Christos Yannaras

The Meaning of Reality

Essays on Existence and Communion, Eros and History

Edited by
Fr. Gregory Edwards
and Herman A. Middleton

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Address all correspondence to:
Sebastian Press
1621 West Garvey Avenue
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Email: info@westsrbdio.org Website: http://www.westsrbdio.org

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II. The Meaning of Communion

racial boundaries; it is an ecumenical message, an invitation to life for every human person. Greece was never a place, it was always a way of life, with ecumenical dimensions. And you, the Greeks of Australia, are not the diaspora of the Greeks but the living incarnation of Hellenic ecumenism. The tradition that you incarnate is the revolutionary message that Hellenism conveys to our contemporary world. It is the message of the transfiguration of life, of that life that shines anew when it becomes faith, trust, and love.

You have probably heard of the trumpets that knocked down the walls of Jericho by their loud sound alone. There are many walls to be knocked down around us, and our trumpet call needs much strength. Absorb thoroughly the life-giving air of our tradition and sound its song with your trumpet. This is the wish and expectation that I convey to you from our distant motherland.

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In Praise of Marriage

The monk will never taste the experience (the real event) of sharing his life, his existence. The experience of sharing with someone else his body, his desire and his instinctive urges, the food that he has won by his labor, whatever sorrows he experiences, whatever joys. The monk will never share his name with anyone, that which ensures participation in the communion of relations. He will never taste any kind of sharing of himself, any loss of the soul—a sharing or loss that is, moreover, also self-evident, natural, without the slightest possibility of being experienced as a reward for virtue.

Marriage begins with a humble submission, clearly without awareness, to needs that are natural, individualistic, and egocentric: a need for pleasure, a need for companionship, a need for independence from parental protection, a need for individual human beings to establish their own home, their own presence in society. And the love of God "Who desires everyone to be saved" (He does not simply fish for the over-achievers), has mapped out a route for these natural, individual-centered needs to be satisfied unawares by means of sharing one's life and existence.

Sharing is not the goal. The goal is the satisfaction of the individual needs that comes through sharing. That is why there is nothing about sharing that is automatically virtuous. It is simply the involuntary humility of submission to need. And because need is egocentric, its satisfaction through sharing entails, at almost every step, a collision with the other, a clash, a visible or invisible conflict, an antagonism between the two egos. But need gains the upper hand. Need forces the ego gradually and imperceptibly to submit, to pay the costly price of backing down, the price presupposed by the satisfaction of needs.
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Marriage, as a rule, involves a tough confrontation of egos, of demands for autonomy and for the imposition of one's will—it involves battles, bitter words, wounded feelings. Thus, through these birth pangs, a sharing of existence comes imperceptibly into being. The price paid in pain banishes any sense of achievement, of praiseworthy back- ing down. The sharing of life and existence does not arrive in an observable manner. It comes into being without the awareness of those who are struggling to achieve it. Just as a man sows seed in the ground and goes to bed and gets up night after night and day after day, and the seed germinates and sprouts without his knowing it—for the earth brings forth fruit automatically.

The sharing (more correctly: the communion) of life and existence has the Holy Trinity as its teacher. It is the true life, the immortal life, which the Church proclaims. In the perspective of this proclamation that which is atomic, or individual, is death and that which is self-transcendence, self-offering, and communion constitutes life. Atomic virtue, atomic morality, the individual pursuit of salvation, have no relation to the triadic mode of existence, the mode that has been revealed in the kenotic, or self-emptying, mode of Christ. They are the way of death. By contrast, the way of life and salvation (the mode by which the human person can become sound, or complete, can participate in the plenitude of existence) is the imitation of triadic loving freedom, the kenotic self-denial of Christ: a withdrawal, in the case of the created human being, whether sought or unsought, from the autonomy of the ego, a sharing of the ego, a voluntary or even involuntary act of humility.

Elder Paisios the Kelliotie used to say, "When a person is humbled, even against his will, the grace of God is obliged to come upon him." With this phrase as a measure and criterion we can understand in part that God saves people who have never suspected that they are being saved—people who have been baptized into the Church, or people of other nations and other faiths.

