

Marriage as an Orthodox Spiritual Sacrament or Mystery and “Revisionist” and “New-Age” Theology

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Abstract

There are seven Sacraments in the Eastern Orthodox Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Ordination, Unction and Marriage. These are called "Mysteries" because each one hides in itself a mysterious and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit. The core of each has mysterious and miraculous divine action. We do not know how the Holy Spirit works in each of the Mysteries, but we know that He works in and through it. There are indeed many of the tensions facing Christians in an increasingly pluralist ecclesiastic and often fragmented global society. What are the problems with Revisionist and New Age Orthodox theological notions expressed which are not in line with Orthodox dogma or tradition such as the tendency to deify carnal relations and have sanctified erotic desires? The researcher strives to interpret the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church on the issues of marriage in a historical context. This is done by investigating from a conceptual analytical and historical perspective, the norms and values revolving around the issue in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. As such the article enlightens the reader as to the doctrines, ethics and liturgical life of the Church. This article highlights the relative, perspectival and contextual aspects of marriage as a spiritual sacrament and thus uncovers or deconstructs the ambiguities of modernity as it impacts on the sacrament.

Key words: marriage, sacrament, mystery. Orthodox



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Introduction

From the outset of Christianity the Mystery of Marriage assumed a very important status in the community. The married couple began to live in such a way as to modify their attitudes towards all around them. As children, the couple lived in a close family circle in which each person had a distinct role. As adolescents they gained the right to be themselves. As a married couple, they had to live an adult life together, united as one, no longer solitary beings. They had to face the family environment and the circle of their friends together.

In the first pages of the Holy Bible, the encounter between man and woman is one of the places where the invisible and profound call of a couple united to God is unveiled. God himself desired to imprint his face on the human couple who appeared on the sixth day as the high point of creation. If man and woman became the image of God in their married life the idea of the sacrament as a human reality which proclaims the kingdom because it is a place where it is realised is very appropriate.

Marriage is one of the sacraments in which it is clear that one cannot separate human reality and sacramental reality.

In the Mystery of Marriage, God the Holy Spirit by His grace unites two people, man and woman, for the special purpose of replenishing the Church of God according to His commandment (Genesis 9:1). This Holy Mystery was ratified by Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:5-6). He sanctified the spiritual and physical bond of marriage through His presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee (John, 2:1). The Apostle Paul also declared to us that marriage is a great mystery (Ephesians, 5:32). The Mystery of Marriage of the Eastern Orthodox Church is steeped in symbolism and ritual, and each act has special significance and meaning.

If God has given us in the Church all the objective conditions, all that we need for the attainment of this end, we, on our side, must produce the necessary subjective conditions; for it is this synergy, in this co-operation of man with God that the union is fulfilled.

(Lossky, 1957:196)

The Eucharistic celebration and the Sacraments and numerous non-sacramental services enable us to commune with the Holy Trinity. The main functions of the Church are to praise, bless and glorify the Triune Godhead. Consequently, all the activities of the Church as well as her doctrines are directed towards these functions. It was Christ Himself who established the Church with His incarnation and the calling of His beloved disciples. The founding day of the Church was Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended as tongues of fire and taught the disciples the Truth as had been promised by Our Messiah. In John 15:26 we read:

The Comforter, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, Who proceeds from the Father ...

He will, according to John 16:13, 'Guide you into all the truth'.

The notion of marriage as a sacrament, presupposes that Christians are not only beings with physiological, social and psychological functions, but that they are also citizens of God's Kingdom and that their entire lives involve eternal values and the Triune Godhead of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father. At the start of Divine Liturgy, the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is a gathering of people, ceases to be a human body and it becomes the "Church of God" or His "*Ekklesia*". Christ personally leads the gathering which transforms into His Body. Marriage is a sacrament as it happens within the framework of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy. The Eucharist 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.

