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...ure of the eucharistic cup that holds together the Church. For blessed is Your name, and glorified Your Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Liturgy reform is not something that characterizes the modern Orthodox Church, so it is unlikely that this "New Ecclesiastical Service of Marriage" will ever be more than a paper liturgy. But even on paper, it can stimulate reflection about a dimension of Christian asceticism, the asceticism of married life, reflection that seems to be in short supply in the Church today.

Proposal for a New Ecclesiastical Service of Marriage

Composed and offered to the Church by a certain anonymous married man

After the Divine Liturgy, the bishop or priest stands at the holy doors with those about to be joined together standing before him, the man on the right and the woman on the left. Their two rings are laid upon the holy table.

Choir:
Bring tidings to me of the one whom my soul loved
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Lead me into the house of rejoicing, order love within me
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Until the day fades away and the shadows come
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
I will rise up and seek the one whom my soul loved
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
In the crowning in the day of wedding, in the day of rejoicing of heart
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
How beautiful and how pleasant have you become, my love, in your delights
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Many waters cannot quench love neither can the floods drown it

1 This anonymous married man is Christos Yannaras. — Eds. [Translation of the proposed service]
III. The Meaning of Eucharist

Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

Then the celebrant asks those about to be joined together:
Why have you come, children, to this eucharistic assembly of the body of Christ?
Desiring the life of asceticism in marriage, honored father.
Do you desire to be worthy of that truly great mystery in Christ, and in the Church, of which Paul speaks?
Yes, God working together with us, honored father. Do you come of your own free will?
Yes, of our own free will, honored father.
Not by any constraint or force?
No, honored father.
Will you continue, bearing with each other in love, not looking to your own interests, but each to the interests of the other?
Yes, with God helping us, honored father.
Will you endure every tribulation and difficulty of life together through love and through each giving oneself up to the other?
Yes, with God helping us, honored father.

Celebrant:
Truly you have chosen a good and blessed work, if you bring it to perfection; for good works require effort and demand hard work.

Choir (in the seventh tone):
What shall we give back to the Lord for all that He has given to us?
For our sake God came among human beings; because of our ruined nature the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; the giver of good came to the ungrateful; the liberator to those in prison; the sun of justice rose for those sitting in darkness; on the Cross there was the One free from suffering; light shone in Hades; life entered death; the resurrection for those who had fallen. To Whom we cry: Our God, glory to You.

The celebrant takes the rings from the holy table, places them on the Sacred Gospel and comes out placing the sacred Gospel in front of those about to be married. And he says:
Behold Christ is invisibly present here. Beware lest anyone force you to come to this great Mystery. Take care that it is from free choice that you ask for the sharing of your whole life in this Mystery.

Proposal for a New Ecclesiastical Service of Marriage

Yes, honored father, it is from free choice.
Then the celebrant says this prayer aloud:
O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought together into unity things that were divided and ordained an unbreakable bond of love, guard in Your name these Your servants N. and M., guide them into that unity that has as teacher the Holy Trinity. For You it is Who bless and hallow the universe and to You we offer up praise now and for ever and to the ages of ages.
Then the celebrant then places the sacred Gospel before the man and says to him:
Take the rings and give them to me.

Taking them, the celebrant makes the sign of the cross with the rings on the head of the man, saying:
The servant of God N. is betrothed to the servant of God M., in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Three times)

Then he says to the woman:
Take the rings and give them to me.

Taking them, the celebrant makes the sign of the cross with the rings on the head of the woman, saying:
The servant of God N. is betrothed to the servant of God M., in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Three times)

And when he has said this to each three times, he makes the sign of the cross with both the rings over their heads and places them on their right hands. Then the best man exchanges the rings.

The celebrant (aloud):
Blessed is God who wills all human kind to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Blessed is He who is to the ages of ages.
Then there is given to both of them a lighted candle and they enter into the sacred altar.

Choir (in the second tone: On the rock of faith)
Establish the Faith on the rock and in the ocean of Your love make broad the heart and understanding of your servants, Unity of triple suns, for You are our God, as we put our hope in You, let us not be ashamed.

Deacon: Bless, Master
The celebrant says:
Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Choir:
Amen.

