charity/*caritas*, among which *storge* holds a place of honour.¹ It is, according to Lewis, a broadly conceived brotherly love that includes both need-love, deriving from biological needs, and gift-love, associated with theological notions loosely based on the St John's Gospel view of God as love. Lewis considered *storge* the mainstay of solid and lasting human happiness; at the same time, he warned about its fragile nature in so far as it is linked to the natural cycle of life. His definition demonstrates the dual aspect of caring affection, with its strong biological basis but also its spiritual undertones, that permeate ancient and Byzantine literary sources. All human emotions serve a purpose. *Storge* certainly contributes to the survival of the species with the care for offspring and at the same time forms part of the cohesive social codes of ancient and modern societies. As such, it involves both positive and negative aspects for the giver and the receiver alike. Hence, *storge* seems to be a precious but also challenging emotion that needs to be handled appropriately so as to allow the person to attain their full stature. This is especially the case in the archetypal bondage image of the Virgin and Child that we are going to explore with reference to its Byzantine literary and artistic depictions.

After a preliminary glance at the etymology of the word *storge*, its history and context, as well as the way it has been translated into English, I will turn to science and relate it to the strong imagery with which *storge* is associated in Byzantine sources. In particular, to delineate *storge* in the world of emotion, I look into neurobiological and psychological research of affective states, collectively known as

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, 1960), 31–56.

‘affective science’:² if *storge* is an emotion distinct from other types of love and affective care, it may well be gendered. In this respect, it is interesting to examine whether the visual and textual records give different, culturally determined answers. In this quest, the Virgin plays a pivotal role, as the emblematic figure of motherhood, summarising past and current concepts related to affective care set against the cosmological context of Christian beliefs. Of special interest for the current study is the type of the Virgin of Tenderness whose very name – Glykophilousa – focuses on the most tangible expression of affective care, the tender embrace. Special attention will be paid to the seminal work of Romanos the Melodist and George of Nikomedeia, as their work coincides with major turning points in the development of Marian devotion.

The etymology of the word *storge* (from the verb *στέργω*) points to the primal function of nurturing, taking care of, and protecting, with specific reference to the animal practice of raising offspring, where the female plays the central role. Initially associated with the care provided by parents to children, the word retained the sense of that context in subsequent usage.³ *Στέργω* initially meant ‘to take care of’, ‘to surround with love’ and, regardless of whether it emanates from the mother or the father, it transmits a vivid imagery of parental protection. The English lexical categories render affection, alternatively recorded as fondness or dearness, as the most appropriate translation for *storge*, though these terms have more intellectual connotations and do not carry the specific strength of the Greek word. *Storge* does not represent a separate emotion, clearly distinguished from either *philia* or *agape*. The limits of the terms employed to describe the various kinds of love, among which *storge* maintains a significant place, are fluid and often overlapping, thus allowing space for parallel schemes and interplays between givers and receivers. A theoretical approach is provided by ancient and modern philosophy. Plato and Aristotle offer significant and articulate delineations of emotions. The Byzantines perhaps have little

² This field, formed around a core of neurological, psychological and physiological research, has benefited from input from many social, biological and behavioural sciences, including linguistics and anthropology. For a definition, see R.J. Davidson, K.R. Scherer and H.H. Goldsmith (ed.), *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (Oxford, 2003), XIII–XVII.

³ *TLG*, s.v. *στοργή*, where *στοργή* is defined as ‘love, affection ... esp. of parents and children’.

to offer in the theoretical discussion of emotions but a lot in their integration in texts and images. Emotions have preoccupied the most important figures of philosophy in modern times, including Spinoza, Descartes, Hobbes, Hume and Locke.⁴ They all viewed emotion as a unified whole out of which bodily reactions emanated, and it was not until William James, in what came to be known as the James-Lang theory, that an analysis of the experience of emotion into its constitutive parts was attempted.⁵ Since the late nineteenth century, when emotion began to be studied as a distinct topic, philosophers and affective scientists have not reached agreement over its exact nature and classification. Recent decades have witnessed an expansion in the field of affective neuroscience that came into being with the aim of investigating the neural basis of emotion and its embodiment in the brain.⁶

Love in general, and *storge* in particular, is relational, that is, it entails two parts: the giver, provider of love and care, and at the other end the necessitous receiver. Psychologists stress that an affectionate relationship should allow space for mutual input. In other words, *storge* is reciprocal and presupposes the interaction between giver and receiver. Reciprocity is emphasised in the ancient Greek treatment of love and friendship (both expressed by the term *philia* in Aristotle), but also remains a standard topos in Christian writers of the late antique and early Byzantine period.⁷ Elizabeth Belfiore, in her study on the violation of *philia* in Greek tragedies, stresses the view of Aristotle that tragedy is concerned with terrible deeds among *philoï* and defines *pathos*, one of the three parts of the tragic plot, as a destructive and painful event. She further explores the ways in which love and friendship overlap in classical literature and suggests that ‘the noun *philos* surely has the same range as *philia*, and both refer primarily, if not exclusively, to relationships among close blood

⁴ A. Scarantino and R. de Sousa, ‘Emotion’, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, 2018), sections 3 (‘The early feeling tradition: emotions as feelings’) and 10.2 (‘Instrumental and substantive strategic rationality’), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/emotion>, accessed July 2020.

⁵ W. James, ‘What is an emotion?’, *Mind*, 9 (1884), 188–205; see also below n. 23.

⁶ T. Dalgleish, ‘The emotional brain’, *Perspectives*, 5 (2004), 582–89.

⁷ D. Konstan, ‘Problems in the history of Christian friendship’, *JEChrSt*, 4.1 (1996), 87–113; idem, ‘Aristotle on love and friendship’, *ΣΧΟΛΗ*, 2.2 (2008), 207–12.

kin'.⁸ In his discussion of Belfiore, David Konstan observes that during late antiquity and among Christian writers love/*caritas* militated against friendship, since love for the creature – as opposed to love for the creator – was thought of as a form of idolatry. He adds that 'metaphors for Christian ties tended to be derived from the sphere of kinship' and especially male kinship, such as paternity or brotherhood rather than friendship.⁹ Classical references abound both in pagan and Christian writers, and it is often difficult to determine whether words and respective meanings have a strict correspondence, or whether their semantics have shifted owing to changes in religious orientation and beliefs. Interestingly enough, however, Aristotle refers to *philia* by pointing to a mother's love for her child, thus linking *philia* with *storge* and setting it against its biological root:

φύσει τ' ἐνυπάρχειν ἔοικε πρὸς τὸ γεγεννημένον τῷ γεννήσαντι καὶ πρὸς τὸ γεννηθῆσαν τῷ γεννηθέντι, οὐ μόνον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ὄρνισι καὶ τοῖς πλείστοις τῶν ζώων.