(Meyendorff, 1975:11)

The body of Christ is seen as the absolute model of the relationship between spouses in a marital union. Every human being is a member of a family and the product of some marriage, with the exception of illegitimate children. Within this mystery of marriage, man enters the dimension of biological and eternal life. Marriage is a gift to be accepted or rejected by man. It can be freely lived. Love will never fail (1 Corinthians 13:8), and is not broken by physical death. Marriage is not broken by divorce or remarriage. Christian Orthodox marriage remains a unique union of two people in love who are able to transcend their own humanity and be united with each other and with Jesus Christ.

The prophet Micah in Chapter 6 verse 8, proclaimed that the real act of worship is not in the offering of goods external to human beings, but rather in the daily way of living justly and with tenderness and humility.

The word 'love' is sometimes a *portmanteau* word which can cover very diverse and indeed vague things. There is passionate love or *eros* and romantic love or *agape*. There is also *storge* and *philia*. In all its richness, the biblical tradition gives the word 'love' a content bound up with the making of a special covenant. One can make sense of love by discovering the covenant. These days, many young westernised people fall in love, live together for a few years and then finally decide to get married. This is an indication that for them the word marriage means more than a loving relationship. In their unique way they are rediscovering the reality of a covenant. They become part of an adventure which transcends them and which takes the entire social group of their relations and friends as a witness. There may well be days when love is hidden so to speak and nevertheless faithfulness to the covenant remains constant.

There are partnerships in every covenant. This is true also in marriage but the covenant between man and woman is very fragile. Nonetheless, as the couple is in the image and likeness of God, they are called upon to live in faithfulness. Their spirituality and sexuality must be so aligned to God's word that the task of living in faithfulness becomes far easier.

The canons of the Church guide humanity with regard to marriage, but it cannot be fully understood if it is not taken in a Eucharistic context. It is through marriage as a sacrament that God's Kingdom becomes a living experience and the sacrament is applied to our human existence.

It is in the flesh of Christ that two Christians can become flesh of each other in a truly Christian way. And it is in the Eucharist that they become Christians, by partaking of the Body of Christ. This is why, originally, marriages were blessed during the Divine Liturgy at which the bridegroom and the bride partook of Holy Communion.

(Meyendorff, 1975:83)

According to Jesus Christ, in order for the love of a couple to be what God has created it to be, it must be unique, unending, indestructible and divine. Christ not only gave this teaching, but also the power to fulfil it in the sacrament of the Christian marriage in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The unnatural mastery of the flesh over the spirit is expressed among other things, by the fact that the spirit is as though buried within the flesh, and is bound by it.

According to John of Kronstadt :

... we often so live as though we had no spirit in us, and the highest degree of human depravity is manifested by the fact that the spirit is completely stifled and man becomes as though he were flesh alone ... look more closely into the matter of men's reverence for God; you will see how in this respect the flesh endeavours to dominate over the spirit.

(Goulaeff, 1977: 43)

The world is becoming increasingly secularised and is tending towards neglecting the traditional biblical understanding of both marriage and family life. Many people have misunderstood what marriage is all about and have abandoned its essential moral demands. The consequences are clear ; family life is disintegrating as corrupt sexual behaviour becomes rampant. In essence, the moral fabric of society is being torn apart. Marriage, according to the Eastern Orthodox Church, has a great vision that is gloriously preserved and which manifests itself in doctrine; Holy Tradition, the canons are the liturgy of the Church. The Church is greatly concerned about the welfare and salvation of all humanity and speaks: '... Of that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes ... concerning the word of life' (John 1:1).

The Church knows the Truth of the Holy Scriptures of Christ to be the eternal Truth, the only thing we need, the good portion (Luke 10:42) for all men, in all time and place. Man and woman are mutually complementary and this is expressed in their union and reflects the image and likeness of God. The spiritual basis of Marriage as a Mystery/Sacrament, transcends the fleshly union of the bodies of the two spouses. The fleshly relations are woven into the spiritual realm as a man and woman unite in total love in marriage.

In the Sacrament of Marriage, a man and woman have the ability to become one spirit and one flesh in a unique way that no human love can provide by itself. If we analyse the lives of saints we easily discern the dominance of the spirit over the flesh. This is because saints live by the spirit and see and experience the Holy Spirit. Due to discipline, they easily see the wisdom, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and goodness of God. They see the impress of the Holy Spirit in every phenomenon. Whereas...

