

The Sacrament of Marriage: The Orthodox Service

Introduction

People claim that marriage is an institution, and many institutions have today been disputed, or even disappeared. Clearly marriage, at least as a civil and social institution, does have its problems – it involves contracts, property, regulations, and legalities. Furthermore, we are all too aware of the real and urgent consequences of marital breakdown. This, however, may not necessarily imply a problem with marriage itself, but rather with the expectations people seem to have of marriage. People seek total personal and interpersonal fulfillment, seeing in marriage a magic solution to the problems of human relationships. It is no wonder then that many marriages fail; they simply cannot bear the burden of such unrealistic expectations.

The following pages do not claim to examine the numerous aspects of marriage, but simply to explore its sacramental dimension with particular emphasis on the Orthodox Service of matrimony. In the Christian dimension of marriage, as we have observed, it is primarily our failures and not our strengths that assume special significance for salvation. For in the Church one is healed through the realization that one is loved despite personal weaknesses. This is the starting-point of our own will to live and power to love. In marriage, husband and wife do not love because they are perfect or because they complement one another. Rather, their unconditional forgiving love enables them both to grow towards perfection.

Love is the burning part of life, embracing joy and sorrow alike, encompassing both loyalty and loss. In love there is everything: the fullness of God (cf. 1 John 4.8) and the fullness of life (cf. John 10.10). Accordingly, then, marriage should be regarded not merely as an institution for survival, but as a school for living.

Love and the Sacrament of Marriage

Love is a gift from above; it "is God" Himself (1 John 4.8,16). This is why the deacon in the wedding ceremony leads the people in prayer for the "sending down upon the couple of love perfect." Unfortunately, all too often love is misunderstood as a feeling of kindness or an act of goodness, and one forgets that the condition of love is in fact godliness. With God at its beginning and end, the dimension of love in human life contains the various elements of *eros* (ascending, ecstatic love), *caritas* (compassionate love, or sympathy) and *agape* (love as grace and self-sacrifice to the end). The power of love, then, is the seal of the image of God within us (1 John 3.1), the seal of the gift of the Holy Trinity. When two human persons love and are united in marriage, they actually reflect God.¹ This kind of love can never be exhausted psychologically, sociologically, medically, economically, or legally. Such "love is as strong as death ... its flashes are flames of fire, the most vehement fire of the Eternal" (Song of Songs 8.6).

Marriage is, according to the Orthodox view, a sacrament because through it God directly reveals the heavenly Kingdom to the world in two specific persons. At each stage of our life, the mystery of salvation becomes a real experience through the various sacraments, whether when entering the Church (Baptism), growing in the Holy Spirit (Chrismation), assuming an ecclesiastical ministry (Ordination), or simply being healed (Unction). In each case, new life enters the human person as a real presence and gift, not as an obligation or magic.

The other person in marriage, the marriage partner, is the life-giving personal revelation of Christ. This is why to love the other person is to love oneself, to love "one's own flesh" (Ephesians 5.28-29 and Luke 10.27), because the other person is one's true self, the fulfillment and revelation of the divine dimension of one's nature. In this way, marriage is deeply linked with freedom. Most people envisage marriage as a restriction or loss of freedom, but in fact it is continual growth involving promise and fulfillment. For freedom is something earned and learned, and for many people marriage is one such workshop and school.

That we are created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen-

esis 1.26) is evident not merely in the possibility given to us for procreation, but above all in the fact that God entrusts us with the fate of another human life, the spouse, for whom we bear supreme responsibility. This is particularly clear in the third prayer of marriage, at which point the priest symbolically joins the hands of the couple:

Holy God,
 Who fashioned man from the dust,
 and from his rib fashioned woman,
 and joined her to him as a helpmate for him,
 for it was seemly unto Your Majesty
 for man not to be alone upon the earth;
 Do You Yourself, O Sovereign Lord,
 stretch forth Your hand from Your holy dwelling
 place, and join together this Your servant (Name) and
 Your servant (Name),
 for by You is a wife joined to her husband.
 Join them together in oneness of mind;
 crown them with wedlock into one flesh;
 grant to them the fruit of the womb,
 and the gain of well-favored children;
 For Yours is the dominion,
 and Yours is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the
 Glory, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
 both now and ever, and to the ages of ages.

Proverbially, love is blind; but in fact it would be more correct to say that genuine love enables one to see and accept the other person *as he or she is*. This is why marriage mirrors the testament between God and humanity: one's marital partner is the covenant of faith and way of union with God Himself. For the Church Fathers, a marriage should really be confirmed by the bishop; it is, as we shall see, an ecclesial event that leads to participation in Holy Communion, because "where there are two or three ... there Christ is also" (Matthew 18.20). Christ is forever sealed, almost fused, with the couple and with their every action. It appears that two are wedded during the ceremony, but in effect three persons are being united. The "dance of Isaiah" that concludes the Service denotes this rapture and capture by Christ of the couple:

O Isaiah, dance your joy,
for the Virgin was indeed with child;
and brought to birth a Son, that Emmanuel,
who came as both God and man;
Day-at-the-Dawn is the Name He bears,
and by extolling Him, we hail the Virgin as blessed.

Hence the permanence of the vows: "I marry" signifies that "I belong to Christ forever." And I belong to Him in and through everything: in both sorrows and joys. If you have not suffered, you have not loved; if you have not lived in darkness, you have not hoped with all intensity for daylight. In life, even shadows reveal a presence. This positive sense of martyrdom is underlined with the crowns, as well as with the constant memory of martyrs, such as St. Prokopios who was a married saint who lived during the age of the martyrs.

It is, then, narrow-minded to speak of marriage as a human institution, no matter how significantly religious.² Marriage, as in fact every facet of human life, is placed in the service of salvation and the glory of God (Ephesians 5). This is why it cannot be regarded otherwise than as a sacrament, alongside and within *the* sacrament of love and communion which is the Eucharist. It is a solemn, permanent, and faithful consecration of two persons, free and equal before God, for their perfection according to the model of Christ and His bride, the Church. As the Church is a foretaste and pledge of and an actual participation in the Kingdom to come, so also marriage reveals joy eternal and divine communion. The sacrament of love for a Christian, therefore, is not a state but a stage in the development of life in Christ; it is not a sign of settlement (*apokatastasis*) but rather an essential way of salvation.

Marriage, as already stated, must surely be more than a social or even a dry, ecclesiastical institution concerned with the well-being of a family and with its survival and continuation in a fallen world. The "nuclear" or "conjugal" family has become the basic unit of family organization through most societies in modern life. It is a key social, political, and economic unit, hailed in international celebrations and honored in religious circles (cf. Exodus 20.12 and Ephesians 6.1). This is well, but we have seen the dan-

gerous temptations of exclusivism and individualism. This is why the Church Fathers identify, but do not idolize, this concept of the family. Any idolization and isolation, even within the family, is to be avoided. For a "Christian life is life in the image of God in three persons – life together with others,"³ even those outside the "immediate" family. The Christian family is not a nucleus but a cell in the inclusive Body of Christ. It is an opening and opportunity for self-transcendence within the communion of saints.

Thus the Christian couple is able – and it in fact is responsible for this – to establish a domestic church, a church at home (*kat' oikon ekklesia*), foreshadowing the heavenly Kingdom. This is precisely the implicit significance behind the list of Old Testament couples who are referred to in both of the long prayers at the commencement of the Sacrament of Marriage, as contributing to the mystery of the Incarnation:

Bless them, O Lord our God,
as You blessed Abraham and Sarah,
Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and all the Patriarchs,
Joseph and Asenath, Moses and Zipporah,
Joachim and Anna, Zachariah and Elizabeth.

This means that there is an obligation to and before the whole community of the Church which provides the framework for the beginning, growth, and fulfillment of a marriage. The service, then, of matrimony is evidence of the humble willingness of the couple to be in union with the entire Body of Christ, as well as an assurance by God and a testimony of the Church for this communion.

Issues Relating to Marriage

Brief reference should at this point be made to some specific issues of marriage, namely inter-Christian and inter-religious marriages, the tragedy of divorce, and the matter of chastity prior to and within marriage. The purpose here is not to provide answers, but rather to offer insights into the way in which these issues affect the whole community. The easier solution always is to lay blame on particular individuals who do not follow traditional norms or expectations. However, it is far more compas-

sionate and constructive to assume responsibility as a community for particular problems and pressures that confront married couples.