And there seems to be a natural friendship of a parent for a child, and of a child for a parent, and this occurs not only among human beings, but among birds and most animals.¹⁰

Aristotle further refers to the opinions of other philosophers and thinkers about friendship and love (*Nic. Eth.*, 8.6–7). References to nature and the way in which creatures interact form a repetitive pattern also in his *On the Soul* (A2. 404b 8) where he reverberates Empedocles (*Fragments*, 1342.004) as well as in his *History of Animals*. Ethological is also the context of *stergo* in Aesop's Fables. Blurred boundaries between love and friendship, parallel to the moral qualities insinuated, and the repetitive references to kinship in ancient literature, suggest that iconic exemplars for caring affection were primarily sought and found in the animal world, thereby linking *storge* to biological concerns long before evolution research emerged. Equally prominent is the association of caring affection with parental and kinship contexts, as

⁸ E.S. Belfiore, *Murder among Friends: Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy* (New York, 2000), 20; Konstan, 'Aristotle on love', 208.

⁹ Konstan, 'Problems in the history of Christian friendship', 87–88.

¹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1, ed. I. Bywater, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, OCT (Oxford, 1894), 156; ed.tr. R. Crisp, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2004), 143.

seen above in Aristotle, but also in Plato, Theophrastos and Philemon.¹¹ Nature instructs humans in the caring affection exemplified in the education of children, especially when associated with males.¹²

In a Christian context, the word *storge* occurs with reference to the parental relationship but acquires a different nuance as it reflects the piety of the authors. John Chrysostom's usage of *storge* offers relevant examples of the variable senses with which the term is invested and used in the fourth century. In his homilies on the prodigal son¹³ and those on the epistles to Titus and to Philemon,¹⁴ John considers *storge* as a salient trait of parental love, describing it as a feeling 'befitting the ones who have given birth'. In his homily 'Against the theatre', he refers to the knowledge of *storge* even by those who have not become fathers and were not taught the caring affection by nature.¹⁵ Showing his *storge* for humans, Christ is presented by Chrysostom in an exchange with the Father asking him to keep humans safe, since he is about to be summoned by the Father and will no longer be on earth.¹⁶ In a homily on Genesis, Chrysostom employs *storge* in the sense of fraternal love, while in a homily on the Psalms, he uses it in the simple sense of care inflamed by desire.¹⁷ The

¹¹ Aristotle, *Categories*, 4, treatise 27, fragm. 182, line 19, ed. V. Rose, *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1886); Plato, *Laws*, 754b, ed. J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1907); Theophrastos, *On Piety*, fragm. 19, line 7, ed. W. Pötscher, *Theophrastos, Περὶ εὐσεβείας*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, 11 (Leiden, 1964); Philemon, fragm. 200, line 1, ed. T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum fragmenta*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1884).

¹² See Gregory of Nyssa, 'Homily on the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', PG 46:568C: τί πεπόνθατε ἀκούοντες τοῦ διηγήματος, ὅσοι πατέρες ἐστέ, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας στοργὴν παρὰ τῆς φύσεως ἐδιδάχθητε;

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Repentance*, Homily 1, PG 49:284.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle Epistle to Titus*, Homily 4, PG 62:688: περὶ τέκνα στοργὴν ἐπεδείξατο; idem, *Homilies on the Epistle to Philemon*, Homily 2, PG 62:711: τοῦ τέκνου τὴν στοργὴν ἔδειξε.

¹⁵ Idem, 'Against the theatre', PG 56:546: οἱ μὴ γεγονότες πατέρες, οἱ τέκνων στοργὴν μὴ δεδιδασμένοι παρὰ τῆς φύσεως.

¹⁶ Idem, *Homilies on John*, Homily 81, PG 59:439: τῷ Πατρὶ διαλέγεται, τὴν εἰς αὐτοὺς στοργὴν ἐπιδεικνύμενος· ὡσανεὶ ἔλεγεν· Ἐπειδὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν με συγκαλεῖς, κατὰσθησον αὐτοὺς ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 44, PG 54:474: τὴν ἀδελφικὴν στοργὴν ἐν διανοίᾳ λαμβάνει; idem, 'Exposition on Psalm 115 (PIE)', PG 55:326: ἀλλὰ τὴν κατὰ πολλὴν διάθεσιν καὶ στοργὴν, διαθερμαινόμενος τῷ πόθῳ.

address ‘brothers’ is often encountered in Christian texts from the Pauline epistles onwards, attesting the conversion of ancient *philia* into a quasi-kin relationship, where friends are united as brothers and sisters under the common paternity of God the Father. Elsewhere, the composite φιλοστοργέω, *philostorgeo*, combining the notions of *philia* and *storge*, first used by Plato (*Laws*, 9.27b) and meaning loving tenderly, is included in the main virtues of one’s life along with caring for the necessitous, giving one’s own bread to the hungry, not setting store by money, controlling anger and rejecting vanity.¹⁸ Chrysostom’s commentary on the Pauline Epistle to the Corinthians elucidates the way in which *storge* is perceived by the author and his contemporaries. Glossing the famous passage on love (*caritas*) from 1 Cor 13, Chrysostom replaces *caritas* (ἀγάπη in Greek) with ‘the source of *storge*’, thus identifying God as the source of love and equating him with love and *storge*.

ὄθεν ἡ πηγὴ τῆς στοργῆς. [ο]ὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ. Τουτέστιν, οὐκ ἐφίδεται τοῖς κακῶς πάσχουσιν. ... Συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ. Συνήδεται, φησὶ, τοῖς εὐδοκίμοῦσιν· ὃ λέγει Παῦλος· Χαίρειν μετὰ χαϊρόντων, καὶ κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων... εἶδες πῶς κατὰ μικρὸν ἄγγελον ποιεῖ τὸν αὐτῆς τρόφιμον ἢ ἀγάπη;

The source of *storge* does not rejoice in iniquity, that is, it does not take pleasure in the suffering of others ... but rejoices in truth. It rejoices with those who are happy, as Paul says; it rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with the weeping... Did you see how, little by little, love makes the one who dwells in love [lit. lives by it] an angel?¹⁹

From the above we may deduce that *storge* in the Chrysostomic corpus appears closely associated with love/*caritas* and *philia*, and that semantic limits are fluid, although the biological factor is invariably present in both pagan and Christian authors.

The relationship between emotions and the rational part of the self is about as compelling as that of the mind to the body. The study of the field has had input from

¹⁸ Idem, *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 46, PG 58:480: βίον δὲ λέγω νῦν, ... ἀλλ’ ἐὰν χρημάτων ὑπερίδης ὡς ὑπεριδεῖν χρῆ, ἐὰν φιλοστοργήσης, ἐὰν δῶς πεινῶντι τὸν ἄρτον σου, ἐὰν θυμοῦ κρατήσης, ἂν κενοδοξίαν ἐκβάλῃς.