In contrast to marriage, the choice of a monastic life seems to spring not from a humble submission to need but from an unconsciously arrogant pursuit of reward. If that is the case, the choice of a monastic life seems to be bound up with satisfying natural egocentric urges, different from those that are primarily bound up with marriage. They are those narcissistic instincts that the monk cannot by any effort of the will transform into a sharing of life and existence, into an involuntary self-denying humility—for to conquer one's own nature is not possible. The monk struggles to reject narcissism by a strenuous effort of withdrawal from natural individual-centered desires, withdrawal from the will itself. But his initial motive is concern for his atomic self: all his methods of freeing himself from his ego are governed by self-interest. This is not a way of sharing one's life and being, of sharing the body, the visible and tangible core of individuality, the sharing of necessity, the sharing of daily existence.

In the course of the Church's history many distinguished works entitled "In Praise of Virginity" have been written. They perhaps give the impression to the immature reader that they are dominated by a formally narcissistic competitiveness. And as a rule such narcissism is accompanied (clinical psychology offers a detailed explanation of why) by a primate fear of sexuality, by an extreme feeling of guilt about sex.

Today, within the context of a globalized culture of individualistic utilitarianism, we understand even virginity primarily as celibacy, that is to say, as the rejection of marriage for the sake of dedicating oneself to the work of the Church without the distractions of family responsibilities. And this is natural, because today's culture has been generated by the overturning of the presuppositions of the ecclesial mode of existence and life—it was created by the medieval West after its separation from the body of the Catholic Church.

The priorities that are taken for granted in our culture today, the priorities of individualism and utilitarianism, have brought about a wholesale distortion of the language of the Church's gospel: we understand salvation as something pursued individually and appropriated in legal terms, and faith as a parcel of individual convictions, the Church's presbyter as the priest of a religion, the bishop as a temporal lord, the administrative head of a religion's ideological and liturgical functions. With such assumptions we also understand celibacy as a formal prerequisite for the priestly rank of presbyter and bishop in Roman Catholicism, and for the rank of bishop in Orthodoxy. As a formal qualification, celibacy is distinguished silently but clearly from the virginity of the traditional encomia—it is esteemed on criteria of utilitarian efficacy: the service of the Church free from marital responsibilities. In Orthodox practice, when accession to the priesthood comes first, the
Church's Mystery of marriage is precluded—and if a married priest becomes a widower, he must, whether he likes it or not, join the ranks of the celibate clergy.

The celibate clergy belong to a third category: neither monks practicing the coenobitic or eremitical life, nor heads of families engaged in the struggle to share the self. They are (as a rule) careerists bent on exercising religious authority, rather like the eunuchs of the royal courts in the past. They usually sprout and develop in the cliques that surround bishops. They learn to subordinate their sexual privation to a career with an episcopal throne as the goal, an institutionalized indulgence of the ego: to exercise authority over consciences, to exploit the sheep-like submission of the flock, to be offered incense like idols, and constantly be wished “many years” in liturgical worship. Such a career attracts the young celibates of the episcopal courts. Moreover, they are drawn, too, by a feminine fascination with jewels, imperial mitres and sceptres, gold-embroidered vestments. In the hierarchy of responsibilities, offices, and privileges these young celibates naturally take precedence over grey-haired presbyters, merely because “they have not been polluted by association with a woman”—they have kept their narcissistic autonomy free from subjection to marriage.

St. Isaac the Syrian did not write any work “in praise of virginity.” He recorded his experience and his counsels concerning the ascetic struggle. In his own record one may begin to discern a convergence of the monastic and married ways of life, when they are viewed through the lens of the ecclesial event: the mode of the loving perichoresis of the Trinity, the kenoic mode of Christ. The monk, for St. Isaac, is before anything else someone who has left the world with the intention of giving himself to God—not to God in an abstract and general fashion, but to the mode of God: the mode of the ascetic life that has been institutionalized by the Church’s experience.

Marriage (zeugia in Greek) is submission to the yoke (the εγγυς) of the will of the other, a sharing of the self, of life, of everyday existence, of the body and of desire, with the other. That is how it is, too, for the monk, except that in his case the other is a very specific practice of ecclesial asceticism that is embodied in a loving obedience to the person of the abbot, of the spiritual elder—and sometimes, perhaps, directly to the person of the Lady Theotokos, to the person of Christ. With this personalized ascetical practice the monk shares his will, his food, his bodily toil, his hope.