Deacon:
For the peace from on high,
Choir (after each intercession): Lord, have mercy.
For the peace of the whole world.
For this holy house.
For our father and bishop N.
For the servants of God N. and M. now joined together in the communion of marriage and for their salvation, let us pray to the Lord.
For the blessing of this marriage that it may be perfect in the mystery of the knowledge of God and the manifestation of true life, let us pray to the Lord.
That they may be granted harmony of soul and body, let us pray to the Lord.
That they may be granted to love each other, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it, let us pray to the Lord.
For their rejoicing in seeing their sons and daughters, let us pray to the Lord.
For their and our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and constraint, let us pray to the Lord.
Help us, save us...
Commemorating our all-holy...
To You, O Lord
For to You belong all glory...
Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.
And the celebrant says this prayer aloud:
Trinity beyond being and beyond godhead, ineffable goodness, we dare to apply to You the name of love and of longing, because we call you God and from Your manifestation we know that our God is love. For being the cause of everything, from Your transcendence above and beyond everything, through the excess of loving goodness, You made everything so that by love and longing You might come down among all things. You contain all things; You perfect all things; and,
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self bind together in lifelong love both this Your servant N and this Your servant M, for it is from You that a woman is betrothed to a man. Yoke them together in unity of mind and feeling and in temperance. Crown them in one flesh. Give them the enjoyment of the blessing of children, and may they see their children's children like olives shoots around their table. For Yours is the majesty, and the greatness, and the glory, of Jesus Christ, together with the Father and the comforting Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Choir: Amen

Then the celebrant takes the crowns, and crowns first the bridegroom, saying,

The servant of God N is crowned for the servant of God N, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

He says this three times, making the sign of the cross.

Then he crowns the bride, saying, The servant of God N is crowned for the servant of God N, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

And this three times, similarly.

Then he blesses them saying three times,

O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor.

And after this, the Prokeimenon of the Apostle,

Tone 8.

You have put crowns of precious stones upon their heads. They asked You for life, and You have given them length of days.

Deacon: Wisdom!

Reader:

The Reading from the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians.

Deacon: Wisdom! Let us attend.

Reader:

Brothers and sisters, give thanks always and for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, being subject to one another in the fear of God. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their hus-

bands, Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved 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 splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that She might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man every hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body, from His flesh and from His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.²

Choir:

Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia. F\' You, O Lord, will guard us and keep us.

Celebrant:

Wisdom. Stand upright. Let us listen to the Holy Gospel. Peace to all.

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John.

Let us attend.

At that time, Jesus, lifting up His eyes to heaven, said: Father, I manifested Your name to those whom You gave Me from the world. I pray for them; I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours; all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Holy Father, keep them in Your name that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are. Sanctify them in Your truth, that they may be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, that they may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given to Me I have given to them, that they may be one, as We are one, I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected in one, and that the world may know that You loved them, as You loved Me. Father, I desire that those whom

² Ephesians 5:20-33.
nurtured them, for the prayers of parents make fast the foundations of the house. Remember, God, also Your servants the bridegroom and the bridesmaids and all who have come together to this rejoicing. Be close to us all, be close, You who are everywhere; and, as You were always with Your Apostles, so unite those who desire You to Your merciful self, that united to You we may hymn and glorify the Father who works all and the Spirit who comforts. Amen.

Deacon:
Help us, save us, have mercy upon us, and keep us, O God, by Your grace.
That the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us ask of the Lord...
Having asked for the unity of faith...
Celebrant, aloud:
And count us worthy, Master, with boldness and without condemnation to dare to call upon You, the God of heaven, as Father, and to say:
People: Our Father in heaven...
Celebrant, aloud:
For Yours is (the Kingdom, the power and the glory...)
Choir: Amen.
Celebrant: Peace be to all.
Deacon: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.
Then the common cup is brought to the newlyweds, and the Deacon says:
Let us pray to the Lord.
Blessing the cup, the celebrant says this prayer:
O God, who made everything by Your might, and established the world, and adorn the crown of all things that You have made, bless with Your lifegiving blessing this common cup, which is to be offered to those who have been united in the communion of marriage as a figure of the eucharistic cup that holds together the Church. For blessed is Your name, and glorified Your Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
Choir: Amen.
Then, taking in his hands the common cup, the celebrant gives it to the newlyweds three times, first to the man, and then to the woman, singing:
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I shall take the cup of salvation and I shall call upon the name of the Lord.

