

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

The Sacramental Life of the Church (Part 2)



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OF THE
ASSUMPTION

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The Sacramental Life of the Church (part 2)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance (pages 7-11 of this booklet).

Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective (Pages 12-21 of this booklet).

CONFESSION OR PENANCE

Scriptural Reference: Matthew 4:17; Matthew 18:18; John 20:22-23; I John 1:9

Purpose: **To restore our fallen nature to God**

The church has never considered Baptism to be an automatic guarantor of continuous salvation. Through Baptism, God's image within us is restored. But we are still far from attaining His likeness, however. Thus Baptism is only the beginning of our life in Christ. The process of healing and restoring our damaged nature is on-going through Confession.

Repentance is a consistent theme throughout all the four Gospels. There is no sin God will not forgive. The sinner, however, must have a sense of his unfaithfulness to God and must be determined to make amends.

This must be followed by the confession of his/her sins before the clergy of the church who have been designated as Father Confessors by the Bishop.

Christ is the one who forgives through His representative, the Priest. Any sin confessed here will not have to be dealt with at Christ's second coming when all our deeds will be revealed.

Both interior repentance and the verbal acknowledgment of concrete sins are indispensable conditions for true forgiveness and reconciliation.

In the Orthodox church the penitent and the confessor see each other face to face. Just as a physician seeks to heal wounds, so a Priest offers counsel without being a counselor and may prescribe remedies (penance) that look to the preservation of the spiritual health of the penitent. Such penances are not punitive in nature, but remedial, and do not constitute an essential part of the mystery. They may include fasting, reading, prayer, abstinence from Eucharist, etc.

Through the prayer of absolution, the forgiveness of God is pronounced and bestowed.

Confession is essentially a healing ministry since sin is viewed primarily as a disease that needs to be healed, rather than a crime that needs to be punished. Everyone is susceptible to the wiles of the devil; therefore, everyone must partake of this sacrament which is necessary for one's salvation.

HOLY ORDERS OR ORDINATION

Scriptural Reference: Acts 6:6; I Timothy 4:14

Purpose: **To perpetuate the priestly ministry of Christ. To preach, teach, and shepherd the people of God; to celebrate the sacred mysteries; to preserve correct doctrine; and to keep the body united in the love of God.**

Jesus Christ is the one true Priest of the Church. The royal priesthood has as its source Christ the one true Priest. The priesthood belongs to the church and is very much a part of the structure of the church within which Christ dwells. The gifts and functions once given to the Apostles are transmitted to the ordained ministers through the mystery of the priesthood in the rites or ordination.

THE MAJOR ORDERS

The three major orders are that of Deacon, Priest and Bishop.

BISHOPS:

The Bishops are the successors to the Apostles, the chief shepherds and administrators of the church and the guardians and teachers of the true faith. Since the sixth century, Bishops have been selected from the celibate clergy. Priests and Deacons are permitted to marry as long as they do so before they are ordained.

PRIESTS:

Priests share in the functions of the episcopacy. They teach and celebrate the holy mysteries for the edification of the people of God.

DEACONS:

Deacons assist the bishops and priests in the execution of their pastoral, liturgical, and teaching duties. In earlier times, women also were ordained as deaconesses. This order, however, fell into disuse by the 12th century.

THE MINOR ORDERS

Sub-deacons, readers, chanters, acolytes. They function to assist the major orders in worship. Their ordination is conducted outside the sanctuary and at any communal worship service, but never within the Divine Liturgy.

ORDINATION RITES

Bishops are ordained before the scripture readings and before the liturgy of the faithful since they are the guardians of truth.

Priests/Presbyters are ordained immediately after the Great Entrance and before the Anaphora for the same reasons as above.

Deacons are ordained after the consecration of the Gifts and before Holy Communion because they assist at the liturgical services and administer Holy Communion.

The consent of the whole church is a requirement for ordination.

The primary signs of all ordination rites are the prayers and the laying on of the hands upon the heads of the candidates by the Bishop.

The character of Ordination is indelible. Therefore ordination is never repeated.

The male character of the priesthood is a basic tenet of Orthodoxy. The priesthood belongs to Christ and those called to perpetuate His priesthood are His icons. The clergy do not possess a personal holiness because of their ordination. The clergy must struggle to acquire holiness just as everyone else must. The clergy ought to embody the love of Christ and manifest to the community the essentials of the Christian life. Conversely, the clergy need to discover in their flock the presence of Christ. In this mutual witness each assists the other to become a living member of the body of Christ.

MARRIAGE

Scriptural Reference: John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:32; Romans 7:2

Purpose: The essential and primary purpose of marriage is to unite two free persons into a communion of love for their mutual companionship, support, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment and completion. Each spouse needs to help the other attain salvation.

In marriage once spouse experiences the trinity in relationship through self-sacrifice for the other spouse. God truly manifests Himself in love, one spouse to the other. Marriage helps us discover God and strengthens our relationship with God through our relationship with our spouses. Thus, marriage is more than the social and religious sanction of a biological act. A marriage in the Lord is sustained by the Holy Spirit, who grants to the spouses necessary gifts to secure a godly life in peace, truth, harmony, and love. This is not to say that church weddings are free from problems, but that the spouses are open to the work of the Holy Spirit in their relationship. Bonds are nourished and sanctified by prayer. As scripture says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church." The institution of marriage depends on this!

CONDITIONS FOR MARRIAGE IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH:

1. Spouses must come of their own free will.
2. A Christian marriage presupposes a monogamous relationship.

A church marriage is indissoluble. It is understood to be a life long commitment. The church, however, does permit divorce and remarriage as a concession to human frailty and imperfection. The Orthodox Church today allows the laity three attempts at establishing a true marriage. The clergy are permitted to marry only once.

THE MARRIAGE RITES:

The marriage service has two basic parts:

1. The service of the Betrothal which emphasizes and blesses the pledge of both spouses one to the other through the blessing of the rings.
2. The service of the Crowning which not only blesses the relationship of each spouse to one another, but also seals their relationship in Christ through the exchange of the crowns.

The crowning service contains other liturgical actions such as the joining of hands, the partaking of blessed wine from a common cup and the joyous procession around the credence table.

Birth control is allowed within the context of marriage—not to prevent having children, but rather to space our children and to control pregnancy. Birth control that is abortive is in no way sanctioned by the Church.

HOLY UNCTION

Scriptural References: James 5:14-15

Purpose: Bodily healing as well as the forgiveness of sins are the primary purposes of this sacrament.

The mystery of Holy Unction is established upon the words and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ. It embodies, extends, and continues His healing ministry. Holy Unction is a sacrament of faith. It seeks to raise up hope and impart courage and peace to the sick person by alleviating anxieties, frustrations, and feelings of alienation that often afflict the sufferer. It communicates spiritual power so the trials of sickness are borne with fortitude, and temptations that lead to despair are resisted and overcome. Therefore, while healing is certainly a much desired effect, it is not an indispensable condition for the existence of the sacrament.

The purpose of Unction is to raise up the sick into the realm of God's kingdom.

The Church confers the sacrament upon all the faithful, whether they are physically ill or not, because we do not draw a sharp distinction between bodily and spiritual ills.

Holy Unction does not serve as a substitute for medical treatment.