The same secret belongs to marriage: the humbling of egocentric need—it is this that banishes from the struggle any suspicion of seeking reward. The exclusion of any eventuality of recompense, the complete (but erotic, that is, ecclesial) surrender and offering of the self, in time bears fruit automatically, giving the monk the grace to be separated from all and united to all—the sharing of a life and existence that has the Holy Trinity as its teacher.

Usually, says Isaac from experience, this grace is given when the ascetic life has been practiced for many years without any response and the ascetic (whether married person or monk) despite being sunk in despair does not give in. Such persons persevere in their faith and trust.

“In praise of marriage” means that we should manifest marriage as the measure and model of the ecclesial struggle, both the struggle of the married couple and that of the monk.
A Revised Orthodox Ceremony of Marriage?

Andrew Louth

Several years ago I came across a booklet published in 1997 by the Athens publishing house, Ekdosis 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 asceticism in marriage.” Ascetic 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 ἀσκεῖν, which means, according to Liddell and Scott’s Greek Lexicon, to work with raw materials.1 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 chirest (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 now 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 lay stress, in contrast with the Roman background: and 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 Athanagoras in the second century, and St. Athanasius in the fourth). Christianity was able to claim the moral high ground in late Antiquity, and it did. As the great Byzantologist, 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 scraps there are, in sermons and letters, are precious beyond their comparatively slender extent. But what was being claimed by 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 dispensation), only underline this: not least Diadochos’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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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 geronta 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 the 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 amusing 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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5 Athenagoras, Legatio, 33. 2-3.
6 Athanasius, De Incarnatione, 48.

6 Apophthegmata Patrum, John the Dwarf, 1.
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 on prayer one finds a central role given to attention (there is a nice play on words between the Greek for prayer and attention—prosoche and prososche). 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 logoi (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

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... 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 couples have 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 church 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. Dionysios the Areopagite: in chapter 4 of Divine Names, Dionysios 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.8 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 Dionysios that informs these prayers, but also his language: his amazing neologisms expressing the ineffability of God (adjectives with the prefix impos-, the use of Dionysios'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.9

The prayers boldly develop the way in which God's existence as love undergirds all human experience of koinonia, beginning with the love of man and woman in marriage:

For, having established the creation with wisdom, You have also, as a munificent master, given to our human nature the power to desire, which makes possible longing, which finds its purpose in love. Apart from this power of longing, the mutual exchange of man and woman would not be participation and coinherence in existence, nor would there be among humankind the bond of friendship, neither society nor city, nor even the Church itself, for which the Word of the triadic Tiarchy prayed "that they may be one, as we also are one."

The idea that human love may be the means to a loving encounter with God finds expression in another prayer, where such teaching invokes the authority of St. John Climacus:

In rhyme with this image of Your love for Your Bride, the Church, the great John the ascetic, who is among the Saints, taught us: "Let the longing of bodies become a figure of desire for God," and: "Blessed is he who possesses such a love for God, as a crazed lover possesses towards his beloved." Christ Jesus, may You Yourself now strengthen the mutual love of Your servants N. and N., which today has been offered to You, increase it and direct it towards the desire and longing for Your face.

The ecclesiology informing the prayers is what we are now accustomed to call "eucharistie": i.e., it is in the Eucharist, celebrated by the bishop, that the Church is established. It is in the Eucharist that koinonia finds its fullest earthly expression, and that koinonia finds its possibility in God's existence as love that is reflected in the human relationship of married love. These ideas find expression in the expansion of the prayer blessing the common cup:

O God, who made everything by Your might, and established the world, and adorned the crown of all things that You have made, bless with Your life-giving blessing this common cup, which is to be offered to those who have been united in the communion of marriage as a fig-
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ture 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 Christos Yannaras. — Ed. [Translation of the proposed service]
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Glory to You, our God, glory to You.
Το ευλογημένο του Θεού το κεκλημένο του
η ταινία της στολής της 13 στο PDF είναι καλά στοιχειωμένη.

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.

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Yes, honored father, it is from free choice.