And immediately the celebrant leads the newlyweds and they go round in a circular dance, the bridegroom holding their crowns behind them, and he or the people sing the following troparia in the fifth tone:

Isaia, dance; the Virgin was with child and gave birth to a son, Emmanuel, both God and man; His name is the rising of the sun, magnifying him we call the Virgin blessed.

Others, in the seventh tone:

Holy Martyrs, who have fought the good fight and won the crown, beseech the Lord to have mercy on our souls.

Glory to You, Christ God, the boast of the Apostles, the rejoicing of martyrs, whose preaching is the consubstantial Trinity.

Then the celebrant lifts up the crowns. And lifting up the crown of the bridegroom, he says:

Be magnified, bridegroom, like a king in your heart, sitting exalted in humility, and having surrendered yourself, purely and with simplicity, into the hands of your maker, follow after Him with all your heart.

And he lifts up the crown of the bride, saying:

And you, bride, be magnified like a queen, celebrating the fashioning of humankind, in the boldness of love and discretion, freely and in equal honor striving for what is better.

Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

And the celebrant says this prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, the most cress lower of each human soul, shine with the light of life in the hearts of these Your servants, who in Your providence have come together in the communion of marriage. Bless them and make their life rich in what is good, take up their crowns into Your Kingdom, and show them to be children of Your adoption, fashioned from light, to the ages of ages.

Choir: Amen.

Celebrant: Peace be to all.

Deacon: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

And again the celebrant prays:

May the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thearchic oneness of triple radiance, bless you who have now been united in this Mystery as one
A Revised Orthodox Ceremony of Marriage?

Andrew Louth

Several years ago I came across a booklet published in 1997 by the Athens publishing house, *Ekdoseis Demos*, called *A New Ecclesiastical Service of the Mystery of Marriage*, offered to the Church "by a certain anonymous married man." Several things struck me about the service, not least the very first response of the couple to be married to the priest, asking what they seek "in this eucharistic assembly": they "desire the life of *ascesis* in marriage." *Ascesis* is not an easy word to translate; its basic meaning is "training," "exercise," but it is cognate with the word *asceticism*, which conjures up a rather special kind of training—religious, aimed at achieving union with God, involving rigorous self-discipline and self-control, even self-punishment. The root from which both these words come is the verb *askeo*, which means, according to *Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon*, to work with raw materials. The idea of asceticism as working with the raw materials of human nature to create something precious seems to me an attractive starting-point for an understanding of asceticism, and something that could well be applied to marriage, where the raw materials of two lives are worked together to create a microcosm of what it is to be human; and marriage, too, is seen as a kind of laboratory in which human beings in the full sense—persons shaped by human *koinonia* so as to be capable of *koinonia* with God—find their beginnings. What follows is a translation of this *New Ecclesiastical Service*, prefaced by some general reflections on Christian marriage and Christian asceticism, and some more detailed reflections on the new service itself, in comparison with the traditional rite.

The early Christian understanding of marriage

Despite the high ideal of marriage Jesus put before His hearers (an ideal the disciples clearly felt was beyond any human strength; see Matthew 19:10), and the way in which St. Paul sees the marriage union as an analogy of the union of love between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33), the topic of married life did not feature very prominently in the teaching of the Fathers of the Church. This is doubtless because the Fathers of the Church were, almost without exception, celibates devoted to the single life, if not to the monastic life. But that is simply to restate the problem: the married life is hardly seen by them as an ideal way of following Christ for many of the Fathers commitment to Christ and commitment to the celibate life were inextricably interwoven (think of St. Augustine’s conversion). Nonetheless, in the course of Christian history only a minority has followed Christ in the single state (though at times it has certainly been a large minority); most Christians married, brought up children, and worked out their discipleship to Christ in that context. Most texts about prayer and spirituality, however, especially those from the first millennium and a half of the life of the Church, take the single life as the norm: all married Christians can do is overhear teaching directly intended for others.

A similar apparent neglect of the married Christian can be found in our liturgical texts. We are accustomed to think of marriage as one of the seven Mysteries; but the idea of seven Mysteries is Western, and so too is the inclusion of marriage. More influential in the Orthodox world is the list of six mysteriological rites discussed by Dionysios the Areopagite in his Ecclesiastical Hierarchy: these are baptism, the Eucharist, the rite for the consecration of chrisms (myron), ordination, monastic consecration, and the funeral service. Not surprisingly, it is monastic consecration we find here, not the marriage service. In fact, the history of the marriage service is quite obscure. We know that, from the earliest centuries, Christians had their marriages blessed by the bishop. We know too, that in the early centuries the Christian attitude to marriage was radical in that it cut across rules that forbade marriage between the upper classes and the lower classes or slaves (this seems to have been the policy of Pope Callistus, though we only know this from Hippolytus).