This is the way that we should appreciate *inter-Christian and inter-religious marriages*. It is truly regrettable that the various divisions and schisms within Christendom, as well as the prejudices and differences among the various religions, have repercussions and cause disruptions, deeply affecting issues in marriage and family. Real and significant changes in the conditions of our society have altered the context of marriage. These changes must be taken into account in any theological appreciation and pastoral activity for the understanding of marriage among Orthodox Christians. So-called "mixed marriages" – an unfortunate term used in the past to describe a marriage with a non-Orthodox or non-Christian partner – are a growing phenomenon in the Orthodox world and must surely be looked upon as a more serious, if not a positive factor in the mission of the Church. The reality is that, statistically, inter-religious and inter-confessional marriages account for the majority of conversions to the Orthodox Church, and especially to the Greek Orthodox Church. This means that such marriages should be considered less a problem to be dealt with, as much as a privilege to be worked with.

The aim of the Church is not to condemn or even to curb such marriages, by labeling them conversions of convenience. Rather the Church should seek to embrace and to inform them, in order to render them conversions of conviction. The demands made of such couples, where one is Orthodox and the other not, are equally as serious in their implications: spiritual, ecclesiastical, social, and practical.⁴ There is a need for reform not so much in the marriage itself and its service or canons, but in the understanding of these today, as well as in the relevant pastoral care. In the final decision of the couple, it must be remembered that solutions based on doctrinal relativism and indifference ultimately lead to a gradual desacralization of marriage and family, thereby only creating more problems. On the other hand, inter-Christian marriages are at the same time a tragic result of ecclesiastical disunity and a positive opportunity for commitment to unity and mutual growth on the part of the whole community.

Divorce does not present the same implications and fears as it once did, which is not necessarily a result of our freedom from moral strictures of the past but perhaps an indisputable example of the dangers of contemporary secularism. The involvement of the State may often set pluralistic standards lower than, and even contrary to the Christian ideal, rendering the mystery of love and marriage secondary to the social, psychological, financial, and utilitarian purposes of marriage. Nevertheless, divorce is a reality to be confronted with compassion, not a problem to be avoided in ecclesiastical discussion. Just as society as a whole pays the price when a family break-up leads to violence and delinquency, so the Church shares in a responsibility for the marriage breakdown inasmuch as there has been a similar breakdown in the support system: the Church has failed to provide support through prayer, community, and assistance. We are all responsible for the failure of a marriage – for “this is a great mystery,” and it surely involves “Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5. 32). This is perhaps the reason for the petitions in the second Prayer of the Sacrament, asking God to:

remember the wedding party that is present at this rejoicing.

When the union of marriage is compared to the indissoluble communion between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5.32), this in no way implies that people happily married are necessarily close to Christ. Rather, it means that physical love can only become genuine love when it is lived in Christ, when it is identified with His death and resurrection. In this dialectic of death and resurrection one can also readily appreciate the ascetic aspect of marriage and love. This asceticism has already been discussed in relation to the monastic state. Here, it will be examined in reference to the married life.

Chastity in marriage is repeatedly underlined throughout the prayers and petitions of the marriage service. This is appropriate since both marriage and virginity have the same source and goal, namely, union with Christ. Chastity, however, is understood as the integrity of the human person and is never reduced to the merely physical aspect. The wedding service shows no reserva-

tion towards sexuality, no trace of despicability or even suspicion. Rather, it demands the miracle of the transformation of *eros*. "Carnal" or "fleshly" sin is not the "sin of the flesh" but the sin committed *against* the flesh, against the sacredness of the Incarnation.

The ascetic aspect of marriage is further shown in the prayer asking for the Archangel Michael to prepare the marital chamber. Only a Church that believes in the sanctity and integrity of the body and the world could either imagine an angel preparing the bed of the couple, or else implore for the preservation of an undefiled marriage bed. Once again, the entire community is responsible for preserving the purity of this marriage. We are, all of us, accountable for and affected by a breakdown in the trust between this couple. The bodily expression of love is a language of radical honesty and commitment. Love is an act of faith and of faithfulness, just as faith is an act of love. And so the insistence on faithfulness in the Christian morals is an indication of the vulnerability of this communion. As with all language, it is always possible to lie; the temptation is to be less than honest.⁵ And so faithfulness is a revelation of the degree of truthfulness with others, as well as with ourselves, and consequently with God.

Marriage and the Eucharist

Marriage is an ecclesial celebration, and not a private affair. It is a social event, and not an individualistic matter. This is why at the commencement of both the betrothal and wedding ceremonies, the deacon prays "for the salvation of all," "for the peace of the whole world," and "for the clergy and all the people."

It is clear that the service was originally incorporated into the Divine Liturgy.⁶ In fact, the true meaning of marriage, its very sanctity, cannot be fully appreciated outside of its eucharistic context. The underlying purpose for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage within the Divine Liturgy was the recognition that the Eucharist was the real and tangible revelation of the Kingdom. The candles often held by the couple further symbolize this Kingdom as it appeared in the form of "fiery tongues" (Acts 2.2) at Pentecost, although they are probably more indicative of the

light of Christ that was so central to the Paschal rites of initiation in the early Church. Yet the couple itself are but the living elements offered to God, as bread and wine for the Eucharist, in expectation of His glorious and joyful transfiguration. The miracle of marriage which makes a "new creation," not a creation *ex nihilo*, but one that results from the existing conditions of the couple. One offers to God what one has and what one is, while God transforms the existing water into wine (see John 2.1-11). The result of this "new creation" is the way into eternity, symbolized by the circular "dance of Isaiah." This dance signifies the Church, led by Christ, who is symbolized by the Gospel Book held by the priest. Christ leads the couple in their new life as a microcosm of the Church and creation.

In the early Church, the bishop must have exercised considerable freedom in adopting various prayers which were then incorporated into the Divine Liturgy.⁷ In the eighth and ninth centuries, the number of such prayers increased and the ritual expanded. Yet even then, the marriage order was part of and never distinct from the Eucharist. The presiding clergyman was not an agent of Christ who "joined" the couple but the one who introduced them into a new life, beyond all legal constrictions.

Within the celebration of marriage one finds the same four fundamental elements encountered in the sacraments of both Baptism and the Eucharist. First of all, there is the act of *offering* whereby the couple offers themselves to one another and, together, to the Church. Secondly, there is an *anamnesis* or recollection of the saintly couples from Abraham and Sarah to Joachim and Anna, who prepared the way for of the advent of the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation of Christ. Thirdly, when the priest places the crowns on the heads of the bride and groom he is making an *epiclesis*, an invocation (or a series of invocations) of the Holy Spirit upon the couple. This explodes into a joyous expression of dance around the table with the priest holding the Gospel, which represents the presence of Christ or, more correctly, re-presents Christ on earth. Finally, the service culminates in *communion*.

Until as late as the fifteenth century, the Sacrament of Marriage included communion from the Presanctified Gifts.⁸ As in the Divine Liturgy, the wedding ceremony commences with the

exclamation: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father..." And just as the Lord's Prayer is recited in the Divine Liturgy before the partaking of the cup of Communion, so in the wedding ceremony it is recited before the drinking of the wedding cup. Indeed, remarkable parallels may be drawn between the Liturgy of the Presanctified as we now have it, or even the Eucharist itself, and the service of matrimony. This similarity is a certain remnant of the practice in the early Church to regard a couple as married once they received for the first time Communion as "one flesh" rather than as two individuals. There is, in fact, no point during the service where the Church joins the couple in marriage, but only constant reference to the ratification of this marriage by the Church. There is quite simply an invocation to the Lord in the form of an exhortation: "O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honor." This is the Pentecost of marriage, which may be compared to an ancient eucharistic prayer found in the late first or early second-century text, the *Didache of the Twelve Apostles*:

Above all we give thanks to You because You are mighty; Yours be the glory for ever. Remember, O Lord, Your Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Your love; and gather it together from the four winds – the sanctified Church into Your Kingdom, which You have prepared; for Yours is the power and the glory for ever.⁹

The next phase was the separation of the marriage service from the Eucharist, an event which closely coincided with the Edict of Leo the Wise (893) and which required all legal marriages to be performed in the Church.¹⁰ A later, thirteenth-century rite introduces a new structure, whereby after Communion the couple is also given to drink of the "common cup" three times. In fact, this triple repetition of central gestures is a constant reminder and symbolism of the Trinity (as rings are exchanged three times, crowns are crossed three times, the cup is drunk from three times, and the dance moves three times around the table that representing the altar). The separation of the marriage ritual from the Eucharist meant that the emphasis increasingly moved away from the sacramental aspect to the juridical and social dimension.

Everyone desiring to marry needed to do so ecclesiastically as well, and so the Church was forced to become more discriminate with her sacraments, especially the Eucharist. During such an accommodation of the Church to the mores of society, the profanation of the Eucharist was avoided by its removal from the marriage rite.