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REVIEW WORKSHEET

CONFESSION

Scriptural References:

Purpose:

Facts:

ORDINATION

Scriptural References:

Purpose:

Facts:

MARRIAGE

Scriptural References:

Purpose:

Facts:

HOLY UNCTION

Scriptural References:

Purpose:

Facts:

SESSION CHECK LIST

- Attended session
- Completed Worksheets associated with Session
- Read The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance
- Read Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective

Objections to Confession

(Taken from The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance)

The Prayer before Confession:

Here, O child, here Christ is present invisibly, accepting your confession. Do not be horrified, neither be afraid; conceal nothing from me and without hesitation say all that you have done so that you will receive remission from Jesus Christ our Lord.

How great must be our wickedness! We do not turn to Confession not only because we forget about it, but we do not practice it even when we know about it. What can be more imprudent than this?

Confession is so important to us sinners that we must boldly say: there is no salvation for us without Confession. Abba Isaiah expresses the same thought: “If there were not repentance, nobody would be saved. Just as Baptism cleanses us from original sin and from all sins committed prior to Baptism, so repentance, involving a confession of our sins, cleanses us from all lawlessness committed after Baptism.”

We do not confess because we have objections to Confession. What are our objections usually?

Here are the main ones:

1. One says: “I am so sinful! Can God forgive my sins? I do not believe this! That is why there is no use for me to go to Confession.”

But if a man repents sincerely, any sin can be forgiven him. “*The power of repentance is based on the power of God. The Doctor is all-powerful, and the Medicine given by Him is all-powerful*” (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov).

St. John Chrysostom, pondering on the miraculous results of sincere repentance, says: “*Repentance is a medicine which destroys sin. It is a heavenly gift, a marvelous force which through the grace of God conquers the might and strictness of the laws. It accepts all and transforms all. It does not reject the fornicator, does not send away the adulterer, is not disgusted with the drunkard, does not loathe the idolater, does not neglect the slanderer, does not persecute the reviler nor the haughty man: it regenerates everybody because it is a furnace for purification from sin. The wound and the medicine, these are sin and Repentance*” [Confession—author’s note].

Do not tell me: “*I have sinned much, how can I save myself?*” You cannot, but your God can, and He can do it so that all your sins will be destroyed. Listen carefully to my words: your God destroys your sins in such a manner that there is neither a spot nor trace left of them, and as He restores your health, He presents you with the righteousness which frees you from the death penalty. He gives you righteousness; and the one who has sinned He makes equal to the one who has not, because He destroys sin and makes it disappear as if it had never been.

“*But is it possible,*” you will say, “*for the one who repents to be saved?*” It is perfectly possible! “*But I have spent my entire life in sin: if I repent, will I be saved?*” Of course! “*How do we know that?*” From the love of your God for man. Am I relying on your repentance to destroy your heavy sins? If you were to rely only on your repentance, then, indeed you should tremble; but the mercy of God unites with repentance. And the mercy of

God has no limits; words cannot express His kindness. Your wickedness has an end, but the Medicine for it is boundless! Your wickedness is human wickedness, but God's mercy is ineffable, so, have hope that it will exceed your sins. Imagine a spark which falls in the sea: will it start a fire? Will it appear again? Sin is to God's love for man what that spark is to the sea, not even that, but something much smaller! The sea, however big it may be, has an end, but God's love for man is limitless.

2. Another says: "Why should I go to Confession? I have no special sins. Let those who have murdered, stolen, raped, or committed some other sin go to Confession."

This objection to Confession is the complete opposite of the first one. There the man, because of the oppressing realization of his wickedness, does not believe that he can be forgiven. Here, there is a lack of any realization of wickedness. "I have no special sins..." But is it really so? When a man stays in a closed room for a long time, he gets used to the bad air in it and does not feel how unpleasant it is. But if someone comes in from outside, he will not be able to stand the stench in the room and will run away.

Let those who say, "I have no special sins," answer whether they have Christ in their hearts. He likes to inhabit pure hearts. But are their hearts pure? Hardly! They imagine that they are pure, but imagination is not reality. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (1 John 1:8). And where there is a lie, there Christ is not.

Then, what should we do? - let us confess. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just...to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

The Holy Fathers teach us that it is very hard for a man to see his sins. They explain this with the blindness caused by the devil. Abba Isaiah says: "When a man separates from the one on his left side, i.e. from communication with the demons and from following their suggestions, then he will see his sins against God in full; then he will know Jesus. But a man cannot see his sins until he separates himself from them through a separation filled with labor and distress. Those who have reached this condition have found tears and prayers; as they remember about their sly friendship with the passions, they do not dare to look towards God, and live constantly with a broken spirit."

If it were easy to see our sins, St. Ephraim the Syrian would not have prayed: "Lord, enable me to see my transgressions." Neither would Father John of Kronstadt say: "This is truly a gift of God—to be able to see your sins in their multitude and in all their loathsomeness."

It turns out that those who think that they do not have any great sins are actually blind. They must pray to God to enable them to perceive their sins and to save themselves from the extremely fatal spiritual delusion that they do not have any particular sins. Even if their sins are as small as specks of dust, if they are not cleaned with constant Confession, they pile up and dirty the room of the heart so that the high heavenly Guest cannot enter there.

The small sins are often more dangerous than the greatest crimes, because the latter weigh heavily on the conscience and insist on being atoned for, confessed, settled, erased, while the small sins do not weigh too much on the soul, but they have that perilous property of making it insensitive to the grace of God and indifferent to salvation. Fewer people have perished from ferocious wild beasts than have from small microbes, invisible to the naked eye. By being considered insignificant, the small sins are usually passed by without any attention. They are easily forgotten, but they create in man the most terrible habit—the habit of sinning, of dulling his moral consciousness. Thus the wretched sinner comes to deceive himself that he is not sinful, that everything is all right with him, when he is both a miserable and abject slave of sin.

Small sins create a true stagnation in the spiritual life of man. Just as the wall clock stops because of the accumulation of fine dust, so the spiritual pulse of man gradually dies out under the thick layer of accumulated small sins. In order for man to restore his spiritual life, he needs to confess even the smallest of his sins.

3. A third man says: "All this is true. But why should I confess when I know that tomorrow I will sin again? Is there any point in such confession? I see that one should confess only if one would sin no more after that!"

This objection to Confession contains both something which is very true and something which is not. The right thing here is the desire not to sin any more after Confession. But we are feeble humans, and we cannot attain right away such a firmness which makes falling into voluntary sins impossible. If we cannot reach such steadfastness in virtue right away, should we surrender to vice? Or should we stop confessing? Which is better - to roll in the mud of the spiritual swamp, or to pick yourself up after each fall and go on with the hope that someday you may reach the solid and beautiful shore of virtue? If you do not confess, you remain in the mud. If you confess, you pick yourself up from the mud and clean yourself. "But why should I get up if tomorrow I will fall again?" you say. When you fall again, then get up again! Every day begins all over again! This is undoubtedly better than falling out of the habit of getting up. A young monk complained to the great ascetic Abba Sisoës: "Abba, what should I do? I fell." The elder answered: "Get up!" The monk said: "I got up, and I fell again!" The elder replied: "Get up again!" But the young monk asked: "For how long should I get up when I fall?" "Until your death," answered Abba Sisoës.

This wise dialogue should be remembered by all of us who want to change but, deceived by the devil, constantly return to our previous sins. Every time we fall into a transgression, we must get up. The "getting up" - this is **Confession**.