In sensual men the dominance of the flesh over the spirit is shown by their only seeing that which represents itself to their senses; the carnal, sensual man looks at the world and sees it like an unreasoning animal : he does not marvel at the Wisdom, the everlasting Power and the Goodness of the Creator, as shown in it; ... the flesh predominates.

(Goulaeff, 1977: 44)

For many centuries there was no particular ritual for marriage in the Church. The couple in love expressed their love in the church and received the blessing of God upon their marriage which was sealed in the Holy Eucharist of Christ. Through the Church formally recognising the bond between the couple, and its incorporation into Christ's Body, the marriage assumed a Christian status; that is, it became the created image of the divine love of God which is everlasting, indivisible, unique and without end.

Holy Scripture teaches us that man is a conjunctive being who cannot live in a solitary status: "Then the Lord said: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18). Interpreting the meaning of God's creation, John Chrysostom wrote in a laudation addressed to a certain Maxine, that the yearning for a companion for man was planted by God in our human nature (PG 76, 3, 230, 51).

The altruistic character of the relationship between man and woman remains unsteady if their common life is not firmly rooted in God's love or *agape*. It is through that love that the integral union between them can overcome the weakness of the fallen nature and contradictions of our present mode of life. Christian marriage is not simply an obligation imposed by nature or a relation accomplished by material union, but is rather a grace lived by two believers in Christ, who together walk towards the fullness of love. The couple is called to enter into the realm of divine love and its spiritual depths and man and woman are physically tied to one another in marriage and are incomplete without each other. They must share their total lives. Their physical relationship demonstrates in a literal sense that they are indeed one. Through the sex act the couple show one another their complete love and devotion. Only in marriage do the couple share their minds, souls and bodies totally. They pledge loyalty to one another in a holy bond which is God given. The doctrine of marriage as espoused in Eastern Orthodoxy, gives legitimate satisfaction to the soul and the body; it shows what it means to be truly man; it gives man the joy of giving life, "in the image of his Creator, who gave life to the first man" (Meyendorff, 1975:84).

The Eastern Orthodox Church sees God as the source of every mystery including marriage. He is the source of all life and life is in itself a mystery. "What procreates and perpetuates life cannot be anything but a mystery, a mystery in both its state of nature and in its state of grace" (Constantelos, 1975:19).

Both human history and the Holy Bible begin with and end with weddings. Adam and Eve come together in marriage or marital union in Paradise, before the Fall, thus revealing to us marriage as a part of the Creator's eternal purpose for mankind in the midst of creation (Genesis 2:22-25). Our history ends with the marriage of the Bride of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9). Earthly marriage is fulfilled in heavenly marriage. This demonstrates to us the eternal nature of the Sacrament of Marriage.

"Revisionist" and "New-Age" Orthodox Theology

Theology does not have its source within our own experience. Its source is rather to be found in the revelation which Our Father gives us. Our interpretation of the revelation given to us has absolutely everything to do with our own situation. In the last couple of years, numerous articles and books have been published by Orthodox writers on the issue of the sacrament of marriage. Many articles have emphasised marital relations. Clearly, many of the ideas expressed have not been in line with Orthodox dogma or tradition. These articles have tended to deify carnal relations and have sanctified erotic desires. The writers have claimed that physical desires lead to the realisation of God within us and as such reflect the Triune Godhead. These syncretistic works are dedicated to a mystical interpretation of reality and "the pursuit of occult practices to enhance spirituality. It's followers range from those seeking metaphysical experience to those searching for enhanced human potential through a holistic view" (Larson, 1998:17).

Many of these writings are derived from early pagan writings and Gnostic works and are a very popular aspect of New Age philosophy which believes that humanity is on the verge of entering a new period of existence. They envisage a New Order in all avenues of life. The adherents of the New Age Movement are keen to discredit traditional Christian values in general and specifically, Orthodox values. They believe these values are the core of all the problems we face today in the twenty-first century and that they have also been the root of all problems in the history of mankind. They strive for answers "outside of traditional religious experience and thought" (George Fr. 1996:8). They claim that answers to questions we pose daily can be found in a less rigid and more humane approach to questions concerning man and his experience of life, God and death. They see God in all religions and everywhere. They believe that if mankind can understand its mystical potential, it will be able to arrive at a Higher Consciousness and life will be a permanent spiritual experience. Man is after all, according to them, far better than we give him credit for and certainly far more capable of self-realisation than Christianity assumes.