¹⁹ Idem, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 33, PG 61:281.

philosophy and psychology and has been enriched by contributions from cognitive psychology and neurobiology. Scholarly debate revolves around the relationship of feelings with sensation, which, as William James has argued, *is* the emotion,²⁰ but also around the association of feeling with consciousness, thoughts, beliefs, judgments, etc. For the analysis of emotion, it may prove useful to revert to one (or more) of the above-mentioned categories, keeping in mind, however, that each emotion employs a different form of cognition.²¹ Antonio Damasio in his seminal studies has drawn attention to the role of the body in kinaesthetic judgement, emphasising that somatic appraisals play significant roles in cognition and action.²² Psychologists and philosophers alike have attempted a categorisation of emotions. A detailed analysis would be out of place here, but some key remarks are necessary, as the study of emotions represents the backdrop against which gender considerations will be dealt with in the context of the paradigm of *storge*.

In the largely unmapped world of human feelings and emotions, *storge* has remained unchallenged as material for to the discussion of evolution in modern psychological discourse, according to which the survival of the species – subserved by *storge* – is one of the main postulates of natural selection.²³ Less clear is the extent to which social training and moral development shape our emotions, or whether the practice of maternal nursing associates *storge* singularly with the female human.

²⁰ James, ‘What is an emotion?’, 189–90; J. Corrigan and J. Carrette, ‘William James’, in J. Corrigan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford, 2007) 419–37; J. Carrette, *William James’s Hidden Religious Imagination: A Universe of Relations* (London, 2013), 182–87.

²¹ R.C. Solomon, ‘Thoughts and feelings: what is a “cognitive theory” of the emotions, and does it neglect affectivity?’, in A. Hatzimoysis (ed.), *Philosophy and the Emotions* (Cambridge, 2003), 1–18.

²² A.R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994); idem, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York, 1999).

²³ A. Ploeger, H.L.J. van der Maas and M.E.J. Raijmakers, ‘Is evolutionary psychology a metatheory for psychology? A discussion of four major issues in psychology from an evolutionary developmental perspective’, *Psychological Inquiry*, 19.1 (2008), 1–18. For an overview of evolutionary psychology and recent debates over cultural and genetic evolution, see M. Mameli, ‘Evolution and psychology in philosophical perspective’, in R.I.M. Dunbar and L. Barrett (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Oxford, 2007), 21–34.

Various research methodologies have been applied to the question of gender difference, contributing inciting results.²⁴

An essential distinction needs to be drawn between sex and gender, the first referring to genetic characteristics and the latter representing a social construction that affects not only self-perception and behaviour, but also the way a person experiences his or her emotions.²⁵ The study of the subtle world of the human brain has brought up innumerable parameters of interaction and interdependence among the various centres that regulate human perception, feelings and emotions.

Research since the 1950s has shown that there is sexual differentiation in the development and organisation of the brain, and that men and women tend to focus on different aspects of the surrounding reality, which they apprehend, analyse and store in their brains in distinct ways.²⁶ In particular, men and women vary in their use of the hippocampus, and consequently stimuli are presented differently in the hemispheres of the brain, affecting respective responses to emotions.²⁷ Scientists argue that beyond societal rules, the female brain is more open to the world of emotion but also to language and art, although others show that blanket stereotypes about women's greater emotionality are not accurate.²⁸ Differences in the function of the male and the female brain are associated with primitive needs and the survival of the species, as

²⁴ W. Wood and A.H. Eagly, 'Two traditions of research on gender identity', *Sex Roles*, 73.11–12 (2015), 461–73; L. Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (New York, 2017), 22–45.

²⁵ R. Adolphs and D. Anderson, *The Neuroscience of Emotion: A New Synthesis* (Princeton, 2018), 281–307.

²⁶ See, for example, A.M. Svedholm-Häkkinen, S.J. Ojala and M. Lindeman, 'Male brain type women and female brain type men: gender atypical cognitive profiles and their correlates', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 122 (2018), 7–12; M. Ingahalikar et al., 'Sex differences in the structural connectome of the human brain', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111 (2014), 823–28.

²⁷ J.E. Le Doux, 'Rethinking the emotional brain', *Neuron*, 73.4 (2012), 653–76.

²⁸ See, among others, L. Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York, 2006) and A. Fidalgo, H. Tenenbaum and A. Aznar, 'Are there gender differences in emotion comprehension? Analysis of the test of emotion comprehension', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27.4 (2018), 1065–74. For the opposite view, see, among others, E. Quest, A. Higgins, C. Allison and M.C. Morton, 'Gender differences in self-conscious emotional experience: a meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 138.5 (2012), 947–81.

well as with childbearing, labour and rearing. The biological aspect of childbearing involves a self-giving process (where the embryo is fed by the very blood of the mother, whose intestines are pushed aside for the womb to grow and allow space for the foetus) and provokes significant psychological consequences, altering irreversibly the person of the mother. It is telling that maternal pain, in the homily on Good Friday by George of Nikomedeia in the ninth century, is described as scorching of the inner parts.²⁹ Affective sciences remind us that emotion is determined by genetic characteristics as well as by individual biological, neurological and psychological factors, including the social background of the person.³⁰

Damasio's interoceptive theory holds that conscious experience of feelings is intertwined with the basic sense of the self, forming more or less two sides of the same coin, upon which identity it attempts to establish the seminal importance of emotions in the biological and social life of the person.³¹ Current theories of emotions tend to offer supplementary perspectives and perhaps could be unified. Among the spectrum of alternative theories, it is worth noting that both the constructed emotion theory³² and Panksepp's emotion systems theory recognise 'basic emotions'. Among his seven basic emotional systems, Panksepp reserves a place for *care*, which is nothing but the caring affection, namely *storge*.³³ *Storge* emerges as the distinct feeling that supersedes the limits of the self and, drawing on empathy, urges the person to take care of another being in need. The standard example of caring affection among philosophers, neuroscientists and psychologists is maternal love. In maternal

²⁹ George of Nikomedeia, 'Homily on Good Friday', 8, PG 100:1461: τοῖς διαφλεγόμενοις αὐτῆς σπλάγγνοις.

³⁰ T. Chaplin, 'Gender and emotion expression: a developmental contextual perspective', *Emotion Review*, 7.1 (2015), 14–21.

³¹ A.R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York, 1999); see also the review by J. Panksepp and A.H. Modell, *Neuropsychoanalysis: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Psychoanalysis and the Neurosciences*, 16 (2014), 81–91.

³² L.F. Barrett, 'The theory of constructed emotion: an active inference account of interoception and categorization', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 12.1 (2017), 1–23.

³³ J. Panksepp, B. Knutson and D.L. Pruitt, 'Toward a neuroscience of emotion', in M.F. Mascolo and S. Griffin (ed.), *What Develops in Emotional Development? Emotions, Personality, and Psychotherapy* (Boston, 1998).

storge, the biological need for the survival of the species – seen from an evolutionary perspective – is reinforced by societal concerns that dictate its behavioural and functional expression.