There was a certain compromise with the State requirements which the Church had to accept once it acquired legal functions from the State. Gradually the Church ritual – originally *not* identified with the mystical union of the couple that was expressed in Holy Communion – became the only legal form of entering into marriage.¹¹ Furthermore, with the conclusion of the matrimonial contract after the twelfth century, whether one entered marriage in civil manner or through “betrothal” in the Church, the union was regarded as indissoluble. Thus, Balsamon notes in his commentary on Basil’s Canons 26 and 88 that, while in Basil’s time marriage was valid by mutual consent and Church Communion, in his own time (during the twelfth century) the actual rite of crowning and Communion was the only accepted way.

Inasmuch as marriage involved human beings in a fallen and sinful world, there was naturally a need also of legal rules and formal stipulations to protect the institution as such. One must, however, constantly remember that this formal, more “canonical” side is never an end in itself. The external “structure” is but a means of preserving the ideal and of maintaining in the world the uniqueness of the mystical union between Christ and His Church. For the Christian faith is not only an abstract truth about God, but a very real truth about humanity. In this respect, marriage is a joyful experience, but above all a sacred responsibility.

The Marriage Service

The theology of marriage, as it is expressed in Scripture and Holy Tradition, is essentially contained in the liturgical life of the Church rather than in juridical formulas which were influenced by the requirements of the State.

It is true that the Sacrament of Marriage which in fact includes two Services – that of Betrothal and that of Matrimony – con-

tains in precise and concise form the entire Orthodox teaching concerning marriage, as it has been conveyed to us through the ages in the Tradition of the Church. The actual development of the rite was naturally gradual, but the present ceremony echoes many prayers and psalms recited in the early Church.

The Church assumes the whole of life and transforms it into an offering. Thus every aspect and detail of humanity – including sexuality – is redeemed and baptized. This offering and redemption is the final purpose of marriage, namely the preparation for and realization of the Kingdom of God. According to a saying attributed to Christ and recently discovered in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, the Kingdom is opened to both sexes when their union is made perfect.¹² According to another, unrecorded saying of Christ, “the Kingdom has arrived at the moment when two are one.”¹³

The Genesis account, repeatedly referred to in the marriage Service, speaks of the creation of woman as a “helper,” a “helpmate” or “companion.” Woman is the response to man’s need, just as man is to woman’s, to live with another person capable of complete and mutual communion and reciprocation. Solitude can no longer be regarded as a human category, “for it is not good for any person to be alone” (Genesis 2.18). Whereas the rest of the animal kingdom was created in their double sexuality simultaneously, in the instance of humanity – at least according to the second creation account – the element of communion and complementariness is emphasized by the separate creation of the two, even though we are told that woman is taken out of man. The two dimensions of communion are thus revealed: we are to stand “side” by “side” (cf. Genesis 2.21-3) with our partner; only together can we come “face to face” with God (cf. 1 Corinthians 13.12). This understanding is echoed liturgically in the well-known phrase of prayer: “let us commit ourselves, and one another, and all our life to Christ God.”

The covenant or promise between God and His chosen people provides the prophetic and symbolic sign of love among human persons and the spiritual dimension of marriage. The Biblical notion of covenant is neither contractual nor juridical. It consti-

tutes, rather, an intimate personal relationship, the context for communion and mutuality. In Judaism, it is the *continuation* of the human race that is of primary importance, while in the Roman world the basic principle is that of *consent* or contract. These are not done away with in the New Testament, but Paul places marriage on a different level: "This is a great mystery, and I refer to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5.32). What is novel for the Christian couple is the possibility of transfiguring their union into a new consummation, into the Kingdom of God.

The betrothal rings are a symbol adopted by many peoples, and they usually denote power and authority. In Christianity they are a sign of self-sacrifice and mutual commitment, not in terms of a passive subjection to the other, but rather of a positive acceptance of the other person. Syrians and Armenians have a somewhat different custom which portrays the same truth: they exchange baptismal crosses as a sign of accepting the other person's "cross."¹⁴ Indeed, whereas in the Armenian and Syrian rites the crosses come from the couple themselves, in the Byzantine and Coptic rites the rings are given by the priest as representative of the Church acting on behalf of God: the rings symbolize God's personal commitment to protect and glorify His faithful servants. The "subjection" in question is "out of reverence for Christ," according to the Epistle reading (Ephesians 5.20-33). It is the noble recognition of the image of God in the other person, and the loving rendering of precedence to this person. Any reference to fear (v. 33) in this case is not an allusion to human terror but rather to the feeling of awe before the divine presence that is concealed in the other person, whether husband or wife.

Another significant feature projected by the betrothal service is that it is God who leads the lives of men and women; it is He who guides them. This divine direction is the meaning of the "dance of Isaiah" that is led by the priest, for "by the Lord is a woman joined to a man" (Proverbs 19.14). Just as marriage is not an individual affair but a corporate event, so also it incorporates not only human persons but God Himself. For God is personally involved in human history and in every aspect of each human story. The love of the betrothed couple is directed towards personal union and communion with God. In fact, the betrothal ser-

vice concludes with the putting on of rings as a seal of divine promise. The final prayer in this service provides Scriptural evidence with the examples of Joseph's ring in Egypt, Daniel's glory in Babylon, Tamar's very identity, and the Father's gift of the ring to the Prodigal Son in the New Testament parable. During the betrothal, the entire human history has been related in summary. With the opening of the marriage service we hear of the Promised Land, the new Jerusalem, the "Blessed Kingdom of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

The matrimonial prayers offer a brief yet surprisingly dense theological survey of the entire human history, beginning with the creation of the world, of man and woman, the fall, the unfolding of the scheme of divine providence through the ages, the patriarchs, prophets, and tribes of Israel and, finally, the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is a genealogical outline that aims at emphasizing the purpose of human life, which is the crowning in the Kingdom of God and the realization of God's presence among us. There is a constant leap from the historical to the eschatological, from the fallen creation to the New City of Jerusalem. The second prayer in the marriage service implores for the preservation of the couple as "Noah in the ark, Jonah in the belly of the whale, and the holy three Children in the fire." These three events from the Old Testament are symbolic of the three fundamental truths of our faith: the Church, the Resurrection, and the Holy Trinity.

According to the author of the fourth Gospel, the first miracle performed by Christ took place during the wedding at Cana (John 2.1-11). Yet in Cana, Christ merely confirmed that which was instituted in Eden¹⁵ and prefigured that which eventuated on Golgotha when "from His side came blood and water" (John 19.34). There is surely a close connection and interrelationship between creation, crucifixion, Baptism, Eucharist, and Marriage. Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God. The woman being created out of man's side, God proclaimed that "the two shall be one flesh." While our Lord hung upon the Cross, His side was pierced with a lance and from the wound water and blood issued forth. In the water of baptism, we died spiritually to our fallen nature and were resurrected to new life in Christ. In

the Eucharist, we offer bread and wine mixed with water and receive divine Communion through God's Body and Blood. Our Lord's first miraculous sign was transforming water into wine in celebration of conjugal communion. This again connects back to the "re-direction" of sexual love to its divine source. It draws the very presence of God into the sacrament of love and marriage. For the Church Fathers, Christ is the only and unique fiancé at every wedding service, for "marriage is a mysterious icon of the Church."¹⁶ This is yet another reason why the sacrament must take place in a church before a bishop or priest, and not in any worldly setting of one's choice. It is never merely a private affair but always an event of the entire communion of the Church.

The service concludes with the "dance of Isaiah." Three times the couple is led by the priest around a table which holds a Cross and symbolizes the altar. This same event takes place in precisely the same way and with precisely the same song around the altar during the Sacrament of Ordination. Here, too, there is a vocation involved, and it is the Prophet Isaiah and the holy martyrs who are recalled: (a) Isaiah inasmuch as he prophesied the birth of Christ on earth, Emmanuel, God with us. A married couple is called to be a miniature Church, a living cell constituting the very Body of Christ on earth; and (b) the martyrs who "struggled and were crowned" are a permanent reminder of the need to renounce egoism. The martyrdom of marriage is not simply a sign of the "hardships" to be faced together; we usually create our own havoc and difficulties. Rather, it is a symbol of the Cross and of the ascetic struggle to die constantly for the other person. "Grant them, Lord," prays the priest, "the joy which the blessed Helen had when she found the precious Cross." Cross and love – "love unto death" – are continually underlined.

The priest carries the Book of the Gospels, for the way of marriage is not simply a journey but is led around the eternal axis of the Word of God. The sacrament, however, does not abolish the personal freedom of the couple. It is they who must desire to have Christ as the center and circumference of their life, which is consequently filled with joy. The sadistic view that virtue in Christianity is identified with pain and sacrifice is foreign to the teaching of our Church which accepts both the joy and sorrow of the

couple, and prays for their happiness and pleasure in life – a life from the very outset given to humanity to enjoy. The final Prayer of the sacrament asks that:

the all-holy Trinity... may bless [the couple],
and grant [them] long life... progress in life...
replenishing [them] with all the good things of the
earth.