The Holy Fathers of Orthodoxy warn us consistently not to mingle carnal and spiritual issues as this impedes our spiritual development. New Age thinking completely contradicts Orthodox beliefs. The Greek Archdiocesan priest Rev. Demetrios Constantelos, describes sexual relations in marriage in a highly liturgical fashion which is the antithesis of traditional Orthodoxy. He writes:

Sexuality, intimate embraces between husband and wife and their subsequent union into one flesh is a holy altar. The moment when love leads husband and wife into a consummation of their beings is a holy moment and a sacred event. Sexual intercourse in marriage is an act of recreation ... the recreation of the unity of man.

(Constantelos, 1975:23).

It is totally inappropriate and offensive to traditional Orthodoxy to use the expression 'holy alter' to describe the sex act. This is a pagan-like, carnalistic expression which is *anathema*.

Euthymius Zygabenos, a Byzantine commentator on the Psalms wrote the following:

Had Adam not sinned, there would be no necessity for him to enter into carnal intercourse with Eve. For sin gave birth to that form of union ... And although marriages by the law became honourable before the Lord for the sake of procreation, nonetheless in their essence they are the offspring of sin ... Therefore it is not surprising that David himself had the misfortune to sin, in a way submitting to the necessity of nature.

(SC 55,:401)

Many Orthodox writers have written non-traditional ideas on Marriage due to their New Age Movement connections. An article in the Moscow Patriarchate journal, *One Church*, written by a certain Laura Jones entitled "Made in the Image of the Holy Trinity" is rife with 'mystic' beliefs. Jones claims that one can attain the highest spiritual state by having the proper knowledge of love, sexuality and the Triune Godhead. She begins by saying:

We can say that the life of the Triune God is that of the eternal ecstasy of the three Divine Persons, for ecstasy means a kind of going out from one's self ... How then do we reflect the Divine ecstasy of the Three in One? In sexual ecstasy one goes out of oneself to be physically lost in another person. Spiritual writers utilise erotic imagery very much, as also in Holy Scripture, to describe the mystical ecstasy of being lost in God. Such a correlation is also found in the traditions of non-Christian religions where belief in the Holy Trinity is absent. In what way must ours be an especially Trinitarian spirituality? How, moreover, does such a spirituality transform our understanding of our own, properly human, sexuality?

(Jones, 1994:166)

She invites readers to seek after that which will unite them more intimately with God. Only in this way can mankind realise the revelation of God. She even goes so far as to redefine the concept of love:

So true love for another person is not mere feeling, but feeling which derives from and is informed by the very rational conviction that we are loved by God. The joy this inspires is

the rational ecstasy of that invincible faith which has the power to move mountains.

(Jones, 1994:169)

She clarifies her concept by saying: "Just as when man is overcome by sexual desire everything else would be obliterated, so when you turn to Jesus this way there is a supernatural obliteration of everything else ...: She concludes: "Rightly understood, true and holy conjugal union does reflect the Spirit of the Word from on High. It is like a mysterious love of the Father towards the Word mysteriously begotten" (Jones, 1994:170).

It is clear from the quotes that carnal union and knowledge are essential elements of Laura Jones' brand of spirituality.

The rigid adherence to the ancient dogmas of the Eastern Orthodox Church, explains the utter unity and sameness of the Church with the ancient Church. The former is an uninterrupted continuation and extension of the latter as established on earth by the Incarnate Word of God. It was organised and enlightened by the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the Holy Fathers of Orthodoxy. She thus has every right to proclaim that she has: "kept intact to the present time the dogmatic teaching of the Apostles" as well as the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and especially the Nicene Creed, "in which confession of faith our ancestral heritage is preserved" (Migne. 1284:83).