"But why should we play at falling and getting up?" ask some. It is not a game, but a struggle in which there is much sense. If we, as feeble humans, fall but get up again, there is a great probability that death will find us when we are standing. Then we are saved. But if we do not intend to get up, death will surely find us lying in the mud. Then we are lost forever! St. John Chrysostom says: "Repentance opens the heavens for man, takes him to Paradise, and overcomes the devil. Have you sinned? Do not despair! If you sin every day, then offer repentance every day! When there are rotten parts in old houses, we replace the parts with new ones, and we do not stop caring for the houses. In the same way, you should reason for yourself: if today you have defiled yourself with sin, immediately clean yourself with repentance."¹

For the washing away of bodily dirtiness God has given water. And for the washing of spiritual foulness, God has given the grace of the holy Sacrament of Confession. Every man, when he dirties his hands, washes them. No one says: "I will not wash my hands any more, because I will get them dirty again!" But why is it then that many people say, "I will not go to Confession, because I will sin again tomorrow!" It is clear that the enemy of our salvation is enticing us not to wash our souls, so that he can gain power over them.

But we must not give in to such satanic suggestions; we should confess frequently, because frequent washing produces a taste for cleanliness in us.

Leave your house un-swept, un-cleaned, and unventilated for one year! Will it not turn into a pigsty? Now think about what the soul of a man is like when he has not cleaned it through Confession, not only for a year, but for twenty, forty, sixty, or seventy years!...

4. A fourth man says: "I am confessing before God. What need is there for me to go to the priest?" God has ordained the priest to administer the Holy Sacraments so that we can receive through them heavenly all-saving grace. Confession is a sacrament, too. If you confess before God, you are doing well, because you are moving your conscience, remembering your sins, and maybe even shedding tears for them. Yet you do not receive God's grace of forgiveness through all that. As when you sit and think how, during the never-ending day of the Heavenly Kingdom, those who have pleased God partake of the unfathomable-for-us heavenly Communion, you do not partake in reality, no matter how moved you may be by your thought, until you accept visible Holy Communion; so too, until you go to the priest to whom Jesus Christ Himself has given the power to bind and loose, no matter how much you confess before God, you do not receive forgiveness for your sins, because God

¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Works*, Vol. 2, Book 3 (St. Petersburg, 1896), p. 377.

Himself has condescended to say to the priest: *whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them* (John 20:23).

Besides, Confession before a priest has an enormous instructive meaning. It humbles us. It cures our pride; it makes us blush "savingly"; it instills in us shame and fear and thus protects us from future sins. When we sin, we sin against the Omnipotent God, but we are not ashamed before Him because we do not see Him. In the same manner, when we confess before God, we do so easily, because we do not see Him, and it is as if we were talking to ourselves. But what shyness comes over us when we confess before the priests! The man who has submitted to the Church order to confess before a priest will hardly dare to repeat his sins, when he chinks of having to reveal them again during Confession.² Jesus Christ has ordered very wisely that our repentance should be done before a priest who is God's witness!

"But how can the priest absolve sins?" you ask. He can, since God has ordered it so. "But is the priest himself not a sinful man?" If he is sinful, what do you lose from that? He is sinful for himself and will answer before God for his sins. The Holy Sacraments administered by him do not cease to be active for you because of his sinfulness if you accept them with Faith and humility. Does the sunray get dirty when it falls on mud? In the same way, God's grace does not lessen by being transmitted by a priest muddied with sins. He himself may be denied grace on Judgment Day because of his sinfulness, but you, accepting through him God's grace, will not deprive yourself of it if you show yourself to be worthy.

"But will the priest not give away the secret of my confessed sins?" No! No priest has the right to tell of that which he has heard during Confession. He has to take the secret of the Confession to his grave. So do not worry that the shame of your sinfulness may be announced to society.

But remember that if you avoid Confession because of zeal for your honor, you will shame yourself. If you are shamed to admit your weaknesses before one man, everyone will begin talking about them! Such is the spiritual law. People sense our weaknesses, no matter how diligently we hide them. If you confess them before one man, God, because of your humility before this single witness, will cover you with His grace before the many.

However, if you are shielding your name before the confessor, your authority will collapse before all. Repent only before one man. Your confession will teach you to struggle with your passions; and if you are really fighting against them, the multitude of people will not find out about them. You, with God's help, will be healed before you have shamed yourself. But if you do not want to be healed through Confession, then you will both expose your name to abuse here and then be disgraced before the whole universe at the Last Judgment!

5. A fifth man says: "I am going to the priest to have him read the prayer of absolution for me." This is the most sacrilegious abuse of Confession! What does "the prayer of absolution" mean? It means a prayer for the absolving of sins. The Christian goes to the priest and, without confessing his sins, asks him: "Father, say the prayer of absolution for me!" or "Forgiving prayer"; and the priest puts the stole on the head of the repenting man and forgives him the "lawlessnesses" which he has not confessed, but has hidden. Stop, you, servant of God! What are you doing? Do you know what sins are hiding in this soul that you forgive them so carelessly? What a responsibility you carry before God, too! What if a deadly sin is being hidden from you, and you so thoughtlessly allow the Christian to partake of Holy Communion? Will you not speed up the death of his soul? Do you not know the words of the holy Apostle Paul: *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord* (I Cor. 11:27). Why do you not test the believer? Why do you let him eat and drink his eternal condemnation? Why do you give the Sacrament to an unrepentant sinner? Judas, too, took Holy Communion together with the other holy Apostles at the Last Supper, but because he was an unrepentant sinner, instead of God's grace, Satan went into him. Do you want to make a second Judas out of the careless Christian who approaches Christ without Confession, only with an "absolving" prayer? It is better to refuse Holy Communion to the unprepared man until he repents and confesses than to give him Fire and condemnation.

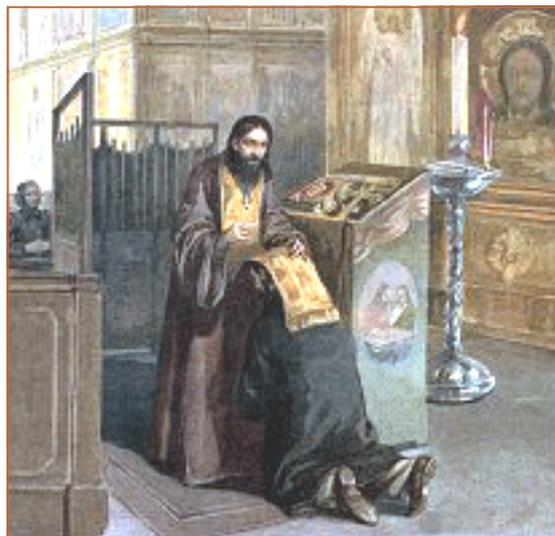
² St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 7th edition (Sergiev Posad, 1908), p. 41.

This reading of the prayer of absolution is the greatest misuse! It is both lying to God and lying to oneself. Ananias and Sapphira paid with their lives for their wicked attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:1-10). Do not fool yourself, Christian! The priest cannot forgive your sins until he hears them during Confession. He cannot loose the knots or your conscience until he has touched them. No prayer of absolution, lulling to your conscience, can help you. You have either confessed your sins and have received forgiveness for them, or you have not confessed them and they have stayed in your soul. If you can wash yourself without touching the water, then you will also be able to clean yourself from your lawlessness without confessing it.