Wood and Eagly note that gender is among the core concepts that constitute human identity and situate persons within social structures, although biological, cognitive and social factors produce individual differences in gender identity.³⁴ Self-categorisation and stereotyping, however, is further determined by other factors, such as ethnicity, social status, education and religion. The ‘nature-nurture’ debate refers to the dilemma over which factors (biological or environmental/societal) most strongly affect a person’s behaviour. The debate has been influenced by ideological currents, such as the feminist movement, which on the one hand fuelled discussions over gender in the circles of psychologists and neurobiologists, but on the other hand resulted in biased studies favouring the supported cause.³⁵ In any case, as A. Constantinople crisply puts it, ‘masculinity and femininity are among the muddiest concepts in the psychologist’s vocabulary’.³⁶

Scholarly treatment of emotion in late antiquity and Byzantium has been growing, and the subject has benefited from the attention by David Konstan over a period of forty years, which has concentrated on the emotions relevant to the classics: beauty, friendship, anger, pity, forgiveness, clemency and so on.³⁷ Konstan has drawn

³⁴ Wood and Eagly, ‘Two traditions’, 390; A.H. Eagly and W. Wood, ‘The nature-nurture debates: 25 years of challenges in understanding the psychology of gender’, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8 (2013), 340–57.

³⁵ M.B. Lykes and A.J. Stewart, ‘Evaluating the feminist challenge to research in personality and social psychology: 1963–1983’, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 10 (1986), 393–412. For a systematic overview, see R.K. Unger, *Gender and Psychology: Resisting Gender; Twenty-Five Years of Feminist Psychology* (London, 1998). See also A. Gheaus, ‘Feminism and gender’, in A. Fiala (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Political Philosophy* (London, 2015), 167–82, esp. 168–70, where the author analyses the ethics of care and ‘maternal thinking’.

³⁶ A. Constantinople, ‘Masculinity-femininity: an exception to a famous dictum?’ *Psychological Bulletin*, 80 (1973), 389–407.

³⁷ D. Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton, 1994), esp. 178–85 with reference to ἔρως (*eros*); idem, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997); idem, *Pity Transformed* (London, 2001); idem, ‘Shame in ancient Greece’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 70.4 (2003),

material and methodological tools from psychology and neuroscience to compare our own emotions to those of the ancients. The enduring nature of emotions often takes him back to the theories and methods of Darwin and his followers, as well as to modern theories of adaptiveness and evolutionary psychology.³⁸

In recent years, scholars from various backgrounds, such as cultural studies, philosophy, history, literature and art history, have focused on the study of emotions in order to gain deeper insight into hitherto hidden aspects of past cultures. Angelos Chaniotis, through his research project ‘The social and cultural construction of emotions: the Greek paradigm’ and subsequent publications, illustrates the use and expression of emotion in the public sphere, as recorded in text and image with respect to the Hellenistic era and late antiquity.³⁹ Concerning Byzantium, a body of work employing theoretical cultural tools brought to the fore vibrant undercurrents of this reticent civilisation. In this discussion, I confine myself to noting some representative recent publications that mark a point of departure for an investigation of emotion in conjunction with gender. Also, I intentionally leave aside the numerous studies on women in Byzantium that touch upon gender issues, as it would divert us from the scope of the present study. Liz James was among the first to challenge conventional concepts about gender roles in Byzantium and tackle issues related to the concept of the self and emotion;⁴⁰ Martin Hinterberger has drawn attention to various aspects of

1031–60; idem, ‘Clemency as a virtue’, *CQ*, 100.4 (2005), 337–46; idem, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge, 2010).

³⁸ D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Greek Literature* (Toronto, 2006).

³⁹ A. Chaniotis, *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation* (Stuttgart, 2011); idem (ed.), *Unveiling Emotions: Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World* (Stuttgart, 2012); idem (ed.), *Unveiling Emotions II: Emotions in Greece and Rome; Texts, Images, Material Culture* (Stuttgart, 2013). See also D. Cairns and D. Nelis (ed.), *Emotions in the Classical World: Methods, Approaches, and Directions* (Stuttgart, 2017).

⁴⁰ L. James (ed.), *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997); eadem (ed.), *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the 31st Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, SPBS, 6 (Brighton, 1997); eadem, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001). See also L.-M. Peltomaa, ‘Gender and Byzantine Studies from the viewpoint of methodology’, *AnzWien*, 140.1 (2005), 23–44; C. Galatariotou, ‘Holy women and witches: aspects of Byzantine concepts of

emotions,⁴¹ while the volume recently edited by Susan Harvey and Margaret Mullett marks a major turning point in the appreciation of the Byzantine sensory universe.⁴² Mati Meyer has been attentive to the proper theoretical framework for the study of emotion, which is also the case for the volume she co-edited with Stavroula Constantinou on emotion and gender.⁴³ The volume also presents case studies that mark a step forward in the field. Finally, the volume at hand represents a valuable addition to the study of emotions in Byzantium.

‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’.⁴⁴ Wittgenstein has ingeniously shown that subjective experience – such as that involved in memory – draws on linguistic models and criteria for its cognition. In the absence of social, objective, anchoring, descriptions come adrift and lose their content. Language cannot possibly describe something other than what the person experiences in terms of safely grounded public language.⁴⁵ An array of usages of the word *storge* demonstrates the manner in which it was perceived by ancient and Byzantine authors and audiences.

In Byzantium, *storge* is authored and depicted invariably by males in a conceptual framework that draws mainly on the Bible rather than the classical past.

gender’, *BMGS*, 9 (1984–85), 55–94; and the important exhibition catalogue by I. Kalavrezou (ed.), *Byzantine Women and their World* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

⁴¹ M. Hinterberger, ‘Emotions in Byzantium’, in L. James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester, 2010), 123–35; idem, *Phthonos: Missgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur*, Serta Graeca, 20 (Wiesbaden, 2013).

⁴² S.A. Harvey and M. Mullett (ed.), *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, DOBSC (Washington, DC, 2017).

⁴³ M. Meyer, ‘Constructing emotions and weaving meaning in Byzantine art’, in R. Milano and W. Barcham (ed.), *Happiness or its Absence in Art* (Cambridge, 2013); S. Constantinou and M. Meyer (ed.), *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture: New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture* (Cham, 2019); and therein M. Meyer, ‘Towards an approach to gendered emotions in Byzantine culture: an introduction’, 3–32.

⁴⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London, 1961), 5.6. For an analysis of this quote and Wittgenstein’s reasoning, see M. Morris, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Tractatus* (London, 2008), 263–308, esp. 275–77.

⁴⁵ See the relevant discussion in D. Stern, ‘Private language’, in O. Kuusela and M. McGinn (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford, 2011), 333–50. See also D. Nanopoulos and G. Babiniotis, *Από την κοσμογονία στη γλωσσογονία* (Athens, 2010), 84–85.

Notwithstanding the fluidity of its use, *storge* in Byzantium is employed as an emotion between friends, as we saw in the case of Chrysostom. Parallel to that, it is employed with reference to God and God's relationship to humankind. The view of the classics that friendship, and consequently *storge* can only develop among equals or two of the same kind is abandoned by Christian authors, who speak about our relationship to God in terms evoking the emotional undertones of friendship and caring affection. The biblical roots are to be sought in the story of Moses, but also in the challenge with which Abraham, the friend of God (Isa 41:8), is presented when asked to sacrifice his only son as a proof of his absolute love for God (Gen 22:1–19). The command of Deuteronomy 6:5, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength', reverberates in Matthew 22:38–40. In Matthew, the love of God becomes 'the great and first commandment'.