Orthodox dogmatic teaching has as its source and basis the Divine Revelation, as contained in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition (Hodges 1955:47). The dogmas are declared to be divinely revealed truths and thus have absolute, eternal and divine authority, and are both obligatory and valid for all believers. Orthodox dogma can be characterised as an expression of the common faith and universal conscience of the *pleroma* of the Church. The '*pleroma*' or 'fullness' of the Church is the bearer and the custodian of the dogmatic faith of Orthodoxy which speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through Ecumenical Councils. The essential and totally indispensable characteristic of such dogma is its source in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition (Karmiris, 1965:920).

The Church is then an infallible "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), which guards the treasures of the faith which have been delivered by Jesus Christ to His Apostles and inspired by the Holy Spirit who guides her into all Truth.

When we investigate the Orthodox dogmas and canons relating to marriage, we see rules on various issues in Christian life. Marriage is an honourable sacrament, as indeed they all are, and in it the unity of the faith is vital. What do the canons say concerning marriage? The Holy Fathers wrote anathema to all who disregard legitimate marriage. *Anathema* to all who are virgins because "they abhor marriage, not on account of the beauty of virginity itself" (Meyendorff, 1975:117)

If we assume that God created Adam and Eve with the intention of them engaging in carnal sexual relations we are guilty of jumping to erroneous conclusions. God created us in an unfallen and angelic state. Orthodoxy thus teaches that God did not create man and women to have sex, as is the pattern among the lower life-forms of

Creation. The direct consequence of the fall was carnal relations. The Old Testament Church needed to be replaced by the New Testament as revealed by the incarnate Logos of God, in whom man's fallen nature was reconciled to the Father and made whole once more. It is through Jesus Christ that man's wholeness is brought to fruition. It was Christ's incarnation that occurred without carnal relations.

"Marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterers and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4). As marriage and home life are part of all of life, we must honour and worship God in our married lives. We should serve God acceptably in marriage and have no freedom to live our married lives for our own pleasure as the New Age Movement suggests. Our married lives should be consecrated to the glory of God.

It is very clear that Orthodox morality and ethics differ from that espoused in other Christian confessions. The main differences emanate from the fact that Orthodoxy has markedly different conceptions of aspects such as Original Sin, Redemption, the Original state of man and the way in which Divine Grace functions. Over and above these aspects, the criteria of morality in the Orthodox Church, also differs as does the conception of the Church and the understanding of the meaning of life. Marriage, spirituality, sexuality and celibacy are all very strongly linked to morality.

The Spiritual Connection in Marriage

Early man had from the outset of human existence, before his fall and despite his many faults and transgressions, found himself moving inexorably closer to the Creator. Man had been granted moral and spiritual capacity to strive for the goals which God had intended for him. Only by carrying out daily living in terms of proper morality and by acquiring godlike virtues could man actually strive for *Theosis*. It was however always likely that man could be tempted towards evil thought and deed. Man therefore, although created by God, was imperfect, but was nonetheless capable of progressing morally and striving for perfection. By virtue of man's co-operating with God's Divine Grace, man could progress on the road to *Theosis*. Man's moral perfection is attainable through the Church which is the dispenser of Divine Grace. There is thus no salvation outside the Church of God as Christ's Body, it is the sole dispenser of Grace (Cavarnos, 1982).

As man turned away from relative perfection and lost his path on the way to *Theosis*, he lost the 'image of God' and was unable to attain *Theosis* without God's help. He fell away from moral perfection and became tainted by his weakness to move towards sin. His intellect became very confused and his will became depraved. He strove only to boost his own ego. Despite these shortcomings, man did not lose divine enlightenment after his fall. He was still able to discern God's power and the requirements of God's laws. Man thus wanders in the paths of ignorance and sin and therefore is in great need of love and care in order to return to his intended mission. Man needs both guidance of a spiritual and moral nature to enable him to return to God in a redemptive fashion. The Church is an instrument for the redemptive powers of God to manifest themselves in man's daily living. Jesus Christ by His sacrifice on Golgotha, gave man the aid he desperately needed and needs to this day "All goodness in man and all his works lead to his acceptance of the

salvation which God has offered man through the sacrifice of His only Begotten Son" (Ware, 1970:88)