The reading of the prayer of absolution, as a lulling of the conscience's vigilance, is a sin both for the priest and the layman, because in its core there is delusion and lies. This practice does not lead to spiritual healing, but to ever greater sinfulness. Someone is critically ill. The illness is identified with certainty, and the medicine which can overcome it is also precisely known; but because it is bitter, the sick man asks for something more pleasant. Then the doctor gives either morphine to dull the pain or some sweet but useless syrup. Will the sick man recover? Never! And who will be responsible For his death? He himself, because he wanted sweet syrups to fool himself, and the doctor, who knew what he should give, but out of a desire to please the man did not give it.

Just recently a good and knowledgeable Christian woman confided in me the following: "I had prepared for Holy Communion. I went to church and looked for the parish priest so that I could confess. The priest was very busy, and his mood, as I noticed, was not good. He met me with a slight irritation: 'Well, why have you come? To confess all the same small sins? You do not have any big transgressions before God. Come here. I will read you the prayer of absolution!' `But I want to confess; something is weighing me down!'- 'There is no need! Come and kneel here!' I obeyed, and he read me the prayer of absolution. I got up and walked away, but there was no relief in my soul! The burden remained there and tormented me even more! I returned to the priest from the middle of the temple, but he was already busy with other worshipers. The time for Communion came. I did not dare to take Communion, because I did not feel that my conscience was cleared. On the next Sunday I went to another church. There I went to Confession and took Communion. I felt a great joy from the Confession; it was only then that I was relieved." ■

Editor's Note: The same warning may be said about the current practice of "general confession," that is, when the priest raises his epitrachelion to the whole congregation and recites the prayer of absolution for all, even though none have given a personal confession.



MARRIAGE: An Orthodox Perspective

INTRODUCTION

All Orthodox catechisms and textbooks define marriage as a *sacrament* or a "mystery" of the Church. At first glance, this definition may appear strange; marriage is practiced by Christians and non-Christians alike, by atheists, by generations of human beings who never heard what the word "sacrament" means. Man is born, gets married, begets children, and dies. These are the laws of nature which God established and blessed; but marriage particularly is singled out by the Church. The very special blessing which it bestows upon the man and the woman who get married is called a "sacrament." Why?

There is a very rich literature on marriage written by Roman Catholics and Protestants, by psychologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists, canonists. In our day and age mass media cultivate the issues connected with the sexual nature of man. They discuss publicly questions which the puritan generations of the past never envisaged even privately. It is being recognized widely that Freud and Jung revolutionized not only sexual ethics but also our very understanding of human nature. Meanwhile the Roman Catholic Church has also adopted attitudes which are difficult to justify, such as a total ban on "artificial" birth control (as if it were easy to establish a clear distinction between "artificial" and "natural" forms of contraception). In fact, the crisis created in the Roman Catholic world by the papal encyclical *Humanae vitae* involves much more than the issue of birth control; it presupposes a philosophy of marriage and marital responsibility. All this requires an Orthodox evaluation and response.

It is beyond the author's competence and the size of the present essay to discuss all the issues involving marriage and sexuality raised by the developments mentioned above. Our only topic is marriage as sacrament, i.e., an aspect which enters neither the field of psychology nor that of physiology nor that of sociology. It is the author's belief, however, that the Orthodox understanding of the sacrament of marriage suggests the only possible Christian attitude towards most of the issues raised today. This understanding is clearly different from those which traditionally prevailed in Western Christianity; and, thus, it may give different openings to practical solutions.

The very notion of marriage as a sacrament presupposes that man is not only a being with physiological, psychological, and social functions, but that he is a citizen of God's Kingdom, i.e., that his entire life—and especially its most decisive moments—involves *eternal values* and God Himself.

For Orthodox Christians, this essential involvement is best realized in the Eucharist. The Eucharist, or "Divine Liturgy," is the moment and the place when and where a Christian should realize what he truly is. In the Eucharist, the Kingdom of God—whose citizen he is by baptism becomes available directly to his spiritual senses. The Divine Liturgy actually starts with the exclamation: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In the Liturgy, the Church, being concretely a gathering of people, ceases to be a human organization and becomes truly the "Church of God." Then Christ Himself leads the assembly, and the assembly is transformed into His Body. Then all partitions between concrete historical happenings and eternity are broken. The true meaning of marriage as a sacrament becomes understandable in the framework of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy.

In our contemporary practice the connection of marriage with the Eucharist is not obvious. Marriage appears to us primarily as a personal or a family affair. It may be blessed in Church and thus acquire a comforting flavor of both legitimacy and sacredness; but its relation to the Liturgy of the Church remains unclear for most of us. The actual church ceremony has no obvious relation to the Eucharist, and only a circle of invited relatives and friends take part in it. However, as we will try to show in this essay, it is impossible to understand either the

New Testament doctrine on marriage, or the very consistent practice of the Orthodox Church, without seeing Christian marriage in the context of the Eucharist. The Eucharist, and the discipline which our communion in the Eucharist presupposes, is the key which explains the Christian attitude toward "church marriage" as well as toward those marriages which were or still are concluded outside the Church. Many practical difficulties which we face come from a misunderstanding of this basic connection of marriage with the Eucharist.

The misunderstanding must be corrected if we want to face our responsibilities in our modern, secular society, and if we desire an articulate Orthodox Christian answer to the challenges of the day. Actually, the "Eucharistic" understanding of marriage clearly illustrates what is the essential Christian claim for man—an image of God, destined to participation in divine life itself. Psychologists and sociologists, on the basis of their respective limited fields of inquiry, may reach a foretaste of this truth, but certainly not affirm it in its entirety. The Christian experience of "God becoming man, so that man may become God" (St. Athanasius of Alexandria), is alone able to make the claim in all its daring significance. Of this, Christian marriage is also an expression. The liturgical and historical facts mentioned in this essay are well known;¹ our task will consist only of drawing the necessary conclusions and of trying to establish the pattern according to which the essential meaning of marriage can be brought again to the consciousness of Christians today.

JUDAISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Old Testament Judaic thought saw the essential meaning and goal of marriage in procreation. The most obvious and necessary sign of God's blessing was seen in the continuation of the race. Abraham's obedience and confidence in God brought the promise of a glorious posterity: *"I will bless thee and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice"* (Genesis 22:17-18). This solemn promise given to Abraham explains why the absence of children was seen as a curse, especially for women.

This view, so clearly reflected in the Old Testament, is originally connected to the fact that early Judaism did not have a clear notion of personal survival after death. At best one could hope for a shady and imperfect existence in a place called *sheol* (often inaccurately translated as "hell"). The Psalmist asks for God's help against his enemies who want to kill him; and he knows that God "remembers no more" the slain, who are "cut off from God's hand." Asking for God's help against those who want to kill him, he skeptically challenges God: *"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?"* (Psalm 88:10). God was the "God of the living," and not of the dead. However, the promise to Abraham implied that life could be perpetuated through posterity, hence the central importance of childbirth.

If marriage—monogamous or polygamous—was the normal means, concubinage was also tolerated and even sometimes recommended to secure the continuation of the race (Genesis 16:1-3). The institution of the "levirate" (Genesis 38:8) consisted of an obligation for a man to "raise the seed" of a dead brother by marrying his widow, and thus securing for him a partial survival in the children of his wife. Monogamous marriage, based on eternal love of a husband and a wife for each other, existed rather as an ideal image. It was implied in the story of creation, in the Song of Songs, in various prophetic images of the love of God for His people. But it never became an absolute religious norm or requirement.