A Revised Orthodox Ceremony of Marriage

The marriage service as know it is, in origin, the blessing of (a betrothal and) a marriage already legally contracted; the exchanging of rings, the crowning, and especially the dance, are elements of the traditional Roman marriage ceremony, brought into a liturgical context. The comparative simplicity of the service, compared with that for baptism, for instance, is probably due to the fact that for centuries the marriage service had been nothing more than the blessing of a couple in the context of the Eucharist. The prayers direct attention to those aspects of marriage on which Christians laid stress, in contrast with the Roman background: that meant indissolubility and the procreation of children, the mysterious parallel drawn by St. Paul in Ephesians only being mentioned in the reading from the Apostle.

The influence of the late antique “mystique of the One”

The reason for both of these—the neglect of Christian marriage as a state of life in instruction on the Christian life and the ambivalent place of the marriage rite—is probably to be found in the fact that, in its origins, Christianity is a religion of Late Antiquity, and still shares many of the characteristics of the age in which it was born. Late Antiquity was a period that valued asceticism, that seems, in fact, to have endowed the single state of ascetical celibacy with a kind of metaphysical significance. The early Christian centuries are full of what one might call a “mystique of the One.” It is multiplicity that needs explanation, not oneness, and it is oneness that ultimately provides explanation: it is from oneness that everything derives, it is through oneness that we shall attain knowledge of and communion with the origin of everything. Pythagoreanism, which included unity-duality in its antinomies, unity being good, duality bad, further fueled this “mystique of the One.” And it was on the basis of this mystique that Christianity challenged the world of Late Antiquity. A monotheism of impeccable credentials, as Christians sought to demonstrate, traced everything from the ultimate oneness of God; monotheism was construed to mean not just that there was one God, but that He was Himself ultimate simplicity (whatever the Trinity meant, it did not challenge God’s simplicity). But Christianity could go much further than that: this God became incarnate as man, and indeed as a single man. And very early on, Christians were claiming as evidence of the truth of Christianity the fact that
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many of those who embraced Christianity lived their lives as virgins; something much admired in Late Antiquity, but not so often achieved. Virgins and martyrs—single men and women with single-minded devotion: the reality of these among the early Christians was often put forward as evidence of the truth of Christianity (cf. the apologist Athenagoras in the second century, and St. Athanasius in the fourth century). Christianity was able to claim the moral high ground in Late Antiquity, and it did. As the great Byzantinist, Norman Baynes, once remarked, “there are to be found at the heart of Christianity a stark asceticism and a staggering confidence.” And part of that stark asceticism was the promotion and glorification of the celibate state.

In the light of that, what chance was there for marriage? The answer seems to be not much, though in the light of this concern, to harness the power of the achievement of virginity what scrubs there are, in sermons and letters, are precious beyond their comparatively slender extent. But what was being claimed in early Christian monastic asceticism was a profound exploration of what it was to be a human being standing before God in prayer, and that emphasis on exploring human nature, not human deformity, remains a constant in Byzantine asceticism, preserving it from dangers of dualism that often seemed to threaten. The paradoxes of patristic asceticism, especially those that cluster around that much misunderstood aim, apatheia, for which there is no satisfactory English equivalent (not even the English Philokalia's tendering dispassion), only underline this: not least Diadochus's talk of the “fire of apatheia.” But if monastic asceticism is an exploration of what it is to be human, then the experience of marriage might equally make such a claim. Let us see what married Christians might find there is to learn from the treasury of patristic-monastic asceticism. And since this is a very preliminary foray, let us limit ourselves to two quests.