Reciprocity is noted in biblical narratives stressing not only the affection streaming from parents to children, but also the honour that children should show to their parents and the comfort they should provide for them, especially when they reach old age.⁴⁶ Affectionate care and a sense of honour permeate the narrative of Genesis 9:20–24, describing the way in which Noah's sons cover the naked body of their drunk father after the flood. Honour of parents has its place among the ten commandments, and the precept receives kindred treatment in the New Testament.⁴⁷ Kinship acquires a new meaning in the context of the Incarnation, one encompassing the members of the community beyond biological bonds. The gospels signal this shift in the episodes where Christ speaks openly about his mission and that of his disciples.⁴⁸ In other passages, Christ draws a line between himself and his biological family, emphasising the spiritual ties bonding him in a caring, and sacrificial, relationship with the living body of the *ecclesia*.⁴⁹ The miracle at Cana has been much discussed with reference to the attitude of Christ towards his mother, and theologians have invariably expressed the view that Christ makes a clear statement about his

⁴⁶ See, for example, Deut 5:16; Ex 20:12; Mt 15:4.

⁴⁷ Mt 15:4; 19:19; Mk 7:10; 10:19; Lk 18:20; Eph 6:2.

⁴⁸ Mt 10:34–36.

⁴⁹ For example, the twelve-year-old Jesus teaching at the temple (Lk 2:41–52). See also Mt 12:50: 'For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'.

mission in dismissing his mother's exhortation to help out with the lack of wine. The scene is intricate: *καὶ λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου. λέγει ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς διακόνοις Ὅτι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν ποιήσατε* (And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come'. Jn 2:4–5). Christ's distancing address to the Virgin as *γύναι* (woman) relegates the affectionate mother-child relationship to suggest the scope of his mission, but the request is granted, and Mary hardly appears doubting, whereby their relationship is affirmed. However, it is being transformed, and it no longer is the conventional tender mother-child relationship. As Romanos the Melodist depicts the scene, Christ appears at the wedding in order to sanctify the ritual. His reply to his mother is set against a backdrop of nonverbal communication between Mary and Christ:

Οἶδα πρὶν μάθῃς, παρθένε σεμνή, ὡς οἶνος ἔλειψε τούτοις νυνί, ἀπεκρίνατο.
Οἶδά σου τῆς καρδίας πάσας τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις ... καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἐλογίσω
τοιαῦτα· ἡ χρεία νῦν καλεῖ τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς θαῦμα.

I knew before you learned, modest virgin, that they have run out of wine....
He replied, 'I knew all your heart's worries ... and what you thought to
yourself, that the need now calls my son to a miracle'.⁵⁰

The New Testament does not have much to offer in the study of caring affection, especially between the Virgin and Christ. Mary's worry, concern and eventual agony as the crucifixion approaches is only implied. The scene at the crucifixion, where Christ entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple (Jn 19:26–27), conforms to the norms of ancient societies steeped in the morality of the Bible. The scene as described in the Gospels, endlessly reproduced in art, combines the manifestation of *storge* towards the mother and of friendship towards the disciple. Christ, who has repeatedly rejected the family niche, pays his duty to his mother by entrusting her to John, who takes his place as a son. In other words, he affirms the deep loving friendship that connects him with John and at the same time pays tribute to his mother.

⁵⁰ Romanos the Melodist, Hymn 7 ('On the marriage at Cana'), 12.1–5, ed. P. Maas and C.A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica genuina* (Oxford, 1963), 53; see also the more recent edition by J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Melode, Hymnes*, vol. 2, SC, 110 (Paris, 1965), 312.

Male affection reflects the social background of biblical narratives in which the paternal figure occupies a special place as the safeguard for the survival and the honour of the family and the race. Tenderness is often encountered as a related emotion in the context of parent-child kinship. In the parable of the prodigal son, *storge* streams from the father, the leader of the household, who welcomes the ‘lost sheep’ of the family (Lk 15:20). This parable has been employed as an archetypal reference to the love of God towards his creatures. Biblical references offer insights into the affectionate relationship between man and God that evokes the strong bond between provider and recipient.

In Byzantine tradition, the Mother of God is invested with the double role of representing the female gender that is largely absent from the front scene of the ecclesiastical and the public sphere, and of interceding on behalf of mankind. Unsurprisingly, the rare references to Mary in the gospels do not include any direct expression of maternal or filial affection, other than at the crucifixion scene. Nonetheless, in the literature and art of Eastern Christianity, the Virgin and Child constitute a key image. This imagery underwent several phases before acquiring its two main forms, the Virgin *Hodegetria* and the Virgin of Tenderness. To these two types the image of the Virgin as Intercessor may be added, portrayed in the *Orans* and the *Deesis* depictions. Types are not standard, even less so, the epithets applied to their variants.⁵¹ The exemplars of this typology follow one another chronologically in terms of emergence but exist simultaneously and appear accompanied by a number of site- or cult-specific epithets.

Early Byzantine artistic representations promote a hieratic profile of the Virgin. The examples of this type are numerous and spread over a wide geographic area, ranging from Sinai, with the famous encaustic icon of the Enthroned Virgin and Child

⁵¹ B. Neil, ‘Mary as intercessor in Byzantine theology’, in C. Maunder (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mary* (Oxford, 2019), 140–52; A. Lidov, ‘The priesthood of the Virgin Mary as an image-paradigm of Christian visual culture’, *Ikon*, 10 (2017), 9–26, esp. 11–13. Valuable are the articles published in the volume edited by L.-M. Peltomaa, A. Külzer and P. Allen (ed.), *Presbeia Theotokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium, 4th–9th Centuries* (Vienna, 2015). M.J. Milliner, ‘The Virgin of the Passion: development, dissemination, and afterlife of a Byzantine icon type’ (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011), associates the Virgin of the Passion with Mary’s intercession and priesthood. See also A.W. Carr’s essay in the present volume.

(around 600), to Rome, with S. Maria Antiqua, S. Maria Maggiore and S. Maria in Trastevere to mention the best-known examples, to the apse mosaics of the Virgin in churches of Cyprus. In terms of chronology, plausible dates from the sixth century onwards have been proposed. Although the Maria Regina represents a type specific to western Christendom and is closely associated with papal influence, it belongs to the same category of material, as far as the expression of affection is concerned. Specific examples have been presented and scrutinised in art-historical studies.⁵² Of particular interest for our purposes are the facial characteristics and the hieratic posture of the early representations of Mary in East and West, which differ significantly from the typical features of the Virgin as she came to be known and recognised in post-iconoclastic art. In all early known examples dating prior to the iconoclastic era, Mary has no direct eye contact with the infant Christ who appears sitting on her lap but devoid of outward signs of affection.