In the New Testament, the meaning of marriage changes radically. The opposition is clear precisely because the texts use Old Testament categories of thought in order explicitly to modify them. Not a single New Testament text mentioning marriage points to procreation as its justification or goal. Childbirth itself is a means of salvation only if it is accomplished "in faith, love and sanctity" (I Tim. 2:15). Modification of Old Testament norms appears with particular clarity in three instances:

¹ See especially A.S. Pavlov, *Chapter Fifty of the Kormchaia Kniga*, Moscow, 1887 (in Russian) and S.V. Troitsky, *The Christian Philosophy of Marriage*, Paris, 1932 (in Russian); a brief survey in English in A. Smirensky, "The Evolution of the Present Rite of Matrimony and Parallel Developments" in *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, 8, 1964, No. 1, pp. 38-48; cf. also Jean Dauvillier and Carlo de Clercq, *Le mariage en droit canonique oriental*, Paris, 1936; K. Ritzer, *Le mariage dans les Eglises chrétiennes*, Paris, Cerf, 1970; and T. Stylianopoulos, "Towards a Theology of Marriage in the Orthodox Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22, pp. 1977, pp. 249-283; R. Stephanopoulos, "Marriage and Family in Ecumenical Perspective," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 25, 1981, pp. 21-34.

1) All three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22:23-32; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-37) report Jesus' attitude towards the "levirate." It is important to notice that the question is related to Christ's teaching on resurrection and immortality, which cancels worries about survival through posterity. When the Sadducees ("which say that there is no resurrection") asked who, among the seven brothers who successively married the same woman, will have her to wife "in the resurrection," Jesus answers that "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven."

This text is often understood to imply that marriage is only an earthly institution and that its reality is dissolved by death. Such an understanding prevailed in the Western Church, which never discouraged remarriage of widowers and never limited the number of remarriages permitted to Christians. However, if this were the right understanding of Jesus' words, they would be in clear contradiction to the teaching of St. Paul and to the very consistent canonical practice of the Orthodox Church throughout the centuries. In the Christian understanding, marriage is absolutely unique and quite incompatible with the "levirate." Never would the Christian Church encourage a man to marry his brother's widow (see below, Chapter X). In fact, as Clement of Alexandria already noted, "The Lord is not rejecting marriage, but ridding their minds of the expectation that in the resurrection there will be carnal desire."² Jesus' answer to the Sadducees is strictly limited by the meaning of their question. They rejected the Resurrection because they could not understand it otherwise than as a restoration of earthly human existence, which would include the Judaic understanding of marriage as procreation through sexual intercourse. In this, Jesus says, they "err," because life in the Kingdom will be like that of the "angels." Jesus' answer is, therefore, nothing more than a denial of a naive and materialistic understanding of the Resurrection, and it does not give any positive meaning to marriage. He speaks of the *levirate*, and not of Christian marriage, whose meaning is revealed implicitly - and explicitly - in other parts of the New Testament.

2) Christ's teaching prohibiting divorce reflects, more positively, the nature of Christian marriage. It is expressed in direct opposition to the Jewish Deuteronomy, which allowed divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18). The very fact that Christian marriage is indissoluble excludes all utilitarian interpretations. The union between husband and wife is an end in itself; it is an eternal union between two unique and eternal personalities which cannot be broken by such concerns as "posterity" (the justification for concubinage) or family solidarity (the basis for the "levirate").

Indissolubility, however, is not a requirement which is *legally* absolute. The famous exception mentioned by Matthew ("save for the cause of fornication" - 5:32) is there to remind us that the law of the Kingdom of God is never legally compelling, that it presupposes free human response, and that therefore the gift of Christian marriage needs to be accepted, freely lived, but can eventually be rejected by man. In general, the Gospel never reduces the mystery of human freedom to legal precepts. It offers man the only gift worthy of the "image of God" - "impossible" perfection. "Be perfect, as your Father is perfect." Christ's requirement of absolute monogamy also appeared as an impossibility to Christ's auditors (Matthew 19:10). In fact, love is beyond the categories of the possible and of the impossible. It is a "perfect gift," known only through experience. It is obviously incompatible with adultery. In case of adultery, the gift is refused, and marriage does not exist. What occurs then is not only legal "divorce," but a tragedy of misused freedom, i.e., of sin.

3) When he speaks of widowhood, St. Paul presupposes that marriage is not broken by death, for "love never fails" (Cor. 13:8). In general, Paul's attitude towards marriage is clearly distinct from the Jewish rabbinic view in that especially in I Corinthians he gives such strong preference to celibacy over marriage. Only in Ephesians is this negative view corrected by the doctrine of marriage as a reflection of the union between Christ and the Church—a doctrine which became the basis of the entire theology of marriage as found in Orthodox tradition.

However, on one issue - the remarriage of widowers - Paul's view, as it is expressed in I Corinthians, is strictly upheld by the canonical and sacramental tradition of the Church: "If they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7:9). Second marriage - either of a widower or of a divorcee - is only tolerated as better than "burning." Until the tenth century, it was not blessed in church and, even today, it remains an obstacle for entering the clergy. Our contemporary rite for blessing second marriages also shows

² Clement of Alexandria (d. appr. 215 A.D.) is one of the founders of Christian theology. The quotation is from his *Miscellanies*, III, 12, 87, Engl. tr. in *The Library of Christian Classics*, II, Philadelphia, Pa., The Westminster Press, 1954, p. 81.

clearly that it is admitted only by condescension. In any case, Scripture and Tradition agree that faithfulness of the widower or the widow to his or her deceased partner is more than an "ideal"; it is a Christian norm. Christian marriage is not only an earthly sexual union, but an eternal bond which will continue when our bodies will be "spiritual" and when Christ will be all in all."

These three examples clearly show that in the New Testament a totally new concept of marriage is being introduced; it is directly dependent upon the "Good News" of the Resurrection which was brought by Christ. A Christian is called - already in this world - to experience new life, to become a citizen of the Kingdom; and he can do so in marriage. But then marriage ceases to be either a simple satisfaction of temporary natural urges, or a means for securing an illusory survival through posterity. It is a unique union of two beings in love, two beings who can transcend their own humanity and thus be united not only "with each other," but also "in Christ."

THE EARLY CHURCH AND ROMAN LAW

In the Roman world, marriage was not conceived primarily as a means to secure posterity but as an agreement between two freely-choosing parties. The famous principle of Roman law, specifying that "marriage is not in the intercourse, but in the consent" (*nuptias non concubitus, sed consensus facit*), and the definition popularized by Modestinus that "cohabitation with a free woman is marriage, and not concubinage" which presupposed that a slave woman could not give her free consent, and that, therefore, cohabitation with her could never be called "marriage"-are the very basis of civil law in all modern civilized countries. The essence of marriage lies in the consent which, in turn, gives meaning and legal substance to the marriage *agreement, or contract*.

The fact that marriage was conceived, in Roman law, as an agreement between two free parties implied a substantial social progress if compared to the concepts prevailing in other ancient civilizations. It provided the legal framework for the total emancipation of women and their legal equality to men.