Obedience: as an ascetic virtue and in marriage

Let us start with the virtue of obedience, universally presented as central in monastic asceticism. The stories of the Desert Fathers are full

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1 Athenagoras, Legatio, 33. 2-3.
2 Athanasius, De Incarnatione, 48.
3 In his lecture “Idolatry and the Early Church,” printed in Norman Baynes

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of teaching on this. There is John the Dwarf and his watering of a bit of dry wood in obedience to his spiritual father; fetching the water occupies his nights for three years, at the end of which the wood bore fruit, which John's geronda offers to the brothers with the words, “Take and eat of the fruit of obedience.” “Obedience” in marriage is often thought of in connection with the promise to obey included in the bride's promise—that seems to speak of the domination of the man over the woman in the relationship of marriage, something that is all too often a reality, even an abusive reality. But domination of one human over another is not the point of monastic obedience: rather obedience is a way of wearing down self-will, so that the monk can surrender himself freely to God. It is probably not from extraordinary feats of obedience, retold from the Egyptian desert, that we shall find most help, as from writings dealing with communal, coenobitic monasticism, that is, the monasticism of those who live together in community (sharing a common life, koinos bios in Greek); for instance, the vastly influential Rule of St. Benedict, or a work Benedict regarded as one of his sources, the so-called Rules of St. Basil. The rules of St. Basil are particularly relevant for our purposes, as they do not seem to envisage any formal religious community: they are addressed to “Christians,” and seem to envisage any earnest Christians (though being in earnest seems to entail celibacy—but we are in Late Antiquity). Obedience is important in these texts, and usually obedience to some kind of superior, abbot or spiritual father. But there is no interest in amazing feats of obedience: obedience means, primarily, obedience to the community and its way of life. It is the obedience of submitting oneself to those with whom one is living, and not asserting oneself over them. It is an asceticism in which self-will is checked, not by apparently irrational behavior, but by experience of life together with other people, each with their own will. It is a life in which the “corners,” so to speak, are rubbed off by an asceticism of daily life, which is perhaps more reliable, though less apparently dramatic, than the asceticism implied in the story of John the Dwarf. And it is an asceticism that can be found in the life of a family. Not just the family of husband and wife, though there most intensely, but also in the family augmented by children, and still more so in the extended family of the families brought together, and the wider community shared
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through friends, and children's friends. The point of such a community, from the point of view of asceticism, is that only a minority within that community are people we would have chosen to live with. We choose spouses, and we choose friends, but we do not choose our own parents or siblings, nor our in-laws, nor their friends. This community, too close to place at a distance, yet full of people with different interests and values, is perhaps as effective in exposing and challenging our self-centered way of viewing things as any monastic cell. "Sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything" sounds more like a temptation to one subject to the asceticism of daily life.

Attention: to one another and to God

Let us take another tack, and this time, instead of looking to coenobitic monasticism, which could be regarded as not too distant from the family, let us go to Evagrius, for whom the real asceticism was the hand-to-hand combat with the demons of the hermit, even coenobitic monasticism (for whom the "more negligent brothers" play the role of the demons; cf. the last paragraph above) being regarded as much less demanding. In Evagrius's teaching one finds a central role given to attention (there is a nice play on words between the Greek for prayer and attention—proseuche and prosuche). Prayer is a state of attention to God, and much of Evagrius's ascetic teaching is concerned with analyzing those psychological states that detract from such attention: distraction, caused by desires, or much worse the sense of occlusion caused by anger. But this attention to God is not to be separated from attention to anything else: attention is seamless. One who is attentive can be attentive to God; it is not so much a matter of conflicting attentions, as a conflict between attentiveness and lack of attentiveness. For instance, in Evagrius's understanding of the spiritual life, attention to the inner structure of created things, to their logos (principles), is a necessary lower step on the way towards pure prayer, pure attention to God. For attention to anything, being absorbed in something, involves an elision of self, and it is self-concern that turns us inwards and makes attention impossible. And in all of this the family is both a way of learning attention, and something that can only attain its proper state of

 communion (koinonia), if its members are attentive to each other. And what does attention involve? A capacity to be open to others; a freedom from the self and its demands that makes it impossible for us to attend to others; a capacity to listen, rather than waiting for an opportunity to intervene. Stillness in personal prayer makes such attention to others possible, and vice versa: the capacity to be attentive to others is a form of that stillness that we need in order to pray. Eckhart's interpretation of Martha as already possessing Mary's capacity to listen, and yet also being able to be busied about with matters of practical attentive care, turns that episode in the Gospels into a parable of the superiority of contemplative action over mere contemplation.