Early Nativity scenes depicting Christ swaddled, a prefiguration of his crucifixion and entombment, emphasise the typology rather than the human aspect of Christ's birth from Mary.⁵³ The iconography of the Nativity testifies to the most tragic aspects of human love, of parental affection and of motherly angst faced with

⁵² For the hieratic posture of the Virgin in early representations, see A. Kateusz, *Mary and the Early Christian Women: Hidden Leadership* (London, 2019), 10–12 and passim. For Maria Regina, see J. Osborne, 'The cult of Maria Regina in early medieval Rome', *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, 21.7 (2008), 95–106; and the pertinent studies of M. Lidova, 'The earliest representations of Maria Regina in Rome and Byzantine imperial iconography', in M. Rakojska (ed.), *The Days of St. Emperor Constantine and Helena, Niš and Byzantium: The Collection of Scientific Works*, 8 (Niš, 2010), 231–43; eadem, 'Empress, Virgin, Ecclesia: the icon of Santa Maria in Trastevere in the early Byzantine context', *Ikona*, 9 (2016), 109–28; eadem, 'Maria Regina on the "Palimpsest Wall" in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome: historical context and imperial connotations of the early Byzantine image', *Iconographica*, 16 (2017), 9–25, with earlier bibliography and discussion of the multifaceted issues involved. For the Virgin in Cyprus, apart from the monographs discussing specific sites, see B. Shilling, 'Apse mosaics of the Virgin Mary in early Byzantine Cyprus' (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2013).

⁵³ M. Cunningham, 'Byzantine reception', in P.M. Blowers and P.W. Martens (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford, 2019), 666–85, esp. 671–72. For the earliest example of the Nativity, the third-century sarcophagus lid (from St Ambrose basilica in Milan), see Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women*, 5–6 and fig. 1.

inconceivable loss. In the case of the Mother of God, this is magnified through the prophecy of the sword that would pierce Mary's heart (Lk 2:35). The salvific death of Christ is suggested by the expression of the eyes of the Virgin, whose cult becomes ever more closely linked to the crucifixion, the lamentation and Christ's resurrection.⁵⁴ The treatment of the subject in art points to the importance of the divine conception, and therefore to the christological background against which these representations were created.

In Byzantine literature and art, Mary is the central figure for the expression of affection, especially as related to rituals of rearing and burial inherited from the centuries-long tradition of the eastern Mediterranean. However, text and image do not quite correspond, especially in the early Byzantine period.⁵⁵ *Storge*, absent from early Christian iconography, abounds in texts and especially in poetry. Romanos the Melodist is singled out here as the most influential hymnographer whose work vibrates with emotional imagery, primarily of the affectionate Virgin. His Syriac background with its rich literary tradition, and especially the *madrasha*, accounts at least partially for the distinct emotional tone that characterises his poetry, which became a model for Byzantine hymnography.⁵⁶ Style and content in the poetry of Romanos engaged in biblical exegesis, revisiting familiar stories and dramatising the

⁵⁴ M. Vassilaki and N. Tsironis, 'Representations of the Virgin and their association with the Passion of Christ', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens, 2000), 453–63.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the evidence regarding Marian devotion in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* presented by M. Conostas, 'I wish I could always weep like that: Abba Poemen and Mary at the cross; on the origins of Byzantine devotion to the Mother of God', in N. Tsironis (ed.), *Lament as Performance in Byzantium* (London, forthcoming). Sensory piety occupies a significant part in G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000).

⁵⁶ W.L. Petersen, 'The dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: its importance for the origin of the kontakion', *VChr*, 39.2 (1985): 171–87; idem, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, CSCO, 475 / Subsidia, 74 (Leuven, 1985); M. Cunningham, 'The reception of Romanos in middle Byzantine homiletics and hymnography', *DOP*, 62 (2008), 251–60. The year 2017 saw two important publications on Romanos: S. Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry in Early Byzantium: The Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist* (Cambridge, 2017); and T. Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist* (Philadelphia, 2017).

persons involved, especially Mary, in a relational and participatory manner,⁵⁷ revealing the effect the *kontakia* had on various audiences inside and outside the sacred space of the church.

The first hymn on the Nativity – still in use in the Orthodox rite – is perhaps the most famous kontakion of Romanos. According to the tradition, it was with this hymn that the poet started his career in the church of the Virgin in Blachernae sometime in the sixth century, after having received a vision in which Mary gives him a scroll to eat. In this hymn, Romanos stresses kinship, and furthermore the antinomy of the omnipotent God being born of the humble Virgin: with his own consent, the father becomes son of the mother (ὁ πατήρ τῆς μητρὸς γνώμη υἱὸς ἐγένετο).⁵⁸ Affection is expressed by the metaphor with which the infant Christ asks his mother to accept the magi in the cave as if in her arms (ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις σου), recalling the imagery of the Virgin *Platytera* ('wider than the heavens'). In Romanos, Mary's affectionate intercession acquires a cosmological dimension. Bringing the Saviour into the world, Mary becomes the mediator on behalf of humankind and the created order:

βλέπουσα ἡ ἀμόμητος
μάγους δῶρα χερσὶ φέροντας καὶ προσπίπτοντας,
ἀστέρα δηλοῦντα, ποιμένας ὑμνοῦντας,
τὸν πάντων τούτων κτίστην καὶ κύριον ἰκέτευε λέγουσα·
Τριάδα δώρων, τέκνον, δεξάμενος,
τρεῖς αἰτήσεις δὸς τῇ γεννησάσῃ σε·
ὑπὲρ ἀέρων παρακαλῶ σε
καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν οἰκούντων ἐν αὐτῇ.

The immaculate seeing the magi bringing presents in their hands and prostrating, the star pointing at [the cave] and the shepherds glorifying [the Saviour], she begged the Creator and Lord of all these, saying, 'Accept, my child, the triad of presents, granting three favours to the one

⁵⁷ Arentzen, *Virgin in Song*, 164–73 and passim.

⁵⁸ See S. Brock, 'From Ephrem to Romanos', *Studia Patristica*, 20 (1989), 139–51.

who gave birth to you: I plead with you on behalf of the air, for the fruit of the earth and for the inhabitants of the earth'.⁵⁹

In the following stanza, Mary asserts that she is not only the mother of the Saviour; he has also raised her to be the 'steady roof' and the 'wall' for the whole of mankind, the one who guides the forefathers who were once expelled from paradise back to its bliss. The content of her supplication is clearly liturgical as it echoes the very words of the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom that show Mary as a kind of universal priestess.

Ἵπὲρ εὐκρασίας ἀέρων, εὐφορίας τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς, καὶ καιρῶν
εἰρηνικῶν, τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

For reasonable weather, abundance of the fruits of the earth, and peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord.