Conclusion

It comes as no surprise that the institution of marriage is being criticized and doubted today. In a society of materialism and individualism, it is natural for marriage to lose all meaning. In fact, it is more surprising that marriage still stands as high as it does. And it is not a question merely of pre-marital courses to counsel couples, or even of trial periods in marriages. There must occur a radical change in our way of life which today, unfortunately, gives absolute precedence to the individual. The question, then, addressed to the Church concerning its view on “pre-marital sex” is wrongly posed. We must stop thinking in terms of coded laws. The Church is precisely a communion of persons, a union between mortal and immortal, humanity and God. Marriage grants the possibility to live in the Church, that is to say to live in a personal relationship through which *eternity* is revealed. Outside the Church any physical relationship merely postpones death.¹⁷ Only in the Church can two people participate in the life-giving death of Christ, transforming mere survival into authentic life. There is no question of abstract idealism here, for a sacrament is precisely a reality and experience wherein both humanity and God act. This cooperation (or *synergy*) is the underlying significance of the great “mysterion” of marriage.

Life is a journey – a difficult and complex journey. And marriage is one way of traveling – indeed of enjoying and not simply enduring – this journey through sharing. Yet the goal of the journey lies ahead; the significance of the sacrament lies in the Kingdom. It is this Kingdom for which we truly hope and which is our true home.

Notes

¹John Chrysostom, *Homily XXVI, 2-3 on I Corinthians* PG 61.215, and *Homily on Colossians I, 2*, PG62.387. References to the Sacrament of Marriage are taken from N.M.Vaporis (ed.), *An Orthodox Prayerbook* (Brookline, 1977), with minor modifications. For a helpful insight into the sacramental dimension of love and marriage, particularly in relation to other Sacraments, see the contribution by A. Calivas in ed. F. Litsas, *A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church* (New York, 1984) pp. 277-83.

²Cf. R. G. Stephanopoulos, "Marriage and Family in Ecumenical Perspective," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 25 (1981) p. 26.

³Sr. Magdalen, *Children in the Church Today: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, 1991) p. 14.

⁴The significant work done in this area between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Bilateral Theological Discussions may be found in E. J. Kilmartin, *Toward Reunion* (New York, 1979). Cf. also L. J. Patsavos, "A Canonical Response to Intra-Christian and Inter-Religious Marriages," in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40: 3-4 (1995), pp. 287-298. The entire issue of this journal presents various Orthodox perspectives on "mixed marriages."

⁵For a remarkable interpretation of the relationship between fidelity and sexuality, see W. Berry, *Standing on Earth: Selected Essays* (Ipswich, 1991).

⁶Cf. reference as early as in Codex 958 on Mt. Sinai (tenth century). See Meyendorff, *Marriage*, pp.18-24. See also K. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (Oxford, 1983) pp. 95-121; and with M. Searle, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville, 1992).

⁷Cf. Theodore of Studium, *Letter to Symeon* 22, PG 99.973CD. This appears to be the case as late as into the fourteenth century with the *Euchologia*: cf. the monumental articles on the *Euchologion* of the Church of Constantinople by M. Arranz in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 48 (1982) - 59 (1993).

⁸Cf. J. Meyendorff, "Marriage et Eucharistie," in *Messenger Orthodoxe* 49-50 (Paris, 1970), and *Dieu est Vivant* (ed. O. Clément, Paris, 1979) p. 352.

⁹Cf. chapter 10 in H. Bettenson (ed.), *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford, 1978) p. 51 [modified], and P. Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, 1985) p. 151. Strictly speaking, there is not only one *epiclesis* in each sacrament, but rather an *epiclesis* in each prayer, although some Pneumatological references may be more apparent than others. Thus, the *epiclesis* in the Marriage Service is embedded in the longer prayers: "be present also here, O Lord, with Your invisible presence," "send down Your heavenly grace upon these Your servants," "stretch forth Your hand from Your holy dwelling place." I am indebted to Dr. J. Klentos for this clarification, as well as for his critical comments on this chapter.

¹⁰Cf. S. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (Cambridge, 1955) p. 63.

¹¹Cf. Canon 98 of the Council in Trullo.

¹²Logion 22, in A. Guillaumont (ed.), *The Apocryphal Books. Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, 1959) p. 57.

¹³Cf. Clement of Rome, *Letter II to the Corinthians* 12,2, PG 1.345B. See also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* (in *Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*: Berlin, 1960, pp. 201-7).

¹⁴T. Zannes, "This Is a Great Mystery," in *Eros and Marriage* (Athens, 1972) p. 15.

¹⁵Augustine, *Commentary on John's Gospel* IX, 2. See *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, 1956) p. 63.

¹⁶John Chrysostom, *Homily XII on Colossians* IV, 5, PG 62:387. For an enlightening essay on the theology of marriage, see T. Stylianopoulos, *The Good News of Christ* (Brookline, 1991) pp. 99-138, which examines the service of, and explores important issues regarding, marriage.

¹⁷Cf. P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ* (Crestwood, 1985) p. 47.

Kallistos of Diokleia (b. 1934)

Monasticism and Marriage

The two complement each other, much as the kataphatic and the apophatic ways balance and complete one another in theology. The kataphatic or affirmative way points to the presence of God the Creator in all created things, in all images and symbols. The apophatic or negative way insists that God is infinitely above and beyond all that He has made; and in the name of what is greater, it puts aside that which is less, reaching out beyond every image and symbol, and plunging into the divine darkness. The one attains to a mediated, the other to an immediate, knowledge of the living God. Both are necessary to a sound and balanced theology. A totally kataphatic theology would risk degenerating into idolatry; an altogether apophatic theology would end up as mere emptiness, a kind of intellectual nihilism.

How does this apply to marriage and monasticism? Both are sacraments of love. But what the married couple realizes in a mediated way, the monks seek to achieve directly. In marriage, as in kataphatic or symbolical theology, the archetype is attained through the ikon. Husband and wife express their love for God through and in their love for one another. "Grant, O Lord, that in loving each other, we may love You Yourself:" such is their prayer to God. In monasticism, as in apophatic theology, the ikon is laid aside: love for God is expressed directly, not through the image or medium of another human person. Like the two ways in theology, the two forms of love complete and balance one another. Both are true expressions of the royal or universal priesthood of the baptized. Both are necessary to the Church, and neither can be properly understood except in the light of the other. In the words of Paul Evdokimov, "The best and perhaps the only way to deepen our understanding of the distinctive value of marriage is to grasp in its fullness the meaning of monasticism." By the same token, only those monks who regard marriage as a source of grace and a means of deification can appreciate to the full the positive significance of their own renunciation.

It is tempting to make a simple contrast: to say that asceticism and chastity are the characteristics of monasticism, and love the characteristic of marriage. Yet the two states cannot be thus opposed. Married people, as well as monks, are called to the "narrow way" of the ascetic life, to fasting and self-denial; if the monks are martyrs, then so also are the married, as the crowns and hymns at the Marriage Service plainly indicate. Perfect love is always a crucified love; yet, for both monks and married Christians, if the cross is voluntarily accepted, it proves a door to resurrection and new life. In the same way, chastity – understood in its proper sense of integrity and integration – is a quality not only of the single but of the married life. In a sense, marriage includes within itself the characteristic values of monasticism: the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience – when understood, as they should be, in a positive manner as a way of enabling us to be free to love God and one another – are also applicable to the married life. And if asceticism and chastity are marks of the married life, then love (as we have already seen) is a mark of the true monk.

The monk is not a dualist but, to the same degree as the married Christian although in another mode, he is concerned to affirm the intrinsic goodness of the material creation and the human body. If the monk abstains from marriage, this is not because the married state is sinful, but because he personally is called to express his love for God and humankind on a different level. Monk and married Christian are both alike ascetics, and both alike materialists – using the word in its true Christian sense, of one who affirms the Spirit-bearing potentialities of material things. Both alike are sin-denying and world-affirming. The difference between them lies only in the outward conditions under which their ascetic warfare is carried on.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century) speaks of the Son and the Holy Spirit as the "two hands" of God the Father; in all His work of creation, redemption, and sanctification, God is always using His two hands together. Marriage and monasti-

cism are likewise the "two hands" of the Church, the two complementary expressions of the one royal priesthood. Each needs the other, and in her mission the Church uses both her hands together.

From "The Monastic Life as a Sacrament of Love," in *Ekklesia kai Theologia* 2 (1981) pp. 697-699.