Then the celebrant says this prayer aloud:

Ο 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 Ν. and Μ., 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 Ν. is betrothed to the servant of God Μ., 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 Ν. is betrothed to the servant of God Μ., 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 perfected 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,

zealous for the good harmony and splendor of everything. You have
given to each being its own beauty. Therefore we address You as the
object of all true love and longing, since You have made us worthy of
love, having given and planted in us this power, even as we have been
fashioned in Your image to make it manifest. For, having established
the creation with wisdom, You have also, as a munificent master, given
to our human nature the power to desire, which makes possible long-
ing, which finds its purpose in love. Apart from this power of longing,
the mutual exchange of man and woman would not be participation
and coinherence in existence, nor would there be among human kind
the bond of friendship, neither society nor city, nor even the Church
itself, for which the Word of the triadic thearchy prayed “that they
may be one, as we also are one.” Confessing all this, we beseech You
and entreat You, unity with three lights, holding all together, the source
of godhead and preserver of all, strengthen these your servants N and
M., now joined together in the communion of marriage, in Your love
and their love for each other. Grant them to live in self-denial embracing
all life in love, bearing with each other in unfeigned long-suffering,
each sharing their own will with that of the other. Bless them, so that,
manifesting Your image in themselves, they may fulfill this great mys-
tery of marriage, accomplishing that unity that has for its teacher, Your
triple-sunned and threefold-radiant transcendence of any beginning
or principle. For to You is due all glory, honor and worship, to the
Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to
the ages of ages.

Choir: Amen.

Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

And again the celebrant says this prayer aloud:
Lord Jesus Christ, Son and Word of the Living God, being one of
the Trinity and the Lord of glory, who for us human beings and for our
immortality took flesh and deified what You had assumed, look also
upon these servants, N. and N., and lead them to the wedding feast of
the fullness of life, which You have shown to us through Your crucified
love for human kind. For You first loved us when we were enemies fight-
ing against You. Not only did You love us, but You were dishonored by
us, and flogged, and crucified, and reckoned among the dead; and
through all this You commended to us Your love. Lord, may You Your-
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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. ¶ 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 prayed 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 in You, that they too 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, in Them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in one, and that the world may know that You love them as You loved Me. Father, I desire that those whom

² Ephesians 5:20-33.
You have given Me may be with Me where I am. I made known to them Your name and I shall make it known, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.\(^3\)

**Choir:** Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You.

**Deacon:**
Let us all say, with all our soul and with all our mind, let us say Lord Almighty, the God of our fathers, we pray You, hear and have mercy.

Also we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, and visitation for Your servants the newlyweds N. and M., their parents, their brothers and sisters and their relations, the sponsors, and for all those who love them and have come together for this holy Mystery.

**Celebrant:**
For to You praise is due, to the God and Father through Jesus Christ, His Child in the Holy Spirit the Comforter, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

**Choir:** Amen.

**Celebrant:** Peace be to all.

**Deacon:** Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

**And the celebrant says this prayer out loud:**

Lord Jesus Christ, God, who without change took bodily form for us and created from Your flesh the Church, for the sake of which You left the Father and descended to be united to it and thus You are no longer two, but now one flesh, that You might present to Yourself the glorious Church, the mother of all those who live in God. In accordance with this image of Your love for Your Bride, the Church, that great one among the Saints, John the ascetic, taught us: “Let the longing of bodies become a figure of desire for God,” and: “Blessed is he who possesses such a love for God, as a crazed lover possesses towards his beloved.” Christ Jesus, may You Yourself now strengthen the mutual love of Your servants N. and N., which today has been offered to You, increase it and direct it towards the desire and longing for Your face. May their union come to be a mutual search for You their God and a mutual dwelling in timeless life. Remember, Lord, their parents who

\(^3\) John 17:6, 9-10, 11, 17, 21-24, 26.
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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 crenellated lover 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, the archic oneness of triple radiance, bless you who have now been united in this Mystery as one.

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soul in two bodies, and grant you long life, the blessing of children, increase in life and faith, fill you with good things on earth and make you worthy of the promised delights of timeless life, through the intercessions of the holy Mother of God and all the Saints. Amen.

