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Love as a Gift of Self : Call to Holiness in Christian Marriage in the Light of Eastern Monasticism

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Abstract: Perhaps more than ever before, Christian spouses in the contemporary world encounter challenges and difficulties in living out their call to holiness. In the history of Christianity monasticism has always represented a model of a life according to the Gospel. Monastic life has been a living icon of holiness for all Christians in the world striving for perfection. This paper considers some characteristic aspects of the spiritual life of the monastic community and their possible application to the spiritual community life of Christian marriage. The two primary sources of this paper are the writings of St. Basil the Great and St. John Paul II. Beginning with a consideration of the call to holiness, the paper proceeds to explore some fundamental and characteristic values of the monastic *koinonia* and of the *communio personarum* of Christian marriage, which leads to a discussion of the inner discipline of love as a gift of self. The paper concludes by a short eschatological reflection.

Keywords: Christian marriage, holiness, *communio personarum*, monastic *koinonia*, love as a gift of self, St. Basil the Great, St. John Paul II

Introduction

“Is there a greater happiness than to imitate on earth the choir of angels?” writes St. Basil the Great in a letter to his friend St. Gregory Nazianzus.¹ In his *Ladder*

¹ St. Basil the Great, “Letter 2,” in *The Fathers Speak*, trans. Georges A. Barrois (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 49; *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, vol. 32, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris 1864), 72. Hereafter as PG.

of *Divine Ascent* St. John Climacus writes that “Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men.”²

Monastic life is a life of imitation here on earth of the angelic life in Heaven. At the same time, monastic life is a model, a living icon, for all Christians in a world striving for perfection, and the spouses are not excluded from this call to imitate the “angelic” way of life. The question is: what is the mode of living out this “domestic monasticism”? In this paper I would like to consider some characteristic aspects of the spiritual life of the monastic community and their possible application to the spiritual community life of Christian marriage.

One would need to begin any consideration on monasticism by going first to the scriptural foundations in the Old and the New Testament, discussing the life of St. Prophet Elijah and St. John the Baptist and then proceed examining the lives of St. Anthony, the founder of the hermetic monasticism, and St. Pachomius, the founder of the coenobitic monasticism. But this would go beyond the scope of this resurge. Thus, I shall consider two primary sources in this paper, namely, St. Basil the Great, a legislator of Eastern Greek monasticism in Cappadocia Asia Minor, and St. John Paul II, a great saint, pope, and theologian in the end of 20th and beginning of 21st century.

Beginning with a consideration of the call to holiness, the paper will explore some fundamental and characteristic values of the monastic *koinonia* and of the *communio personarum* of Christian marriage. This will lead into a discussion of the inner discipline of love as a gift of self. The paper will conclude by a short eschatological reflection.

The Call to Holiness

Reading *The Longer Rules* and *The Shorter Rules* of St. Basil one could define monasticism simply as a life according to the Gospel. As he writes it in the beginning of *The Shorter Rules*, perfection consists in a sound faith and a life according to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.³ This life of faith and obedience to the call of the Gospel is aimed towards its ultimate Eschatological fulfillment which is described in the prologue of *The Longer Rules* as “a life of blessedness, equal citizenship with the saints and joy among the angels in the presence of

² St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Step 26 (Mahwah: Paulist Press 1982), 234; PG 88:339.

³ Cf. St. Basil the Great: *The Shorter Responses* (SR), prologue, in *The Asceticism of St Basil the Great*, ed. Anna Silvas (Oxford University Press, 2007), 272; PG 31:413. For comparative analysis of English translation of *The Shorter Rules* see also *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, ed. Lowther Clarke (London, New York, Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1925), 229–351.

Christ.⁴ Our Lord calls us all to His heavenly kingdom and the monks are those who respond to this call in a very “direct” and “radical” way. They live out their Baptismal grace in a most dynamic and powerful mode and take the Kingdom of God by violence—*biazetai* (Mt 11:12). The monks are the violent ones (*biastai*)⁵ of the Church, who by their “good works” bring the “light” before man and thus glorify the Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:16). This way of life is seen as a continuation of martyrdom of the first Christians, who, with a burning love for God in their hearts, witnessed their faith in Jesus Christ and, putting their hope in the Lord, offered themselves as a pure and sincere gift to God.