Epilogue

Dionysios the Areopagite (c. 500)

Now, some of our writers about holy things have thought the title of "Eros" to be more divine than that of "Love." Ignatios the Divine writes: "He who is my eros is crucified." And in the "Introductions" of Scripture, you will find someone saying concerning the Divine Wisdom: "I yearned for her beauty." Let us not, therefore, shrink from this title of "Eros," nor be perturbed and frightened by anything that anyone may say about it. For I think the Sacred Writers regard the titles "Love" and "Eros" as of one meaning; but preferred, when speaking of Eros in a heavenly sense, to qualify it with the word "real" because of the inconvenient pre-notion of some people. For whereas the title of "Real Eros" is employed not merely by ourselves but even by the Scriptures, humankind (not grasping the unity intended when Eros is ascribed to God) fell by its own propensity into the notion of a partial, physical, and divided quality, which is not true Eros but a vain image of Real Eros, or rather a lapse from this. For humankind at large cannot grasp the simplicity of the one Divine Eros, and hence, because of the offense it gives to most people, it is used concerning the Divine Wisdom to lead and raise them up to the knowledge of the Real Eros until they are set free from all offense; and often on the other hand when it was possible that base minds should suppose that which is not convenient, the word that is held in greater reverence is used concerning ourselves. "Your love," says someone, "came upon me like as the love of

a mad dog seeking whom he may devour, we learn from the history of Job. If then you refuse battle with your antagonist, take yourself to another world where he is not; then, avoidance of conflict with him will be possible for you, as well as relaxation without peril to evangelical doctrines.

From *On the Renunciation of the World*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. IX (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962) pp. 17-18.

Gregory of Nyssa (331–95)

(a) That Marriage Is Not To Be Despised

We are not ignorant of the fact that marriage also is not deprived of God's blessing. But since there is sufficient support for it and since the common nature of humanity, bestowed upon all who come to birth through marriage, automatically inclines in this direction, whereas virginity somehow goes against nature, it would be superfluous to go to the trouble of writing a plea for marriage and a eulogy of it emphasizing its indisputable inducement, I mean pleasure, unless there should be need of such words because of some people who tamper with the teachings of the Church on marriage, whom the apostle calls "those having their conscience branded." These, forsaking the guidance of the Holy Spirit because of the teaching of demons, engrave scars and brands upon their hearts, detesting God's creatures as abominations, addressing them as evil-bringers, causes of evil, and the like. But He speaks saying: "What have I to do with judging those outside?" For they are truly outside of the court of the mysteries of the word, being lodged, not in the shelter of God, but in the stable of the wicked one, being captives of his will, according to the voice of the apostle. And this is because they do not understand that evil is the turning to extremes, all virtue being looked upon as lying in the mean, since one everywhere distinguishes virtue from evil by taking the mean between the slack and the taut....

One should neither remain aloof from the more divine desires, nor should one reject the idea of marriage. It is not reasonable to disregard the economy of nature or to slander what is honorable as disgusting. For just as we said in the illustration of the water

and the source, when the farmer directs the water to a certain place and draws it off, there is a need for a small central stream to facilitate the flow in proportion to the amount required for it to be mingled again easily with the main stream. But, if someone imprudently and unskillfully opens up a channel for the water, there is the risk that the whole stream will abandon its straight course and be broken up into gullies. In the same way, since there is need in life also for the succession of one thing from another, if someone uses reproduction similarly while spiritual considerations hold priority, exercising his desire for such things sparingly and fearfully in accordance with the holy Virgin which served the unblemished childbirth, he is blessed on the grounds that the offspring does not destroy virginity and virginity does not stand in the way of such begetting. For, as Isaiah says, where "the spirit of salvation is born the wishes of the flesh are entirely useless."

From *On Virginity*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. LVIII (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967) pp. 31-34 and 61-62.

(b) Spiritual Love

Some there may be who do not wear the garment of a clean conscience as befits the divine espousals; they may be involved in their own thoughts, and try to drag down the pure words of the Bride and Bridegroom to the level of irrational, animal pleasure, and thus become absorbed in shameful images. Such as these must be cast out of the community who joyfully participate in the marriage, and be assigned to the weeping and gnashing of teeth instead of the happiness of the marriage chamber.

Some are saved by fear, as for example, when we break off from sin because we have our eyes on the threatened punishment of hell. There are others, too, who lead lives of virtue because of the rewards promised to the good; and these possess their goal not by charity, but by their hope of reward. But he who runs in spirit to reach perfection, casts out fear. For it is the attitude of a slave, who does not stay with his master out of love, and simply does not run away for fear he will be beaten. The truly virtuous person even despises rewards, lest he give the im-

pression that he esteems the gift more than the giver. He loves with his whole heart and soul and strength (Deut. 6.5) not creatures that come from God, but Him who is the source of all good. And He who calls us to share in Him commands that this disposition be in the souls of all of us who listen to Him.

(c) The Order of Charity

We must be aware of the order of love which the Law teaches us, that is, how we are to love God, our neighbor, our wives, our enemies; and our fulfillment of the law of charity must never be inverted or contrary to good order. We should love God with our whole heart and soul and strength and with all our senses, and our neighbor as ourselves. If we are of pure souls, we are to love our wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5.25); but if we are subject to passion, we should love them as our own bodies (Eph. 5.28). This is the command of Paul, who has set up the order in this matter. We are to love our enemies by not returning evil, but by requiting injury with kindness.

But as it is, we see in most people a confused and disordered charity, totally lacking in harmony and orderly direction. Some so love money and honor and (if they feel so inclined) women, with their whole soul and strength, that they would even be willing to give up their lives for them. Their love for God is only so much show; and for their neighbor, they barely show the love which they owe to their enemies. And on those who hate them their habit is to inflict more pain than they themselves have suffered.

And so the Bride says: "Set charity in order within me that I may offer God what is His due and strike the right proportion in my relationships with all else." And we perhaps may also understand the text to mean: Though I was at first beloved, by disobedience I was reckoned with the hated; but now once again I have been restored to favor and united by love to my Bridegroom. Confirm in me the stability and permanence of the grace, you who are the friends of the Bridegroom; and by your care and concern preserve for me permanently that inclination I have towards constant improvement.

(d) The Wound of Love

As the soul then is raised up by these divine elevations, she sees within herself the sweet dart of love that has wounded her, and she glories in the wound: "I am wounded with love." Indeed it is a good wound and a sweet pain by which life penetrates the soul; for by the tearing of the arrow she opens, as it were, a door, an entrance into herself. For no sooner does she receive the dart of love than the image of archery is transformed into a scene of nuptial joy

The Bridegroom and our Archer are the same. And the bride and the arrow is the purified soul which He takes and aims at a good target. Thus does He allow the bride to share in His eternal incorruptibility: with His right hand He gives her the grace of years and a long life; with His left He dispenses the wealth of eternal riches and the glory of God, in which those who seek the glory of the world cannot share. This is why she says: "His left hand is under my head" (Cant. 2.6), for this is the way He aims the arrow towards the mark. With His right hand He takes and draws me back and makes my journey to heaven an easy one, and I am sped there on my way even though I do not leave the Archer; I am carried on my flight, and yet I rest in the arms of my Master.

(e) 'My Beloved to Me'

"I to my beloved," says the bride, "and my beloved to me" (Cant. 6 2). This is the norm and limit of all perfection. By these words we are taught that the purified soul must possess nothing but God alone, and must look to nothing outside of Him. Hence it must so cleanse itself of every material thought and deed, that it may be completely transformed into something spiritual and immaterial, and thus make of itself a most radiant image of that archetypal Beauty. Take the example of a person who looks at a painting on a canvas that has been very modeled on its archetype. He declares that the same form exists in both, that the beauty of the model is in the likeness, and the archetype is clearly visible in its imitation. In the same way the bride, in saying, "I to my

beloved and my beloved to me," declares that she has modeled herself on Christ, thus recovering her own proper loveliness, that blessed state which our human nature had in the beginning, for now her beauty has developed in the image and likeness of that sole true Beauty which is the prototype.

It is just like a mirror that has been artistically and practically designed: it accurately reflects on its pure surface the image of any face that is in front of it. So too the soul reflects the pure image of that unsullied Beauty, when she has prepared herself properly and cast off every material stain. Then may the soul say (for she is a kind of living mirror possessing free will): When I face my Beloved with my entire surface, all the beauty of His form is reflected within me.

Paul too says this when he declares that he lives to God and is dead to the world, that Christ alone lives in him (Gal. 5.19-20). And when he says, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1.21), he proclaims that no human or material passion lives in him – not pleasure, grief, anger, fear, cowardice, vehement emotion, self-esteem, insolence, ill will, envy, vindictiveness, avarice, or any other inordinate disposition of the soul. For I have Him alone, and He is none of these. For I have stripped away everything that is not Christ, and so I have nothing in my soul that is not in Him. Truly then "to me, to live is Christ," or, to use the words of the bride, "I to my beloved, and my beloved to me...."

Now to make my meaning clear. What I am saying is that the soul feeds on the virtues, and that text by way of symbolism is speaking of the virtues as lilies. Whosoever is filled with these by a good life makes himself radiant by reflecting in his character the quality of every virtue throughout his life.