As a legal contract, whose subjects were only the parties involved, marriage did not need any third party to give it legal validity. The State, however, provided facilities for the registration of marriage agreements. Registration implied control over their conformity with the laws and provided ready material for the courts, when the latter were to rule on conflicts connected with individual marriages.

Just as the Mosaic Law, Roman Law provided for the possibility of dissolving marriage contracts. The conditions of divorce varied greatly both before and after the Christian era.

The Christian Church, both at the time of persecution and during her alliance with the Roman State, accepted the Roman laws regulating marriage. Even when Christianity became the prevailing State religion, the ancient definitions of marriage as "contract" continued to be accepted in State laws and even in the ecclesiastical *Nomocanon in Fourteen Titles*. It is also found in the Slavic version of the *Nomocanon*, the so-called *Kormchaia Kniga* ("Book of the Rudder")³ which was the foundation of canon law in Slavic countries until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The same conformity with Roman concepts and terminology is found in the writings of the early Fathers. The following are the words of the second-century writer Athenagoras in his *Apology* to Emperor Marcus Aurelius (Chapter 33): "Everyone of us considers as his the woman whom he married *according to your laws*." St. John Chrysostom (d. 404) refers directly to "civil law" when he defines marriage as "nothing else than closeness, or affinity" (*Hom. 56 on Genesis, 2*).

The number of patristic quotations on this issue can easily be multiplied. Their meaning, however, is not that the Church was indifferent to the issue of marriage, nor that she had no specific point of view and simply adopted as her own the prevailing Roman concept of marriage as contract. The following chapters will show that the contrary is true. Never, in her entire history, did the Christian Church show more clearly that she was

³ Not to be confused with the Greek "Rudder," or *Pedalion*, a canonical compilation of the 18th century, which is also available in English.

bringing into the world a new and unprecedented divine reality and presence. And the New Testament texts quoted above show that this new reality also implied a completely new attitude towards marriage, different from both the Judaic and the Roman concepts. This new reality was not originally expressed in any specific and independent marriage ritual, and its nature did not consist in suppressing the laws which secular society had set. Christians understood the value of the Roman order. They appreciated the progress which some aspects of Roman Law were introducing in human relations. But while accepting all that, they never forgot the specific and totally new experience and commitment which they accepted in Baptism and the Eucharist. What mattered, therefore, was not the particular ceremony used to conclude the marriage, but who was accepting the marriage contract. If the parties were Christian, their marriage was a Christian marriage, involving Christian responsibility and Christian experience. For them, marriage was a sacrament, not simply a legal agreement.

MARRIAGE AS SACRAMENT OR "MYSTERY"

"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32). In chapter 5 of the letter to the Ephesians we discover the *different* meaning of Christian marriage, that element which cannot be reduced to either Judaic utilitarianism or Roman legalism-the possibility and the responsibility given to both husband and wife to transfigure their "agreement" into the reality of the Kingdom.

Every human being is a member of earthly society, a citizen of his country, and a member of his family. He cannot avoid the needs of material existence and must fulfill his social obligations. The Gospel does not deny man's responsibility for the world and for human society. True Christianity never called for a denial of the world. Even monks render a peculiar service to the world by denying not its existence and its importance, but its claims to control man and to restrict his freedom. The calling of man-the "image and likeness of God" in him - is, first of all, a limitless, a "divine," a free use of his creative potentials, his yearning for the absolute Good, for the highest forms of Beauty, for true Love, for the possibility of really *experiencing* this Goodness; because God Himself is that Goodness, that Beauty, that Love and He Himself loves man. To Him man can appeal; His voice he can hear and His love he can experience. For a Christian, God is not an idea to be understood, but a Person to meet: "I am in my Father, and you are in Me and I am in you" (John 14:20). In God man discovers his own humanity, because he has been created as an "image of God." And Christ, being True God, also manifested a true humanity, not in spite of His divinity, but precisely *because* He was True God: in Him, we see divinity as the true norm of humanity.

When man is baptized and becomes "one body" with Christ in the Eucharist, he, in fact, becomes more fully himself; he recovers a truer relationship with God and with fellow-men, and he returns to his worldly responsibilities with all the God-given and limitless potential of creativity, of service, and of love.

Now, if St. Paul calls marriage a "mystery" (or "sacrament": the Greek word is the same), he means that in marriage man does not only satisfy the needs of his earthly, secular existence, but also realizes something very important of the purpose for which he was created; i.e., he enters the realm of eternal life. In the world, man does possess a diversity of talents and powers-material, intellectual, emotional-but his existence is limited by *time*. Now, to "be born from the water and the Spirit" is to enter the realm of eternal life; for through Christ's Resurrection this realm is already open and can be experienced and shared. By calling marriage a "mystery," St. Paul affirms that marriage also has a place in the eternal Kingdom. The husband becomes one single being, one single "flesh" with his wife, just as the Son of God ceased to be only Himself, i.e., God, and became *also* man so that the community of His people may also become His Body. This is why, so often, the Gospel narratives compare the Kingdom of God with a wedding feast, which fulfills the Old Testament prophetic visions of a wedding between God and Israel, the elected people. And this is also why a truly Christian marriage can only be unique, not in virtue of some abstract law or ethical precept, but precisely because it is a Mystery of the Kingdom of God introducing man into *eternal* joy and *eternal* love.

As a mystery, or sacrament, Christian marriage certainly conflicts with the practical, empirical reality of "fallen" humanity. It appears, just as the Gospel itself, as an unattainable ideal. But there is a crucial difference between a "sacrament" and an "ideal." A sacrament is not an imaginary abstraction. It is an experience where

man is not involved alone, but where he acts in communion with God. In a sacrament, humanity participates in the higher reality of the Spirit, without, however, ceasing to be fully humanity. Actually, as we have said above, it becomes more authentically human and fulfills its original destiny. A sacrament is a "passage" to true life; it is man's salvation. It is an open door into true, unadulterated humanity.

A sacrament, therefore, *is not magic*. The Holy Spirit does not suppress human freedom but, rather, liberates man from the limitations of sinfulness. In the new life, the impossible becomes truly possible, if only man freely accepts what God gives. This applies to marriage as well.

Mistakes, misunderstandings, and even conscious rebellion against God, i.e., sin, are possible as long as man lives in the present empirical and visible existence of the "fallen world." The Church understands this very well, and this is why the "mystery" of the Kingdom revealed in marriage is not reduced in Orthodox practice to a set of legal rules. But true understanding and justified condescension to human weakness are possible only if one recognizes the absolute norm of the New Testamental doctrine of marriage as sacrament.

MARRIAGE AND EUCHARIST

If, as we have seen above, marriage was conceived by the Early Church as a "sacrament," anticipating the joy of the Kingdom of God, how can we explain the fact that this Church did not use any particular ceremony, or rite, to sanction marriage? Instead, it recognized as normal a marriage concluded according to the laws of secular society. It never tried to abolish these laws nor to destroy the social order which instituted them.

The answer to this question is that the difference between a non-Christian and a Christian marriage lies in the fact that the first was concluded between two pagans while the second involved two Christians; it did not lie in the manner in which it was concluded. One of the constant reminders of St. Paul was that God did not live in "man-made temples," and that "our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit." When in marriage a man and a woman become "one flesh," and if both are members of the Body of Christ, their union is being sealed by the Holy Spirit living in each of them.

Now the *Eucharist* is what makes them members of the Body of Christ.