Then all approach and offer good wishes to the newlyweds. When all have greeted one another, the celebrant gives the final dismissal:

The bridegroom and Lord of the Church, Christ our true God, who at the marriage festivities in Cana of Galilee prefigured the mystery of the Eucharist and of His Kingdom, through the prayers of his all-pure Mother, of the holy, glorious and all-praised Apostles, of the holy sovereigns and Equal-to-the-Apostles Constantine and Helen, and of all the Saints, have mercy upon us and save us, for He is good and loves humankind.
Te Deum

Come into the shelter of the rock
near the wall
show me your face.

"Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many."

Parisian boulevards, and people swarming in and out of the Metro.
So many. A human river in the streets of Tokyo. The football stadium in Los Angeles, the crowd seated in tiers, like a carpet of spring flowers.
And when the game is over they pour out into the streets like workers leaving the factories after the siren sounds in Osaka, Cologne, Toronto.

They are in a hurry. To win the day, get through the month, to reach the end of the year. The grains of innumerable human lives trickle through the hourglass. Death swallows them all.

"Unreal city, honeycomb structures, multistoried. A labyrinth of corridors, lifts, staircases, and somewhere within a door which is our own. It closes protectively behind us. It defines the space of our own life. We lay the table, open a bottle of wine, make love. For some years we live the illusion of eternity, of an untroubled duration of time. And the hourglass of death swallows the moments, the months, the years.

A century is a brief moment in our school history books. But a century from now none of us will still be alive. The crowd will continue to flow over London Bridge, swarm out of the Paris Metro, stream
along the streets of Tokyo, and pour out of the Los Angeles stadium, the factories of Osaka, Cologne, and Toronto. Like fireflies, the lights in the windows flicker on and off. People lay tables, open bottles of wine, make love. They must be other people, not us, just as the crowds before us were other people.

Every person has a unique glance, a unique smile. We speak, think, love, as nobody else before us, or after us. We sing of love beside the sea. Full of the vigor of life, we plunge into the waves, climb onto a rock, enjoy the sunset. Listen to the swishing of the water. We sink in the present moment totally unconcerned about eternity. We have no thought of death which will cut us down, no thought of betrayal by the flesh which withers daily and eventually will rot in the soil.

Sunburnt boy, with the body of a gazelle. Salt on your eyelashes. What relation have you with your self of tomorrow? The old man with trembling limbs and fading eyesight. And fresh young girl, with the light body of a hedonistic leopard, how will your translucent skin, your light-filled gaze, your firm breasts, your hair blowing in the wind, how will all this change? How will you be transformed into withered yellowing flesh, crooked joints, swollen veins, labored breathing? What is your true self, the real person? When and where is our true identity embodied? What is at the core of our existence, the real “subject” of both beauty and decay?

Every handful of soil is a handful of death. Withered rose petals, dimmed eyes, the vanished firm contour of the flesh, scattered bones of birds, animals, and human beings. So much uniqueness decaying in the same soil, swallowed by the earth’s voracious mouth, which awaits us all. The soil is palatable death, the beyond is impalpable hope.

“How did we give ourselves up to decay? How did we yoke ourselves to death?”

We circle aimlessly in the void, in the insoluble mystery of death. Countless galaxies around us, and beyond us stars “like the sand on the shores of the sea.” Dead worlds without the smiles of flowers, the songs of birds, the colors of sunsets. A pair of human eyes and the consciousness behind the startled glance are “another” incomparable universe. And in this other universe we seek to solve the riddle of death. The lifeless worlds of the galaxies do not know death; only our tiny earth throbbing with life gathers death in every handful of soil.

What does the uniqueness of our earth mean within the infinity of the universe? What does the uniqueness of every person mean in the infinite succession of generations? Prehistoric people of the caves, of the Stone Age, how much animal instinct and how much personal otherness was expressed in their being? Mentally disabled children, cases of grave imbecility, the forgotten sufferers of psychological illnesses, schizophrenia, and senile dementia. And even the myriad of abortive embryos, the countless fertilized ova which are expelled by the mother’s body a few weeks before they acquire a beating heart. Who decides on this implacable natural selection: nature on its own or God? Who can say what is the boundary between human and non-human, between reality and potentiality, the given and the possible?