From H. Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979) pp. 152-3, 177-80, 281-3.

heard the whistle, the woman stopped her ears and withdrew to the inner chamber and shut the doors." The old man said that this courtesan is our soul, that her lovers are the passions and other people; that the lord is Christ; that the inner chamber is the eternal dwelling; those who whistle are the evil demons, but the soul always takes refuge in the Lord.

From B. Ward (ed.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975) pp. 112 and 76.

(b) Virtue in Marriage

Two of the fathers entreated God to inform them as to the measure [of spiritual excellence] to which they had arrived, and a voice came to them which said, "in such and such a village of Egypt there is a certain man in the world who is called Eucharistos, and his wife Mary, and you have not as yet arrived at the same measure as they." Now when the fathers heard [this] they marveled, and they rose up and came to that village, and they inquired for and found the house and the wife of Eucharistos, and they asked her, saying, "Where is your husband?" And she answered and said to them, "He is a shepherd, and he is in the field pasturing sheep," and she brought them into her house. And when the evening had come her husband came from the sheep, and seeing the fathers he rejoiced with great joy, and he prepared a table [for them] and brought water that he might wash their feet. Then the fathers answered and said to him, "We will eat nothing, but tell us what is your work," and Eucharistos said to them with great humility, "I am a shepherd, and this is my wife." Now the fathers entreated him to inform them concerning his life and works, but he concealed the matter and refused to speak. Finally they said to him, "God told us to come to you," and when Eucharistos heard this he was afraid, and he told them, saying, "Behold, we inherited these sheep from our parents, and whatsoever God provides as [our] income from them we divide into three portions; one portion [we devote] to charity, another portion to the love of strangers, and the remaining part serves for our own use. Since the time when I took this woman to wife we have not defiled ourselves, and she is a virgin, and each of us

sleeps alone; at night time we wear sackcloth, and in the daytime we put it off and array ourselves in our [ordinary] attire, and no one has known this thing until the present moment." And when the fathers heard [this] they glorified God.

They say concerning Abba Anthony that on one occasion, when he was praying in his cell he heard a voice which said to him, "Anthony, you have not yet arrived [at the state of excellence] of a certain man who is a tailor and who dwells in Alexandria." Then Anthony rose up in the morning, and took a palm stick and departed to him, and when the man saw him, he was disturbed; and the old man said to him, "Tell me what you do, and how you live," and the tailor said to him, "I do not myself know that I do any good, but I know only that when I rise up in the morning, before I sit down to the labor of my hands, I give thanks to God, and praise Him, and that I set my evil deeds before my eyes, saying, 'All the people who are in this city will go into the kingdom of God, because of their alms and good deeds, except myself, and I shall inherit punishment for my sins'; and again in the evening, before I sleep, I do the same things." Now when Abba Anthony heard these things, he said, "Verily, as the person who works in gold, and who does beautiful work, cleanly and in peace, even so are you; through your beautiful thoughts you will inherit the kingdom of God, while I, who have passed the whole of my life in the desert, separated [from people], have never overtaken you."

Abba Anthony received a revelation in the desert, saying, "In such and such a city there is a man who resembles you; he is a physician, and he works and gives whatsoever he earns to the poor and needy, and, with the angels, he ascribes holiness to God three times each day."

When Abba Makarios was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice which said, "Makarios, you have not yet arrived [at the state of excellence] of two women who are in such and such a city;" the old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city.

Now therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place [of the abode of the women], he knocked at the door, and there came out one of the women and brought him into the house. And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came near and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, "On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this labor, and with great difficulty; I have come from the desert; tell me, then, what works do you do?" And they said to him, "Believe us, father; neither of us has ever been absent from, or kept herself back from, her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, would you see in us?" Then the old man made apologies to them, and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their labor, and thereupon they said to him, "According to worldly considerations we are strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it happened that the two of us married two men who were brethren in the flesh. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us has spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins; but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should come out of our mouths." Now when Makarios heard [this] he said, "Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeks the desire [of a person], and gives the Spirit to everyone."

They used to tell a story about certain brethren who were members of the household of Abba Poemen. Now while these men were dwelling in Egypt their mother wished to see them, but was unable to do so, and she watched for them as they were going to the church, and went out to meet them; but as soon as they saw her they went back to their cell and shut the door on themselves. Then their mother took up her stand by the door, and spoke [to them], and wept and sighed heavily. And when Abba Job heard

her, he went in to Abba Poemen and said to him, "What shall we do in respect of this old woman who is weeping by the door?" Then Abba Poemen rose up and drew near to the door and pressed himself against it and, hearing her speaking in the deepest sorrow, he said to her, "Will you, who are an old woman, cry in this fashion?" Now as soon as she heard his voice she wept the more, and she cried out, saying, "I want to see my sons. For what is this that I see in you? Perhaps I did not rear you? Perhaps I am not your mother? Perhaps you did not suck at my breasts? Perhaps you did not go forth from my womb? I am prevented by my old age, but now that I have heard your voice my bowels have been moved." The old man said to her, "Do you wish to see us here, or would you see us in that country [beyond the grave]?" She said to him, "My sons, if I do not see you here I shall see you there." And the old man said to her, "If you will compel yourself not to see us here, you shall, in very truth, see us there." Then the old woman departed, saying, "Yes, my son, if I shall see you there I shall not seek to see you here."

From E. A. Wallis-Budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers* vol. II (Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1978) pp. 149-51.

Isaiah the Solitary (5th century)

The Passion of Love

When the intellect grows strong, it prepares to pursue the love which quenches all bodily passions and which prevents anything contrary to nature from gaining control over the heart. Then the intellect, struggling against what is contrary to nature, separates this from what is in accordance with nature.

From *Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. I, trans. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) p. 26.

Diadochos of Photike (5th century)

The Love of God

Whoever loves himself cannot love God; but if, because of "the overflowing richness" of God's love, a person does not love him-

Gregory the Great (540–604)

How to Admonish the Married

Those bound in wedlock are to be admonished in one way, those free from the ties of wedlock in another. Those bound in wedlock are to be admonished that while mutually taking thought for each other, they should study to please their consorts without offense to their Maker. They must so act in the affairs of this world, as not to fail to desire the things that are God's. They should rejoice in the present good, but fear earnestly and with solicitude the eternal evil. They should so grieve over temporal evils, as to fix their hope with every reassurance on everlasting good, to the end that they remain conscious that what they are engaged on now is transitory, but what they hope for is permanent. The evils of this world must not destroy the courage of their heart, and they should let the hope of celestial things give it strength. Nor must the good things of this life deceive them, when the dread of the evil of the Judgment casts them into sadness.

Now, then, the mind of married Christians is both weak and steadfast, inasmuch as it cannot altogether disregard temporal matters, and yet is able in desire to unite itself with the eternal. Though the mind is now debased in fleshly delights, it must grow strong with the refreshment which heavenly hope affords; and though it possesses worldly things for use on the way, it should hope for the enjoyment of divine things at the end. It should not give itself entirely to the things it is now engaged in, lest it wholly fall from what it should steadfastly hope for. St. Paul expresses this well and succinctly when he says: "They who have wives, should be as if they had none, and they that weep, as though they wept not, and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not." Now, that man has a wife as though he had not, who so enjoys carnal solace by her means, that for love of her he is never deflected from the rectitude of better purposes to evil deeds. He has a wife as though he had not, who views all things as transitory and endures the cares of the flesh as a necessity, but looks forward in his desires to everlasting spiritual joys. That man weeps as though not weep-

ing, who laments outward adversities in such a way as yet to know how to rejoice in the consolations of eternal hope. And again, to rejoice as though not rejoicing, is so to uplift the mind from things below, as never to cease to be concerned regarding the things that are above. Paul aptly adds at once to the aforesaid passage: "For the fashion of this world passes away" – as if he plainly said: "Love not the world constantly, since the world which you love cannot itself remain constant." It is vain that you fix your heart, as though you were yourself abiding, while that which you love passes away.

The married are to be admonished to bear with mutual patience the things in which they sometimes displease each other, and to assist each other to salvation by mutual encouragement. For Scripture says: "Bear one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ." Indeed, the law of Christ is love, for it was this that prompted Him to bestow bountifully His blessing on us and to bear our evils in patience. Then, therefore, do we fulfill the law of Christ by our imitation of it, when we too are generous in bestowing our own good things, and lovingly endure the evil things of our fellow human beings. They are also to be admonished to consider not so much what each has to endure from the other, as what the other is made to endure. For if one considers what is endured from oneself, that which is endured from another is the more easily borne.