God stirs the weakened soul and will of man and uses the few moral and spiritual aspects remaining in him to enable him to accept or reject the priceless Divine Gift which is offered to those who are not really worthy to receive it. If man accepts God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, a real rebirth is effected. He begins a new life which is expressed in love through good works. He acquires a faith united with love. The Orthodox Church believes that man is not justified by faith alone, but by faith which operates through love. This is basically saying, by 'faith and works'. By striving to live according to God's commandments, we are attempting to please Him and show our love towards Him. Failure to try to live by His commands simply means that we have failed to understand His act of salvation for us. Our moral strivings are thus a deep expression of our appreciation of God's Grace for us. By accepting God's Grace, we are no longer 'slaves' but rather 'sons' of God. "We are then able to fully regain the heights we enjoyed before our fall from Grace" (Gaffin, 1980:63).

The view that sexual love was in itself evil and did not cease to be evil even in Christian marriage was a view that prevailed into the sixteenth century. The early Church Fathers including Ambrose and Tertullian preferred humanity to become extinct rather than propagate through sex. Another Church Father, Origen, had himself castrated before he was ordained and stated that: "Married people ought to blush in the state in which they are living" (Mathew, 1997:2). Gregory of Nyssa stated in his numerous writings that Adam and Eve had been created without sexual desire. He was thus implying that sexual desire is a result of the fall. That is why clerics were prohibited from marrying until the fifth century. Celibacy and virginity were seen as higher and far holier than marriage. A few of the Early Church Fathers including Tertullian believed that if a woman lost her virginity she was automatically indecent and had lost honour and was thus "lower than a beast". Clearly then there was a deep suspicion of sex that can be traced back to the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, when sex was made foul and bestial. Because a woman was the "lure" on sexual matters and men simply the "recipients" of the orgasm, it followed that there would be a revulsion of woman. Her body and its hidden orifices assumed greatly distorted proportions in the minds of Early Church thinkers and writers. In the 4th Century C.E, Jerome wrote to a certain Roman virgin, Eustochium, that she would be better off as a virgin in God's eyes as virginity is the natural state for a woman. Jerome praised virginity as did Ambrose and Augustine.

"The blessed brides of God...have everything that they really want; God always attends to everything that will be for their good. And no earthly misfortune can deprive them of their wealth, because they are rich and fortunate within, in the heart" (Millet & Wogan-Browne, 1990: 27).

If we carefully study the Holy Bible, we learn that creation is not evil because God is the creator of all things. Therefore matter cannot be evil. In fact God called His creation very good. This is not to say that fornication is justified, but some may see it as such because, supposedly, God created us with this predisposition from the outset. One can then accuse God of causing man to fall into the sin of fornication.

The Church, an institution which is both visible and invisible and both human and divine, comprehends all humans who through the ages have accepted God's invitation to salvation. The Church members manifest the bond between them and God by holding true to the faith as formulated by Holy Scriptures and the traditions of the Church which are preserved in the Church and by the Church. By remaining within the Church, the believer remains in the healing and redemptive arms of Christ who will continue to pour out on him Divine mercy and infinite compassion.

The visible Church provides support and certainty of the 'invisible' and unseen things and it guarantees the values and moral and ethical rules for the secular realm of existence. The nature of morality is not perfection but the believers attempt to attain it and therefore *Theosis*. It is sin which creates an apostasy between us and God and it is thus the Church's function to provide a channel for redemption (Cavarnos, 1959) and regeneration which immoral man must accept with open arms if he wishes to live alongside his Creator.

A few Orthodox writers are careful to inform us that the above interpretations refer to the human state in the Old Testament only. They say God's Grace has given marriage a different slant. They speak of erotic desires which are sanctified and consummated on a 'holy altar'. Why is it that the offspring of such unions are by and large spiritually unstable?