The connection between marriage and the Eucharist is alluded to in the story of the marriage in Cana (John 2:1-11), the reading adopted during our contemporary rite of "crowning." This text is one of the numerous texts of the Johannine Gospel pointing at Baptism and the Eucharist:* as water is transformed into wine, so the sinful life of man can be transfigured, by the presence of Christ, into the new reality of the Kingdom.

Early Christian writers—the same ones who otherwise give full recognition to the legal validity of civil marriage "according to laws" - also affirm that it is the Eucharist which gives to marriage its specifically Christian meaning. Thus Tertullian (second century) writes that marriage "is arranged by the church, confirmed by the oblation (the Eucharist), sealed by the blessing, and inscribed in heaven by the angels" (*To His Wife, II, 8:6-9*). Every Christian couple desirous of marriage went through the formalities of civil registration, which gave it validity in secular society; and then through their joint participation in the regular Sunday liturgy, in the presence of the entire local Christian community, they received the Bishop's blessing. It was then that their civil agreement became also sacrament," with eternal value, transcending their earthly lives because it was also "inscribed in heaven," and not only in a secular "registry." It became an eternal union in Christ. The same procedure is implied in a letter of the famous bishop-martyr Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 100 A.D.): "Those who get married must unite with the knowledge of the bishop, so that marriage may be according to the Lord, and not by human desire" (*To Polycarp, 5:2*).

What makes a "sacrament" is not necessarily a set of specific, visible gestures, accomplished by a valid minister. Actually, the Church itself - a mysterious union of God with His people - is the Sacrament, the Mystery of salvation (cf. esp. Ephesians 3). When man is incorporated into this union through Baptism, this is indeed

* Cf. O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, Naperville, Ill., 1956/

"sacrament," for the Mystery of salvation is applied to the individual commitment of that man. But all these individual "sacraments" are "completed" in the Eucharist, as we read in Nicholas Cabasilas, the great Orthodox mystic and theologian of the fourteenth century (*On the Life in Christ*, PG 150, col. 585B). Actually the Eucharist is itself a wedding feast, so often mentioned in the Gospels, as Cabasilas also writes: "This is the most-praised wedding, to which the Bridegroom leads the Church as a Virgin bride ... when we become flesh of His flesh and bones of His bones" (*ibid.*, col. 593D).

Baptism, in the Early Church, was celebrated during the Liturgy, and so are, even today, the services of ordination to the diaconate, the priesthood, and the episcopate. This was originally the case with marriage. Only this understanding of Christian marriage as an integral part of the Mystery, of which the Eucharist is the "completion," can explain the canonical regulations against "mixed marriages," against "second marriages," etc., as we shall see below. These marriages could not be fully sacramental. Perfectly "legitimate" in terms of civil law, they could not be integrated into the Eucharist.

Many confusions and misunderstandings concerning marriage in our contemporary Orthodox practice would be easily eliminated if the original connection between marriage and the Eucharist were restored. Theoretically, Orthodox sacramental theology - even in its scholastic, "textbook" form has preserved this connection in affirming, in opposition to Roman Catholicism, that the priest is the "minister" of marriage.* Western medieval theology, on the contrary, has created a series of confusions by adopting - as in so many other points - Roman legalism as the basis of sacramental theology: marriage, being a "contract," is concluded by the husband and wife themselves, who are therefore the "ministers" of the sacrament, the priest being only a witness. As a legal contract, marriage is dissolved by the death of one of the partners, but it is indissoluble as long as both are alive. Actually, indissolubility - i.e., a legal concept taken as an absolute - is the main, if not the only, contribution of Christianity to the Roman Catholic concept of marriage. Broken by death, assimilated with a human agreement, marriage, in the prevailing Western view, is only an earthly affair, concerned with the "body," unworthy of entering the Kingdom of God. One can even wonder whether marriage, so understood, can still be called a sacrament. But, by affirming that the priest is the minister of the marriage, as he is also the minister of the Eucharist, the Orthodox Church implicitly integrates marriage in the *eternal* Mystery, where the boundaries between heaven and earth are broken and where human decision and action acquire an eternal dimension.

Paradoxically, however, the Roman Catholic Church has preserved the ancient Christian tradition in its liturgical discipline; a marriage between two Roman Catholics still occurs in connection with a mass. The latter is omitted, however, in cases of mixed marriages. A restoration of a similar discipline in the Orthodox Church would certainly fit the Orthodox theology of marriage better than it does the legal concepts which prevailed in Roman Catholicism at a time when Roman Catholic theology ceased to view its own traditional liturgy as a source of its theology!

In some extreme situations, the Orthodox Church is, even today, forced into the position it held during the first centuries. In the Soviet Union, for example - where the celebration of church "crowning" is often unfeasible because of State persecution of religion, but where an anonymous reception of the Eucharist is possible without drawing the attention of authorities-the Church can and does, in fact, tolerate the marriages of Christians even without a formal Church ceremony. Due to the circumstances, this toleration is legitimate. It would, of course, be perfectly inadmissible wherever the Church has the possibility to perform the solemn office of crowning. And, in any case, admission to the Eucharist always implies that the Church knows that a given couple is not only married legitimately, from the Christian point of view, but also intends to live in accordance with the Gospel. The same logic also applies to a non-Orthodox couple who join the Church. Baptized if necessary, or only chrismated, or simply presenting their Confession of Orthodox faith, they are not "remarried," because their .

* P. Trembelas, *Dogmatique d l'Eglise Catholique Orhtodoxe*, III, Chevetogne, 1968, p. 364; T. Stylianopoulos, "Towards a Theology of Marriage in the Orthodox Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22, 1977, pp. 249-283; R. Stephanopoulos, "Marriage and Family in Ecumenical Perspective," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 25, 1981, pp. 21-34.

acceptance to the Eucharist implies that the Church blesses them as husband and wife.* The practice of "remarrying" such couples can be due only to a complete misunderstanding of the Orthodox doctrine of marriage.

WEDDING AS A SEPARATE RITE

Until the ninth century the Church did not know any rite of marriage separate from the eucharistic Liturgy.** Normally, after entering a civil marriage, the Christian couple partook of the Eucharist, and this communion was - according to Tertullian - the seal of marriage, implying all the Christian responsibilities which we discussed above.

However, since the fourth century a specific solemnization of the sacrament is mentioned by Eastern Christian writers: a rite of "crowning," performed during the Eucharistic Liturgy. According to St. John Chrysostom, the crowns symbolized victory over "passions," for Christian marriage - a sacrament of eternity - was not concluded "according to the flesh." From a letter of St. Theodore Studite (d. 826) we learn that crowning was accompanied by a brief prayer read "before the whole people" at the Sunday Liturgy, by the bishop or the priest. The text of the prayer, given by St. Theodore, is the following: "Thyself, O Master, send down Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling place and unite these Thy servant and Thy handmaid. And give to those whom Thou unitest harmony of minds; crown them into one flesh; make their marriage honorable; keep their bed undefiled; deign to make their common life blameless" (Letters I, 22, PG 99, col. 973). The liturgical books of the same period (such as the famous *Codex Barberini*) contain several short prayers similar to that quoted by St. Theodore. These prayers are all meant to be read during the Liturgy.***

The appearance of this brief rite of crowning does not mean, however, that it immediately became required for all Christians contracting marriage. The well-known legal collection, known as *Epanagoge*, describing in detail the relations between Church and State - and whose author is most probably the great patriarch Photius (857-867, 877-886) still offers to Christians three alternatives for concluding marriage: "Marriage," writes Photius, "is an alliance between husband and wife and their union for their entire life; it is accomplished by a blessing, or by a crowning, or by an agreement" (XVI, 1). From the sixth to the ninth centuries, imperial state legislation tended to grant the Church an ever increasing control over marriages (see, for example, novella 64 of Justinian), but it never made "crowning" a legal obligation.