The married must be admonished to bear in mind that they are united in wedlock for the purpose of procreation, and when they abandon themselves to immoderate intercourse, they transfer the occasion of procreation to the service of pleasure. Let them realize that though they do not then pass beyond the bounds of wedlock, yet in wedlock they exceed its rights. Therefore, it is necessary that they should efface by frequent prayer what they befoul in the fair form of intercourse by the admixture of pleasure. Thus it is that the Apostle, versed in celestial medicine, did not so much prescribe for the strong, as point out the remedies for the weak, when he said: "Concerning the things that you wrote to me, it is good for a man not to touch a woman; but for fear of

fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." For in setting out beforehand the fear of fornication, he surely did not give a precept to those who stood on their feet, but pointed out the bed to such as were falling, lest perhaps they should collapse to the ground. Therefore, he further added for the weak: "Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband." So, for the sake of those in whose case he made a certain concession to pleasure in the most honorable estate of wedlock, he added: "But I speak this by indulgence, not by commandment."

Now, the mention of indulgence suggests the presence of sin, but sin which is more readily forgiven, in so far as the sinfulness does not consist in what is done but in what is done lawfully, indeed, but is not kept under control. This truth is well expressed by Lot in his own case when he fled from burning Sodom, and yet on coming to Segor, he did not at once go up into the mountains. To flee from burning Sodom is to shun the sinful fires of the flesh, and the mountain height is the purity of those who are continent; and those are at least, as it were, on a mountain, who beyond exercising carnal intercourse as far as is required for the procreation of offspring, do not indulge in fleshly pleasure. To stand on the mountain is to seek nothing in the flesh but the fruits of offspring. To stand on the mountain is to avoid cleaving to the flesh in a fleshly way.

But there are many who, though abandoning the sins of the flesh, yet in the state of wedlock do not restrict themselves to the practice of intercourse as is due. This is the case of Lot abandoning Sodom, but not proceeding as far as the mountains: these people do relinquish a reprehensible life, but still they do not really attain to perfection in conjugal continence. There is the midway city of Segor for saving the weak fugitive: that is to say, when the married are incontinent in having intercourse, but shun falling into grievous sins, they are nevertheless pardoned and saved.

They find, as it were, a little city in which to be protected from the fire. For the conjugal life as they practice it is not, indeed,

conspicuously virtuous, yet it is secure from punishment. Therefore, the same Lot says to the angel: "There is a city here at hand to which I may flee; it is a little one, and I shall be saved in it. Is it not a little one, and my soul shall live?" The city is said to be near, and yet is represented as a refuge of safety, because conjugal life is neither greatly separated from worldly life, nor yet is it alien, from the joy of salvation. But then only do the married in this manner of conduct save their lives, so to say, in a little city, when they intercede for one another by assiduous supplications. Wherefore, the angel rightly said to the same Lot: "Behold, also in this I have heard your prayers, not to destroy the city for which you have spoken." For it is evident that when supplication is made to God, such manner of conjugal life is by no means condemned. In regard to such supplication, Paul also admonishes, saying: "Defraud not one another, except perhaps by consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer."

From *Pastoral Rule* (London: Newman Press, 1950) pp.186-91.

Theodore the Ascetic (7th century)

The Law of Love

If God is love, he who has love has God within himself. If love is absent, nothing is of the least profit to us (cf. 1 Cor. 13.3); and unless we love others we cannot say that we love God. For, writes St. John, "if a person says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4.20). And again he states: "No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John 4.12). From this it is clear that love is the most comprehensive and the highest of all the divine blessings spoken of in the Holy Scriptures. And there is no form of virtue through which one may become akin to God and united with Him that is not dependent upon love and encompassed by it; for love unites and protects the virtues in an indescribable manner.

When we receive visits from our brethren, we should not consider this an irksome interruption of our stillness, lest we cut ourselves off from the law of love. Nor should we receive them

2. An intellect that has acquired spiritual love does not have thoughts unworthy of this love about anyone.

3. He who conceals his hypocrisy beneath feigned love blesses with his mouth but curses inwardly.

4. He who has acquired love endures calmly and patiently the injuries and sufferings that his enemies inflict on him.

5. Love alone harmoniously joins all created things with God and with each other.

From *Philokalia*, vol. II, trans. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) p. 307.

John Klimakos (579–649)

(a) Monasticism and Marriage

Some people living carelessly in the world put a question to me: "How can we who are married and living amid public cares aspire to the monastic life?"

I answered: "Do whatever good you may. Speak evil of no one. Rob no one. Tell no lie. Despise no one and carry no hate. Do not separate yourself from the Church assemblies. Show compassion to the needy. Do not be a cause of scandal to anyone. Stay away from the bed of another, and be satisfied with what your own wives can provide you. If you do all this, you will not be far from the kingdom of heaven."

Let us hasten with joy and trepidation to the noble contest and with no fear of our enemies. They are themselves unseen, but they can look at the appearance of our soul. If they are really to see our spirits bowed down by fear, then indeed they will make a harsher attack against us, knowing how much we tremble. Let us courageously arm ourselves against them. No one goes to battle against a plucky fighter....

So then rejoice always in the Lord, all you servants of God. Recognize this first sign of the Lord's love. It is He who has summoned you.

(b) The Transformation of Love

He told me this true story: "I had a brother here about ten years ago, and he was very active and enthusiastic. When I saw how zealous he was, I really trembled for him in case the devil, in envy, should trip his foot against an obstacle as he sped along – something that can happen to those in a hurry. And in fact it happened that way. One evening, late, he came to me, showed me an open wound, looked for a dressing, requested cauterization, and was in a very alarmed state. The physician did not wish to make too deep an incision, for the man deserved sympathy. But when the brother saw this, he flung himself on the ground, clasped my feet, moistened them with copious tears, and asked to be shut up in the prison you have seen. "It is impossible for me to avoid going there," he cried, and – something most unusual among the sick – he pleaded with the physician to change his kindness to harshness, and he hurried off to become a companion and fellow sufferer among the penitents. The grief that comes from loving God pierced his heart like a sword, and on the eighth day he died, having asked not to be given burial. But I brought him here and had him buried among the fathers, as he had deserved, because after his week of slavery he had been freed on the eighth day. And let me tell you that someone surely knows that he did not rise up from my foul and wretched feet before he had won God's favor. It is not to be wondered at, for having received in his heart the faith of the Gospel harlot, he moistened my humble feet with the same trust. Everything is possible for the believer, said the Lord (cf. Mark 9.23). I have watched impure souls mad for physical love but turning what they know of such love into a reason for penance and transferring that same capacity for love to the Lord. I have watched them master fear so as to drive themselves unsparingly toward the love of God. That is why, when talking of that chaste harlot, the Lord does not say, "because she feared," but rather, "because she loved much" she was able to drive out love with love (Luke 7.47).

What is the mode, what is the law joining together those steps that the lover has set as an ascent in his heart? (cf. Psalm 83.6). I thirst to know the number of those steps, and the time required to climb them. He who discovered your struggle and your vision has spoken to us of the guides. But he would not – perhaps he could not – tell us any more.

This empress, as if coming from heaven, spoke thus in my soul's hearing: "My love, you will never be able to know how beautiful I am unless you get away from the grossness of the flesh. So let this ladder teach you the spiritual union of the virtues. And I am there on the summit, for as the great man said, a man who knew me well: 'Remaining now are faith, hope, and love, these three. But love is the greatest of them all' (1 Cor. 13.13)."

From *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (London: S.P.C.K., 1982) pp. 78, 128-9, 171, 286-90.

Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022)

(a) *Monasticism and Marriage*

Many regard the eremitic life as the most blessed, others the common or cenobitic life, and others the work of government, of teaching and instruction and Church administration, for this provides many with nourishment of body and soul. For my part, however, I would not set any one of these above the rest, nor would I praise one and depreciate another. But in every situation, whatever the work or the task involved, it is the life lived for God and according to God which is wholly blessed.

From *Theological and Practical Chapters III*, 65 (ed. Darrouzes, *Sources Chrétiennes* 51, p.100).

(b) *Love as the Criterion of the True Followers of Christ*

Forgive me, brethren, for digressing a little from the teaching of my discourse because of my longing for charity. For as I was mindful of it, "my heart rejoiced" (Psalm 16.9), as the holy David says, and I was moved to sing the praises of its marvels. I there-

fore entreat your love to pursue it with all your strength and to run after it with faith so that you may lay hold on it. You will by no means be disappointed of your hopes! However great your zeal and many the efforts of your asceticism, they are all in vain and without useful result unless they attain to love in a broken spirit (Psalm 50.19). By no other virtue, by no other fulfillment of the Lord's commandment, can anyone be known as a disciple of Christ, for He says, "By this will all people know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John. 13.55). It is for this reason that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John. 1.14). For this reason He was incarnate; He willingly endured His life-giving sufferings, in order that He might deliver us, His own creatures, from the bonds of hell, and restore us and lead us up to heaven. Moved by love the Apostles ran that unceasing race and cast on the whole world the fishhook and net of the word to drag it up from the deep of idolatry and bring it safe into the port of the kingdom of heaven. Moved by love the Martyrs shed their blood that they might not lose Christ. Moved by it our God-bearing Fathers and teachers of the world eagerly laid down their own lives for the catholic and apostolic Church. We, though worthless, have entered on the leadership of you, our most worthy fathers and brethren, so that we may imitate them in every way as much as in us lies, and suffer and endure for your sake and do all for your edification and profit, that we might present you as perfect sacrifices, reasonable burnt offerings (cf. Rom. 12.1) on the table of God. For you are God's children, "whom God has given to me" (Isaiah 8.18) as sons, "my very heart" (Philem. 12), my eyes. In the words of the Apostle, you are "my pride" (2 Cor. 1.14) and the seal of my teaching office (1 Cor. 9.2).