In the second hymn on the Nativity, Romanos depicts Mary as addressing mankind, the earth and the sky to share in her joy of bearing the creator in her embrace. Grief is to be set aside; salvation is here; it has come through the heavenly gate that is the Mother of God herself. The hymn typifies the affectionate care of Mary in the image of the creator held in her bosom (2.2.8–9), as well as in the various scenes where she is presented as embracing and nursing the infant Christ (e.g., 1.2.6; 1.4.8; 1.6.8). Romanos's poetry elsewhere portrays Mary both as the humble virgin and the mighty queen, as the tender mother and the lowly maiden, who puts herself at the service of God. Significantly, it is in the Hymn 'On Mary at the foot of the cross' that Romanos sets off the intimacy of Mary's relation to Christ, in order to intensify emotion surrounding the crucifixion.⁶⁰

It has been argued that throughout the Christian era, Mary has been used by the church for the propagation and justification of a role model that associates the female sex with attitudes of submission and obedience.⁶¹ Regarding the Virgin as intercessor, the conceptual, chronological and geographical boundaries are ill-defined, although it

⁵⁹ Romanos the Melodist, Hymn 1 ('On the Nativity'), 22.7–8, ed. Maas and Trypanis, 8; ed. Grosdidiers de Matons, *Hymnes*, vol. 2, SC, 100, pp. 72–74.

⁶⁰ Romanos, Hymn 19 ('On Mary at the cross'), ed. Maas and Trypanis, 142–49.

⁶¹ Kateusz, *Mary and the Early Christian Women*, passim.

is generally accepted that new impetus was given the concept of Mary as mediator in the iconography of the post-iconoclastic era. In the context of Christian literature, however, already from the time of Romanos, Mary pleads not for the female sex alone but for the entirety of mankind. Already at the Annunciation, the Virgin represents the entire human person, the καθ'όλου πρόσωπο as Christos Yannaras put it,⁶² and her consent, which opened the way to the Incarnation and to the fulfilment of the divine economy cannot be reduced to a graceful, passive, feminine response to God's will.⁶³ As the Fathers have demonstrated in homilies, hymns and treatises, and modern theologians have further argued, at the Annunciation Mary is circumspect: she doubts, thinks, judges and consents to the calling of God on behalf of all humanity. In the exegetical tradition, her person becomes emblematic of the distress of the fallen human, with all the pain for their condition, the doubt regarding the transcendence of natural law, the longing and the desire to be found reunited with God. When she says yes to the angel, it is a moment of catholic and all-inclusive acceptance.

Alexander Schmemmann sets the Mother of God against the backdrop of modern society, and speaking about the Annunciation he says:

I do not pretend to understand what the angel is, nor, using the limited language of rationalism, can I explain the event that happened almost two thousand years ago in a tiny Galilean town. But it strikes me that mankind has never forgotten this story, that these few verses [of the dialogue between the angel and the Virgin] have repeatedly been incorporated into countless paintings, poems and prayers, and that they have inspired and continue to inspire.⁶⁴

⁶² C. Yannaras, *The Ontological Content of the Theological Notion of Personhood* (Athens, 1970); R.W. Williams, 'The theology of personhood: a study of the thought of Christos Yannaras', *Sobornost*, 6 (1972), 415–30.

⁶³ A. Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation: An Essay on the Mother of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford, 1977), 14, 16–18; idem, 'John of Damascus on the Mother of God as a link between humanity and God', in L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham (ed.), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, BBOS, 11 (Farnham, 2011), 153–61, esp. 159.

⁶⁴ A. Schmemmann, *The Virgin Mary, The Celebration of Faith: Sermons*, 3, ed. tr. J.A. Jillions (Crestwood, NY, 2001), 29–30.

In Schmemmann's statement, we see how emotion makes a biblical story appealing and relevant to various audiences across the centuries.

Neurobiology and psychology have illustrated the ways in which facial expressions, but also postures, throw light on the vast world of human emotion.⁶⁵ The transition from the hieratic Virgin to the Virgin of Tenderness, similarly, sheds light on the way in which the face of the Virgin reflects the apprehension of the divine as a fusion of noetic categories determined by the doctrine of the church and the liturgical experience. In this respect, the remarkable study of Ioli Kalavrezou on the shift from the Virgin Mary to the *Meter Theou* connected theological and representational developments to psychological reality.⁶⁶ The emergence of this new type in the years following the controversy over the legitimacy of matter to represent the divine links the Virgin to the major arguments upon which the veneration of icons was based.⁶⁷ The very appellation 'Glykophilousa' echoes in the most vibrant manner the caring affection of the Virgin for the infant Christ, the 'little child, before the ages' of the first hymn of Romanos 'On the Nativity'. The epithet itself refers us back to Aristotle and his use of the verb φιλέω/φιλῶ (*phileo/philo*), which signifies love and comprises a variety of nuances, including the affectionate relationship between mother and child. The sweetly embracing Virgin recalls the imagery conceived with such flair and ingenuity by Romanos, a mixture of pulsating presence and a modest pathway leading to Christ. Her characteristics differ significantly from the representations of pre-iconoclastic art. The royal posture of the hieratic Virgin gave way to a body curling to embrace the infant Christ: the head appears to be bending towards his side in a three-quarters perspective, while Christ's bodily attitude expresses a tender emotion towards the mother who has nurtured him, thus affirming the reciprocity of *storge*.

⁶⁵ P. Ekman, E.T. Rolls et al., 'Facial expressions of emotion: an old controversy and new findings', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, series B, 335 (1992), 63–69.

⁶⁶ I. Kalavrezou, 'Images of the Mother: when the Virgin Mary became *Meter Theou*', *DOP*, 44 (1990), 165–72; eadem, 'Exchanging embrace: the body of salvation', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), 103–15, esp. 105–7.

⁶⁷ N. Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the iconoclastic controversy', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens, 2003), 21–47.

Often his hand encircles her neck, and his cheek is pressed against hers in a gesture of mutual affection. Literature precedes art, offering the model that iconographers would follow and inscribe on their representations.⁶⁸ At the same time that the type of the Virgin of Tenderness appears, iconographic types related to the Passion emerge.⁶⁹ Most importantly, though, the association of the Virgin with the Passion is imprinted on Mary's facial characteristics. The sorrowful eyes of the Virgin transmit the message of the prospective sacrifice of the 'little child, before the ages'. And at the same time, the Virgin stands and recapitulates the awareness of any human mother, and of humans in general, regarding the mortality of the species. Her facial expression transmits the reverence towards the infant Christ; the wonder, but also the grief, at his designate death on the cross is expressed in the suspended lips and the sadness of her eyes, arched by the lowered eyebrows.

Romanos's ingenuity and vividness in the description of emotion can be compared to the liveliness with which the ninth-century homilist George of Nikomedeia portrays the Virgin in his homiletic corpus, most of which is dedicated to Mary. In this corpus, outstanding for its expressive intensity and dramatic verve, his homily on Good Friday conveys Mary's sorrow.⁷⁰ Desolate, when all friends and relations have deserted Christ, Mary alone stood steadfast by his side; and 'great as the kindling of her inner parts' might have been, her bravery and doughtiness were just as great. Seeing her alone persevering, the other two women waxed manlier and more compassionate.⁷¹ Vocabulary here shows Mary's *storge* growing into virtues associated with manly attitudes. Employing images from apocryphal texts, and relying heavily on the sermons of Jacob of Serugh and the *kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist, George composed a sermon that we could consider to be the first known full-fledged lament of the Virgin and the source of the highly emotional encomia of Good Friday, the liturgical hymns sung during Vespers and in recent centuries during

⁶⁸ H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1982); N. Tsironis, 'From poetry to liturgy: the cult of the Virgin in the middle Byzantine era', in *Images of the Mother of God*, ed. Vassilaki, 91–102.