Our mind cannot conceive of an inert personality, without thought, reason, judgment, imagination, will, or expression. Nor can it conceive of existence outside space, time, and number. How can we conceive of human existence after death, personal otherness without bodily and psychological energies? What does existence “beyond the where” mean? How do “all” attain immortality, and what is this “all”? We cannot determine when the fertilized ovum attains conscious personhood, nor can we draw a boundary between conscious personhood and congenital amnesia.

We have discovered the constitution of the atomic nucleus, the structure of DNA, the composition of light, the material elements of the most distant galaxies. And yet we do not know how to define either the beginning or the end of the human person, of our own self.

We search for the solution to the riddle of our existence, to the mystery of life and death, in the way that earthworms after rainfall move, blindly in the mud, within predetermined insuperable limits. Thought and word do not guarantee us anything other than the illusion of knowledge, parables, allegories, images seen in a glass darkly. We latch onto the experience of others, the experience of people who testify that they have seen God. That they have spoken to him. And we objectivize these ineffable experiences in solid concepts to support our views. So that upon this logic we can build our psychological self-sufficiency, the defense that wards off fear and panic.

“What use is our struggle in this world? What use is our imagined view of transitory things? All is dust, all is ashes, all is shadow.”
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Perhaps there is "another" knowledge, which begins where our particular knowledge ends. Perhaps it arises as a more certain knowl-
edge when everything becomes dust, ashes, and shadow.

"O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark.
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant.
I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God."

"And then he speaks as one who has gone out of himself and says:
What is the cause of the original creation of this world and its develop-
ment, and its enrichment in this way with the density and number of
the species and the natures, and the placing in it of causes, and matter,
and conflicts between the many passions? And how in the beginning
did he set us in it, and plant in us a love for his abundant creation, and
suddenly he takes us out of this through death, and keeps us for some
time in a state of insensibility and immobility, and destroys our forms,
and pours out our mixture and mingles it with the earth and allows our
constitution to be dissolved, dismantled, and dispersed until absolutely
nothing remains of our human constitution?"

There exists a particular state in which you have doubts, and yet
make an act of trust. And we encounter this state only in erotic love.
Love signifies faith, trust, self-surrender. You are lost in the darkness of
endless unanswerable questions. Yet you abandon yourself to longing,
and this confirms to you whether the Other longs for your longing.
And then your unanswered questions have been answered. What is sig-
nified functions without the signifiers. There is only the language of
reference, the language of longing. This is the language the infant speaks
as it sucks its mother's breast. This is the language lovers speak in the
silence of the "one flesh."

"As a result of this his thoughts soar in astonishment. How did he
bring creation, that is, the wealth of all the different things beyond
number, from non-being into being? And how is it that he intends to
destroy it, its amazing order, and the beauty of its nature, and the well-
regulated course of created things? Do you see the seasons and the suc-
cession of night and day, and the complementary changes of the year,
the varied flowers of the earth, the beautiful buildings of the cities, and
the splendid palaces in them, the busy lives of people, the laborious ne-
pure of their lives, from their entry into life until they take leave of it.
And how will this wonderful order be subsequently destroyed and an-
other age come, and the memory of this first creation not rise into any-
one's heart in any way and another change come about, and other
thoughts, and other concerns?"

The darkness of these questions is the natural distance that sepa-
rates human beings from God. "All things are distanced from God, not
spatially but by nature." It is our nature that prevents us from giving
answers to these questions. That is why even denying the existence of
God, the eternity of the human person, is a natural stance. It is under-
standable. To transform the natural distance into a personal relation is
an achievement of self-withdrawal from nature; it is love.

"How long will this age last, and when will the age to come have
its beginning? And for how long will these tabernacles sleep in this
form, and our bodies be mingled with the dust? And how will that new
life come about and in what form will this nature be raised and consti-
tuted? And in what manner will this new creation come? And when he
has pondered these questions and others like them, wonder comes upon
him and deep silence, and he rises up at that hour and falls on his
knees and gives thanks with copious tears to the only wise God who is
glorified in his all-wise works for ever."

The gift of thanksgiving replaces the unanswerable questions. "For
all things, those which we know, and those which we do not know.

"I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love
For love would be love for the wrong thing;
there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all
in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready
for thought;
So the darkness shall be light, and the stillness
the dancing."