The proposed rite compared with the traditional marriage rite

As I remarked above, the current rite of marriage could easily give the impression that the Church's concern in conducting the service is to impress upon the couple the indissolubility of marriage and the duty of having children (though this is much mitigated in the Orthodox rite by the ceremonies of crowning and dancing). These are not neglected in the proposed rite, but there is much more. The opening verses, sung by the choir, from Psalm 127, appropriate though that is, are replaced by verses from the Song of Songs, which tell of the desire for each other of a man and woman in love, ending with the verse: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Then follow the priest's words ensuring that the couple know what they are seeking, to which the couple's first response is: "desiring the life of asceticism in marriage." The main changes in the rite are, however, in the prayers. There the recital of the patriarchal couple has been dropped (perhaps that is an excess of enthusiasm!), and replaced with beautiful prayers reflecting on the nature of human love as an analogy—as St. Paul makes explicit, and perhaps the inclusion of the Song of Songs in the scriptural canon makes implicit—of the love of God for his creation and of Christ for His Church. What comes across is a boldness to speak of human love in the context of the Incarnation, rather than, as the current rite tends to do, placing it in the context of the Old Testament celebration, in narrative and verse, of the development of the human race. So, for instance, the choir is given this troparion to sing:
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What shall we give back to the Lord for all that He has given to us? For our sake God came among human beings; because of our ruined nature the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; the giver of good came to the ungrateful; the liberator to those in prison; the sun of justice rose for those sitting in darkness; on the Cross there was the One free from suffering; light shone in Hades: life entered death; the resurrection for those who had fallen. To Whom we cry: Our God, glory to You.

Though human love often seems to be a fault line along which the effects of the fall are most manifest, it is also, as this proclaims, an analogy of the reconciling activity of God, and indeed a means of that reconciliation. Inspiring the prayers is not only St. Paul and the Song of Songs, but also the teaching on love found in the writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite: in chapter 4 of Divine Names, Dionysius speaks of the equivalence of the two Greek words for love, agape and eros, and sees both creation and the Incarnation as manifestations of God's crazy love for his creation and humankind. God is seen in His love for His creation, as going out of Himself, while still remaining Himself. It is not only the doctrine of Dionysius that informs these prayers, but also his language: his amazing neologisms expressing the ineffability of God (adjectives with the prefix ἀγαπη-, the use of Dionysius's term for God, Thearchy), and his densely packed syntax, almost impossible to render into English. One of the prayers opens thus:

Trinity beyond being and beyond Godhead, ineffable goodness, we dare to apply to You the name of love and of longing, because we call You God and from Your manifestation we know that our God is love. For being the cause of everything, from Your transcendence above and beyond everything, through the excess of loving goodness, You made everything so that by love and longing You might come down among all things; You contain everything; You perfect everything; and, zealous for the good harmony and splendor of everything, You have given to each being its own beauty.¹

¹ Dionysius the Areopagite, Divine Names, 4, 10-18, especially 13-14.

Cf. the very beginning of the treatise, Mystical Theology: “Trinity, beyond being, beyond Godhead, beyond goodness...” (1.1). In Greek the first four words of the prayer are identical with the first four words of the treatise.
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...ure of the eucharistic cup that holds together the Church. For blessed is Your name, and glorified Your Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Liturgical reform is not something that characterizes the modern Orthodox Church, so it is unlikely that this "New Ecclesiastical Service of Marriage" will ever be more than a paper liturgy. But even on paper, it can stimulate reflection about a dimension of Christian asceticism, the asceticism of married life, reflection that seems to be in short supply in the Church today.

Proposal for a New Ecclesiastical Service of Marriage

Composed and offered to the Church by a certain anonymous married man.

After the Divine Liturgy, the bishop or priest stands at the holy doors with those about to be joined together standing before him, the man on the right and the woman on the left. Their two rings are laid upon the holy table.

Choir:
Bring tidings to me of the one whom my soul loved
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Lead me into the house of rejoicing, order love within me
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Until the day fades away and the shadows come
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
I will rise up and seek the one whom my soul loved
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
In the crowning in the day of wedding, in the day of rejoicing of heart
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
How beautiful and how pleasant have you become, my love, in your delights
Glory to You, our God, glory to You
Many waters cannot quench love neither can the floods drown it

1 This anonymous married man is Chrysostom Yannaras. — Ed. [Translation of the proposed service]