⁶⁹ Vassilaki and Tsironis, 'Representations of the Virgin', 453–63.

⁷⁰ George of Nikomedeia repeatedly uses the word *philia* and relates it to *storge* in order to emphasise God's love for mankind and to exhort the sacrifice of the Lord. See George of Nikomedeia, 'On Good Friday', PG 100:1457.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1461C.

the procession of the *Epitaphios*.⁷² The Virgin, full of agony, following each step of Christ from the court of Annas and Caiaphas right through to Calvary where she witnesses the body of Christ being nailed on the cross and the last hours of her Son and God until he gives up the spirit. The form, content and tone employed in the narrative are richly expressive of emotion,⁷³ an emotion that one may wish to characterise as feminine, as it is based on the long tradition of ritual lament that emerged and flourished in the eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁴ However, how ‘feminine’ is this emotion? George’s lament, written (or at least conceived) in the context of church ritual, was not simply delivered in the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but was literally performed, if we are to judge from its dramatic qualities.⁷⁵ All rhetorical

⁷² N. Tsironis, ‘The lament of the Virgin from Romanos the Melode to George of Nikomedia: aspects of Marian devotion’ (PhD diss., King’s College London, 1998). For the Life of the Virgin as model of George of Nikomedeia, see M.-J. van Esbroeck, *Maxime le Confesseur, Vie de la Vierge*, CSCO, 478–479 / *Scriptores Iberici*, 21–22 (Leuven 1986); S.J. Shoemaker, *Maximus the Confessor, The Life of the Virgin* (New Haven, 2012). The latter’s arguments regarding the authorship and dating of the text were persuasively refuted by P. Booth, ‘On the *Life of the Virgin* Attributed to Maximus the Confessor’, *JTS*, 66 (2015), 149–203. See also Shoemaker’s response ‘The (Pseudo?-)Maximus *Life of the Virgin* and the Byzantine Marian tradition’, *JTS*, 67 (2016), 115–42 and the erudite discussion by M. Cunningham, ‘The Life of the Virgin Mary according to middle Byzantine preachers and hagiographers: changing contexts and perspectives’, *Apocrypha*, 27 (2016), 137–59; and M. Conostas, ‘The story of an edition: Antoine Wenger and John Geometres’ *Life of the Virgin Mary*’, in T. Arentzen and M.B. Cunningham (ed.), *The Reception of the Virgin in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images* (Cambridge 2019), 3–22; C. Simelidis, ‘Two Lives of the Virgin: John Geometres, Efthymios the Athonite, and Maximos the Confessor’, *DOP*, 74 (2020), 125–159.

⁷³ L. James, ‘Art and lies: text, image and imagination in the medieval world’, in A. Eastmond and L. James (ed.), *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), 59–72.

⁷⁴ Ritual elements, although initially banned by the Church in Byzantium, were gradually accepted and incorporated in the standard practices: see M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd edn (Lanham, MD, 2002), 32–34.

⁷⁵ Generally, for the oral delivery of sermons in the church, see M. Cunningham, ‘Messages: the reading of sermons in Byzantine churches and monasteries’, in A. Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages and Meanings; Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker* (Farnham, 2011), 83–98. On dramatic and performative aspects of church rituals, see O. Cargill, *Drama and Liturgy* (New York, 1930); J. Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre*

devices employed by the homilist – as well as the emotionally loaded content – point clearly to a performance that would be consistent with the objectives of the homily.⁷⁶

Can we thus speak of *storge* as a gendered emotion? In both Byzantine literature and art, we encounter a paradoxical fusion of gender as the tender, caring affection of the Virgin, sketched by authors and artists who were invariably male: in all likelihood, men were the authors of apocryphal texts; men were the poets of the Syriac Orient where the first poetic and emotionally charged portrayals of the Virgin emerged; men were the hymnographers of the middle Byzantine period who composed the Stavrotheotokia – an ekphrasis of maternal affection; and a man was also George of Nikomedeia, who produced the first Marian lament right at the end of the iconoclastic controversy.⁷⁷

Affection and sorrow seem interwoven, concomitant in human nature, inherent in literature and art, in all rituals accompanying passage from nothing to life and from life to death. The assistant, male or female, follows and supports rituals with *storge*, an emotion that is perhaps female in its biological origin but universal in its ontological character. In this sense, the caring affection that the Virgin shows does not belong to the stock of ‘female emotions’; on the contrary, we may suggest that

(Nashville, 1998); I. Vivilakis, *To κήρυγμα ως Performance. Εκκλησιαστική ρητορική και θεατρική τέχνη μετά το Βυζάντιο* (Athens, 2013).

⁷⁶ N. Tsironis, ‘Emotion and the senses in middle Byzantine homiletics’, in L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham (ed.), *The Mother of God in Byzantium: Relics, Icons and Texts* (Farnham, 2011), 179–98; eadem, ‘Desire, longing and fear in the narrative of middle Byzantine homiletics’, *Studia Patristica*, 44 (2010), 515–20. For further considerations on the connection between rhetoric and its emotional impact, see D. Konstan, ‘Rhetoric and emotion’, in I. Worthington (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2007), 411–25. For studies on the rhetorical training of the Byzantines in relation to the performative character of Byzantine literature, see, for example, I. Toth, ‘Rhetorical *theatron* in late Byzantium’, in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2007), 429–48; E. Bourbouhakis, ‘Rhetoric and performance’, in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London, 2010), 175–87. See also R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, 2009).

⁷⁷ M. Constan, ‘Poetry and painting in the middle Byzantine period: a bilateral icon from Kastoria and the Stavrotheotokia of Joseph the Hymnographer’, in S. Gerstel (ed.), *Viewing Greece: Cultural and Political Agency in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean* (Turnhout, 2016), 12–32.

elevated beyond the limits of her nature she takes the place of the male provider of *storge*: the Merciful Lord, the Eleemon finds his counterpart in the Eleousa, the Virgin of Mercy and Tenderness. Neuroscience and psychology, although still unable to produce a detailed mapping of the brain, demonstrate the instrumental role of emotion not only for the survival of mankind but also for complex processes such as conception, memory and perception. If we apply emotion theories and attained results in the study of *storge* we may conclude that it represents a versatile tool and medium employed by the Byzantines for the exegesis and promulgation of subtle but critical aspects of Orthodox doctrine. *Storge* epitomises an emotion shared between men and women who have at least once in their lives received the *storge* of a nurturer, and probably have also given it, in one way or another. Caring affection thus appears as the common experiential base artfully used by authors and artists for the expression of the most appealing emotion of all; the emotion of *storge* that links humans with the person that proved instrumental for the utter transformation of human life through the Incarnation: The Mother of God, the one who stands at the root of life and the gateway to death.

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