My dear brethren in Christ, let us then be eager to employ all means, including mutual love, to serve God.... Have as your pattern him whom you have chosen as your spiritual father, even though I fall far short of being worthy thereof, so that God may rejoice over your harmony and perfection. Thus I too in my lowliness may rejoice as I see your continual progress in the life that is in accordance with God, as you increase in faith, in purity, in the fear of God, in reverence, in compunction and tears. By these

the inward man is purified and is filled with divine light, and wholly becomes the possession of the Holy Spirit in a contrite soul and a downcast mind. My joy will be a blessing for you and an increase of imperishable and blessed life in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever.

(c) Examples of Penitence among Laypersons

So it is possible for all people, brethren, not only for monks but for laypersons as well, to be penitent at all times and constantly, and to weep and entreat God, and by such practices to acquire all other virtues as well. That this is true John Chrysostom, the great pillar and doctor of the Church, bears witness with me. In his discourses on David, as he expounds the fiftieth Psalm, he asserts that this is possible for one who has wife and children, men and women, servants, a large household, and great possessions, and who is prominent in worldly affairs. Not only is he able daily to weep and pray and repent; he can also attain to perfection of virtue if he so wishes. He can receive the Holy Spirit and become a friend of God and enjoy the vision of Him. Such men before Christ's coming were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Lot at Sodom, and (to pass over the rest who are too many [to enumerate]) Moses and David. Under the new grace and dispensation of our God and Savior, Peter the unlettered fisherman, who had a mother-in-law and other [relatives], preached the God who had been revealed. Who could count those others, more numerous than the rain drops (Sirach 1.2) and the stars of heaven (Gen. 15.5), kings, rulers, prominent men, not to mention poor people and those in modest circumstances? They have cities and houses and the sanctuaries of Churches, which they have built with liberality; their homes for the aged and hospices for strangers remain and exist to this day. All the things they acquired during their lifetime they used with piety, not as though they owned them, but rather like servants of the Master who administers what He has entrusted to them according to His pleasure and who will, as Paul says, "deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (1 Cor. 7.31). For this reason they have become glorious and illustrious even in this present life, and now and to endless ages they will become even more glorious and illustrious in the kingdom

of God. If instead of being timid, slothful, and despisers of God's commandments, we were zealous, watchful, and sober, we should have no need of renunciation or tonsure or flight from the world.

From *The Discourses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) pp. 44-6, and 93-4.

Nicholas Kavalas (1322–96)

(a) *The Intimacy of Union with Christ*

As God's loving-kindness is ineffable and His love for our race surpasses human speech and reason, so too it belongs to the divine goodness alone, for this is "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4.7). Likewise it follows that His union with those whom He loves surpasses every union of which one might conceive, and cannot be compared with any model.

Therefore even Scripture needed many illustrations to be able to express that connection, since one would not suffice. In one place it employs the figures of an inhabitant and a dwelling, in another those of a vine and a branch, here that of a marriage and a couple, there that of members and a head. None of those figures is adequate for that union, for it is impossible from these to attain to the exact truth. Above all it is necessary that the union should conform to friendship – yet what could be adequate for divine love?

It would appear that marriage and the concord between head and members especially indicate connection and unity, yet they fall far short of it and are far from manifesting the reality. Marriage does not so join together that those who are united exist and live in each other, as is the case with Christ and the Church. So the divine Apostle, speaking of marriage, says, "this is a great mystery," and adds, "I speak of Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5.32), showing that it is not marriage, but union with Christ which he sets up for admiration. The members are joined to the head; they are alive because they are joined and die if they are separated. But it appears that the members of Christ are more closely joined to Him than to their own head, and that it is even more by Him that they live than by their concord with it. This is plain

John of Kronstadt (1829–1908)

Monasticism and Marriage

The white clergy somehow always require severe feats on the part of monastics. Actually a monk differs from a layperson only in being unmarried, and otherwise laypersons too should and must live the same kind of life, i.e., according to the commandments. The Lord's commandments are common to all. The monks withdrew from the world simply in order to have a better chance to fulfill the Lord's commandments. At that time, of course, the monastic life was flowing in a different channel, because of the world situation. Those who have zeal for the spiritual life must adapt themselves to this life outwardly, but the most important thing is to put all their effort into inner work. The holy Apostle Paul says: "While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way" (1 Tim. 4.8).

From *Christ Is in Our Midst: Letters from a Russian Monk* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980) p.37.

Silouan of Athos (1866–1938)

Degrees of Spiritual Love

No one of himself can know what is God's love, unless he be taught of the Holy Spirit; but God's love is known in our Church through the Holy Spirit, and so we speak of this love.

The sinful soul which does not know the Lord fears death, thinking that the Lord will not forgive her her sins. But this is because the soul does not know the Lord and how greatly He loves us. But if people knew this, then no one would despair in his heart, for the Lord not only forgives but rejoices exceedingly at the return of a sinner. Though you be at death's door, believe firmly that the moment you ask you will receive forgiveness.

The Lord is not like us. He is passing meek, and merciful, and good; and when the soul knows Him she marvels greatly and

Alexander Elchaninov (1881–1934)

(a) Monasticism and Marriage

There is the monastic life and the state of marriage. The third condition, that of virginity in the world, is extremely dangerous, fraught with temptation, and beyond the strength of most people. Moreover, those who adhere to this condition are also a danger to the persons around them: the aura and beauty of virginity, which, when deprived of direct religious significance, are in a sense "nuptial feathers," exercise a powerful attraction and awaken unedifying emotions.

Marriage is a revelation and a mystery. We see in it the complete transformation of a human being, the expansion of his personality, fresh vision, a new perception of life, and through it a rebirth into the world in a new plenitude.

Our modern individualism creates special difficulties in married life. To overcome them, a conscious effort on both sides is necessary, in order to build up the marriage and make it a "walking in the presence of God." (The Church alone provides a full and genuine solution for all problems)....

Marriage, fleshly love is a very great sacrament and mystery. Through it is accomplished the most real and at the same time the most mysterious of all possible forms of human relationship. And, qualitatively, marriage enables us to pass beyond all the normal rules of human relationship and to enter a region of the miraculous, the superhuman.

In fleshly love, besides its intrinsic value as such, God has granted the world a share in His omnipotence: a human being creates a human being, a new soul is brought into being.

A human being enters deeply into the texture of the world through his family alone.

Neither the man, nor... the woman, possesses absolute power over the other partner in the marriage. Coercion exercised over

the will of another – even in the name of love – kills love itself. And so the question arises: must one submit to coercion if it threatens that which is most precious? A countless number of unhappy marriages result from precisely this – that each partner considers him or herself as the owner of the loved one. This is the cause of nearly all the difficulties of married life. The highest wisdom in marriage is shown by giving full freedom to the person you love: for our human marriage is the counterpart of the marriage in heaven between Christ and the Church, where there is absolute freedom.

Woman has been called the “weaker vessel.” This “weakness” consists especially in her enslavement to the natural, elemental forces within and outside herself. The result is inadequate self-control, irresponsibility, passionateness, blindness in judgment. Scarcely any woman is free from all these defects; she is always the slave of her passions, of her dislikes, of her desires. In Christianity alone does woman become man’s equal, submitting her temperament to higher principles, and so acquiring moderation, patience, the ability to think rationally, wisdom. Only then does friendship with the husband become possible....

(b) Divine Love

The First Epistle of St. John the Evangelist speaks of divine love, of that love which covers a multitude of sins, which cancels the Law and takes the place of all the commandments: that love which gives life because it brings us into contact with the Source of Life; which confers the highest knowledge: “He that loves not, knows not God” (1 John 4.8), and, on the contrary, “Every one that loves ... knows God” (1 John 4.7) – knows God by the law of similarity.

We must think of ourselves as participating in this love, for each of us loves something, someone. Even if there are a few people who love nothing, who live here already in the “darkness below,” such cases are very rare. We all love our relatives, our family, our friends, the people who share our way of thinking.