The decisive step in this direction was taken at the beginning of the tenth century, and this measure coincided with the appearance of a rite of crowning separate from the Eucharist. What provided this change which modified fundamentally, if not the meaning of marriage, at least its understanding by the vast majority of faithful?

The answer can easily be found in the imperial decree which enforced the change. In his novella 89 (novella: "new law") the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (d. 912) first expresses regrets that in previous imperial legislation the two legal acts of adoption of a child and of marriage were considered as purely civil formalities. He then declares that both of these acts-as long as they involve free citizens, and not slaves will henceforth be sanctioned by a Church ceremony. A marriage not blessed by the Church "will not be considered as marriage," but as an illegitimate concubinage.****

Several aspects of this text deserve attention - for example, the parallel between the act of marriage and that

* Cf. Jerome Kotsonis (former Archbishop of Athens), Ἡ κανονικὴ ἀποψις περὶ τῆς ἐπικοινωνίας μετὰ τῶν ἑτεροδόξων, Athens, 1957, p. 216, and also the decisions of the Russian Holy Synod concerning the matter quoted in P. I. Nechaev, *Prakticheskoe rukovodstvo dlia sviashchennosluzhitelei*, 9th edition, St. Petersburg, 1907, p. 263-264.

** Cf. for example, A. Zavialov, *Brak* ("Marriage"), article in the *Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia* (in Russian), A. P. Lopukhin, ed., vol. II, Petrograd, 1903, pp. 1029-1030, 1034.

*** See Goar, *Euchologion*, repr. Graz, 1960, pp. 321-322.

**** A. Dain, *Les Nouvelles de Leon VI, le Sage*, Paris, 1944, pp. 294-297 (Greek text and French translation), Eng. Tr. Below, p. 109.

of adoption of children,* and the fact that slaves are not covered by the new law. But the most important implication of the decree is that the Church is invested with the responsibility of giving *legal status* to marriage. In spite of the very close connection between Church and State which existed during the ninth century in all the Christian countries, such a responsibility was quite unusual for the Church. The change was indeed striking. Before Leo VI a citizen could enter a marriage disapproved by the Church (second or third marriage, mixed marriage, etc.), and do so legally. If he was a Christian, his action incurred a period of penitence and excommunication (as we will see below), but he remained in good standing before the law. After Leo VI the Church had to determine the legal status of all marriages, even those which contradicted Christian norms. Of course the new situation, in principle, gave the Church an upper hand over the morals of all citizens; but in practice, since these citizens were not all saints, the Church was obliged not only to bless marriages which it did not approve, but even to "dissolve" them (i.e., give "divorces"). The distinction between the "secular" and the "sacred," between fallen human society and the Kingdom of God, between marriage as contract and marriage as sacrament, was partially obliterated.

The Church had to pay a high price for the new social responsibility which it had received; it had to "secularize" its pastoral attitude towards marriage and practically abandon its penitential discipline. Was it possible, for example, to refuse Church blessing to a remarried widower when this refusal implied deprivation of civil rights for one or two years? As soon as the sacrament of marriage - received in the Church became legally obligatory, compromises of all sorts became unavoidable; and, simultaneously, the idea that marriage was a unique and eternal bond-reflecting the union of Christ and the Church-was obliterated in the pastoral practice of the Church and in the conscience of the faithful. Emperor Leo VI himself, the author of the novella, forced upon the Church his own *fourth* marriage with Zoe Carbonopsina in 906.

The only compromise which the Church could not accept, however, was to mitigate the holiness of the Eucharist: it could not, for example, give communion to a non-Orthodox, or to a couple entering a second marriage. Thus, it had to develop a rite of marriage separate from the Eucharist. The change was made more acceptable by the fact that the obvious connection between Church marriage and Eucharist was lost anyway as soon as Church marriage became a *legal* requirement.

However, even the novella of Leo VI failed to suppress entirely the possibility for a particular category of Church members to marry sacramentally, through the Eucharist without a separate—and often expensive—"crowning". The slaves, i.e., more than half the Empire's population were not touched by the new law. This discrepancy between marriage law for slaves and for free citizens was fixed by Emperor Alexis I Comnenos (1081-1118) with another novella making "crowning" a legal obligation for slaves as well.

By establishing a rite of "crowning" separate from the Eucharist, the Church did not forget, however, the original and normal link between marriage and Eucharist. This is clearly shown in the text by St. Symeon of Thessalonica quoted below (Appendix IV). Ancient forms of the rite include communion of the bridal pair - the rubric says: "if they are worthy" - with the reserved Sacrament. Communion was then preceded with the priest's exclamation: "The presanctified Holy Things for the holy!" and accompanied by the communion hymn: "I will receive the cup of the Lord"**. A marriage rite including communion with reserved Sacrament was used in the Church as late as the fifteenth century: it is found in Greek manuscript service books of the thirteenth and in the Slavic books until the fifteenth***. In cases where the married couple was not "worthy" - i.e., when the marriage was not in conformity with Church norms - they partook not of the Sacrament, but only of a common cup of wine blessed by the priest. This practice - similar to the distribution of blessed bread, or antidoron at the end of the Liturgy to those who are not "worthy" of communion - became universal and is still adopted today. But even our

* Would it not be desirable, even today, to give a religious significance to adoption?

** Cf. an euchologion of the tenth century found in the library of Mt. Sinai; text in A. A. Dmitrievsky, *Opisanie Liturgicheskikh Rukopisei*, II, Εύχολόγια, Kiev, 1901, p. 31. It is the practice in Greek churches, even today, to sing the communion hymn at the moment of the common cup.

*** A. Katansky, "Towards a History of the Marriage Rite" (in Russian), in *Khristianskoe Chtenie*, St. Petersburg, 1880, I, pp. 112, 116.

contemporary rite preserves several features witnessing to its original connection with the Eucharist. It starts, as the Liturgy does, with the exclamation: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and partaking of the common cup is preceded by the singing of the Lord's Prayer, as is communion during the Eucharistic liturgy.

In its canonical and practical tradition, the Church also remembered the fact that the Eucharist is the true "seal" of marriage. Marriages concluded before Baptism, i.e., without connection to the Liturgy, have no sacramental meaning.* A newly baptized Christian can enter a second marriage with a Christian woman and then be admitted as a candidate for ordination to the priesthood as if he had been married only once (Apostolic canon 17). On the other hand, as we saw above, a non-Christian couple admitted into the Church through Baptism, Chrismation, and Communion is not "remarried"; their joint reception of the Eucharist is the Christian fulfillment of a "natural" marriage concluded outside the Church.

In our time the connection between marriage and the Eucharist must - and can easily be - restored again. What better way does the Church have to show to its children the true sacramental meaning of the act they are accomplishing?

* The opposite opinion, expressed by S. V. Troitsky in his otherwise very valuable book on *The Christian Philosophy of Marriage*, seem to lack theological or canonical basis.



SESSION NOTES



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Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption
Seattle, Washington