Father Demetrios Constantelos readily claims:

...in the Orthodox Church sexual intercourse is described as synousia which means community of essence, consubstantiality. Basil the Great uses this very term to denote the relations between the three persons in the Trinity. Athanasius and Origen appropriate the same word to indicate that Jesus was born not as a result of synousia - sexual intercourse - although he shares in the synousia of the Trinity.
(Constantelos, 1975:25)

The use of the word *synousia* has a basic meaning of close personal and social contact as is evident in the writings of Aristotle and Plato. It does however also refer to sexual intercourse. The term is also used by St. Justin in his explanation on the incarnation of Jesus Christ : "If He was to have been born by *synousia* (intercourse) like all the firstborn, then why did God Himself say that He would give a sign, which is not common to all firstborn" (Tryphon, 1864:286). The greatest Church Father Basil also uses the term *synousia* when speaking of the nature and essence of the Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity (Homily 24,5). There were also Appollinarians who maintained that in Christ the human and divine natures (*ousia*) were united (*syn*) in one essence.

Epiphanius of Cyprus indicates a further meaning of the word *synousia*. He speaks of *synousios* in his treatise on the Arian view of Christ's participation in the essence of God the Father (Lampe 1961:1337). St Gregory of Nyssa uses the term *synousia* in his description of the heretical Sabellian mixing of the Hypostases of the Triune Godhead. The Sabellians were the followers of a third-century cleric who was pronounced a heretic for his views on the doctrine of the Trinity. Sabellius likened

his doctrine to the tripartite division of human nature into body, soul and spirit-all of which make up one person. He therefore destroyed the integrity of the Son and the Spirit as persons. The Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity found formal expression in later years in the so-called 'Athanasian Creed' which was clearly opposed to the position of Sabellius. The purpose of the above references is to indicate and illustrate the essential understanding of the term *synousia* as utilised by the Church Fathers so as to enable one to use it in the correct theological context, especially in modern theological texts (Lampe, 1961:1321).

It is clear from the use of the term *synousia* in relation to the Triune Godhead, that it in no way refers to marital relations. It is absurd to even attempt to seek a typological analogy between the Divine essence of the Triune Godhead and marital relations between human beings (Ware, 1963). It is heretical to say the least, to try to determine God's essence by applying the attribute of copulation to it.

The recent approaches to human sexuality from a theological perspective begin by granting a fairly broad berth to what we know from human experience and then attempt to relate this to what the Holy Bible in its vast richness, has said. There is a distinctly dialectical relationship between the Holy Bible and modern living in terms of human sexuality and spirituality and how this impacts on marriage. One needs to explore the Holy Bible in order to better understand the human condition. Biblical themes such as the fall of man and the destiny of the church with regard to its role against secular philosophies need careful analysis. What is the biblical view of marriage? Is marriage honourable? The Holy Bible tells us that God ordained marriage. It stands to reason then, if God ordained it, God must honour it. It is not a contrivance of human society as God Himself is its author.

Churches embrace marriage with open arms. Christ is the foundation and the 'cornerstone' of the Church (Ephesians 2:20), while the Church is illumined and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who grants all things and causes any prophecies to abound. He also perfects the priesthood and sustains the entire institution of the Holy Church so much so that '*the powers of death shall not prevail against (it)*' (Matthew 16:18). The Church will always remain the mystical body of Christ and she will always be holy and invincible. She is sanctified by Christ Himself and she sanctifies marriage as an institution.

Marriage and all its related areas of spirituality and sexuality are also sanctified. It is correct to say that in its demand of absolute fidelity, marriage is an enforcer of moral values. It is just as demanding as celibacy and neither more nor less for the Kingdom.

And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.
(Hosea 2:21)

In Ephesians 5:25-27, we read:

Christ the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with

the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

It is through Divine Grace that sinners are purified and sanctified by the Church. Marriage as a sacrament must also remain pure as it is sanctified by Jesus Christ. Marriage and Celibacy are complementary and we cannot exalt one to the detriment of the other. We cannot disparage one to emphasize the other. There are clearly two ways of living out the covenant. We have a choice between marriage and celibacy. Both can be viewed as aspects of the covenant and "Both are ways of giving oneself completely" (Beguerie & Duchesneau, 1991:141).

