Title: Jesus of Bethlehem: Vasily V. Rozanov's Christian Theology of Matrimony
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Abstract:
The author of the first systematic exploration of the religious, cultural, and civic dimensions of matrimonial sexuality in Russian thought, The Family Question in Russia (1903), Vasily V. Rozanov's contribution to the social discussion of marriage and sexuality in late 19th-early 20th century Russia has traditionally been analyzed as an anti-Church, anti-Christian, "pagan" system of thought. This paper aims instead to take seriously Rozanov's Christian hermeneutics and his argument for a continuity between polytheistic and monotheistic systems of faith based in the affirmation of sexual reproduction, particularly his reading of the New Testament as affirmative of a so-called "religion of the family". In his presentation of the religion of the family, the paper argues, Rozanov seeks to replace the dominant contemporary understanding of Russian Christianity as essentially ascetic with what he considered a more genuine Russian faith rooted in reproduction. In so doing, he seeks to provide a theological framework conducive to solving practical social problems of concern to many of Rozanov's contemporaries, particularly that of low birthrates and the so-called "marriage crisis". The failure of Rozanov's "family of religion", the paper concludes, is reflective of larger theological and discursive issues surrounding the spiritual status of matrimony and reproduction – peculiar to Russian Orthodoxy – with which Orthodox theologians and religious thinkers continue to grapple today.