It is the intention of this study to critically sift Eastern Orthodox tradition in terms of the Sacrament of Marriage and to reject all that is not Biblical, and preserve all that is (Ware, 1984). It is my passion to be obedient to Biblical truth about marriage and its related areas of spirituality, sexuality and celibacy. Marriages should be lasting and whole for both husband and wife. We must strive to resist all the attempts of 'modern' theologians and New Age Movement 'Revisionists' to discredit the writings of the Church Fathers and to re-interpret scripture to suit their particular theological agendas. Many have profoundly different interpretations of how Eastern Orthodox Canon views marriage. It is however God Himself who will fulfil His plan for the church: "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" (Isaiah 46:10). It is abundantly clear that God will have His way: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:27-28).

It would be wonderful if all Christians could adhere to the interpretations on Christian issues as espoused by the Early Church Fathers on whom the Eastern Orthodox Church has based its beliefs – along with Holy Scripture of course. If we could all be: "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord with one mind" (Philippians 2:2). Paul urges us to set our minds on truth, honour and justice; and God will be with us (Philippians 4:8-9). The Eastern Orthodox Church renounces those who aim to 'win at all costs' by distorting truth, concealing reality and disagreeing without clarity. Jesus Christ was opposed to religious leaders who cunningly moulded their responses so as to conceal what they really thought (Mark 11:33). All Christians should strive to emulate Paul who states:

We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:2)

Scripture must be interpreted holistically and thematically in such a way that there is a clear distinction between interpretation and divine inspiration which is directly linked to divine impulse where canonical writings are the true Word of God. Many 'revisionist' theologians and 'Christian groups' try to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the whole of Scripture but are blinded by personal agendas. Only those true to Gods' word will be atoned to Him. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says: "For

what have I to do with judging those outside? God will judge those outside" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). It is thus essential to remain true to what Holy Scripture actually says on issues of human living. Scripture reveals that all have fallen short by nature. We need to recognise this and accept Christ's love which will in turn free us to love truly as He intends us to. We need to therefore continually examine faith and practice using the Holy Bible and the writings of the Early Church Fathers. It is essential that no singular theme be interpreted in such a manner as to nullify the remainder of Scripture. All themes including Marriage, Sexuality and Celibacy need to be interpreted in the context in which they were written, which is what the Early Church Fathers have done (Ware, 1993). As the Early Church Fathers and Ecumenical Councils play a pivotal role in Eastern Orthodox dogma and thematic interpretations, it is not surprising to discover that in Orthodox's marriage, spirituality, sexuality and celibacy differ distinctly from other types (Tikhon, 2000). Eastern Orthodox views are strictly God-centered, whereas the views of many others are man-centered. The differences are thus to be found in doctrinal teaching. This is precisely why the word 'Orthodox' is placed before the word 'Church' so as to enable a crystal clear distinction to be made. As Orthodoxy per se cannot exist outside of the Church, neither can the Church exist outside of Orthodoxy.

Conclusions

The creator of the Mystery of Marriage is God. It was not instituted by Christ, but He gave to it a very specific significance and meaning. Jesus teaches of the uniqueness of Marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God's love (*agape*) for mankind. Christ also teaches that if spouses are to love each other as God intends, their marriage is to be indestructible, unique and eternal. It is especially, to be Divine. Jesus has given this teaching as well as the power to fulfil it in the Mystery of Christian Marriage in the Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church believes and accepts all these teachings and regards very highly, especially the teachings of John Chrysostom. The Orthodox Church also believes that in the Mystery of Marriage, the spouses are given an opportunity to become one spirit (*pneuma*) and one flesh (*sark*), in a way which no human love can provide by itself.

The Holy Spirit is "given" to a couple so that what is started on earth does not end in the death of a spouse but is fulfilled and continues perfectly in God's Kingdom. Marriage is a Mystery because through it and in it the Kingdom of God becomes a living reality for the spouses. It is in the flesh of Christ that the spouses become flesh of each other in a truly unique Christian manner. Through the Holy Eucharist the spouses become Christians by partaking of the Body of Christ.

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