St. Paul teaches “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom 5:5). The love of God (*Agape tou Theou*) is granted to man by God, but not only as the created charity, but the uncreated Charity, that is, the Holy Spirit himself indwells in the soul of the just. St. Basil teaches that the Holy Spirit, the origin of our sanctification, indwells in a purified soul.⁶ It is through the Holy Spirit, as St. Basil explains, that the “hearts are lifted up [...] and those who progress are brought to perfection.”⁷ By the grace of the Holy Spirit man is able to participate in the life of the Triune God and be deified.⁸

The heart of Christian holiness and of monastic life is the perfection of charity. It is no wonder that St. Basil dedicates the first three chapters of his *Longer Rules* to this fundamental question of monastic perfection. According to St. Basil man is created with a tendency to love.⁹ “It is germinated in the school of God’s commandments, where it is carefully cultivated, skillfully nurtured, and so, by God’s grace, brought to maturity [perfection].”¹⁰ This virtue (*katorthoma*),¹¹ as St. Basil explains, “effects and comprehends in itself every commandment,” for whoever loves Christ, keeps His commandments (Jn 14:15).¹² As the saint as-

⁴ St. Basil the Great: *The Longer Responses* (LR), prologue, in *The Asceticon*, 158; PG 31:330. For comparative analysis of English translation of *The Longer Rules* see also *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, ed. Lowther Clarke (London, New York, Toronto: The Macmillan Co. 1925), 145–228.

⁵ Cf. Geoffrey William H. Lampe: *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1961), 296.

⁶ Cf. St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*. Chap. 9:23 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 44; PG 32:20.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen*, accessed 30.07.201, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19950502_orientalis-lumen.html, no. 6. Here St. John Paul II explains that the theology of deification (*theosis*) “remains one of the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought.”

⁹ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 2; SR 174, 212; PG 31:336–340, 473, 486.

¹⁰ St. Basil the Great, LR 2, in *The Asceticon*, 162; PG 31:336–340.

¹¹ Cf. PG 31:336; *Katorthoma* means action rightly done, a moral act achieved—very prominent in St. Basil’s vocabulary; see footnote 42 in *The Asceticon*, 163.

¹² St. Basil the Great, LR 2, in *The Asceticon*, 163; PG 31:336.

serts, we have already received from God “the capacities (*dynameis*) for all the commandments” that the Lord has given us.¹³

According to St. Basil love towards God (*Theon agapes*) cannot be learned from outside.¹⁴ One has to learn it, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, from within, by living a virtuous life in accomplishing the commandments.¹⁵ Virtue, as defined by St. Basil, is the proper use of the movements of the soul implanted in us by God, that is, “with a good conscience, in accordance with the Lord’s commandments.”¹⁶ The alternative is to turn towards vice, which is an evil use of the movements of the soul, that is, contrary to the commandments.¹⁷

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* St. John Paul II writes that “God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love [...]. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.”¹⁸ These words of St. John Paul II seem to correspond to St. Basil’s idea on love discussed above. Monasticism and marriage are two specific states of Christian life. Thus, one should not make direct connections between the monastic spirituality and that of marriage and family. Nevertheless, men and women in both states are called to grow in holiness, which consists in the perfection of charity. In the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* we read that “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”¹⁹ As St. John Paul II writes in *Familiaris Consortio*, “Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: *marriage and virginity or celibacy*. Either one is in its proper form an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being created in the image of God.”²⁰ By divine grace human natural love, being flawed by sin, is healed and raised to a supernatural dimension—to charity—and man is called to love God and his neighbor (Mt 22:37–39) in a supernatural and holy way. This call to perfect charity is the same call for both, the monks and the married couples, but the way they live it out is, nevertheless, different.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164; PG 31:337.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 163–64; PG 31:336–37.

¹⁸ St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. November 22, 1981, in Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II (Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1981), no. 11.

¹⁹ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. November 21, 1964, in *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), no. 40.

²⁰ St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11.

The Monastic *Koinonia*

As St. John Paul II explains, God inscribed in man the capacity and the vocation not only of love but also of communion.²¹ Speaking of monastic life St. Basil emphasizes important anthropological and social aspects in the third chapter of *Longer Rules*, namely, that man is “a domesticated (*emeron*) and sociable (*koinonikon*) animal” and not “a solitary (*monastikon*) and wild (*agrion*) one.”²² As he writes: “Nothing is more characteristic of our nature, that we have fellowship with one another, need one another and love our own kind.”²³ The monastic community, the monastic *koinonia*, is the school of authentic love—a love lived out and perfected in communion.

Considering the manner of life together St. Basil uses the example of the human body and compares the harmonious work of its members to that of the members of a monastic community.²⁴ The principle of a harmonious life and activity lies in the proper way of doing things. St. Basil writes: “Since the Apostle says: ‘Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40),’ we consider that when believers are joined together there will be a decent and well-ordered way of life in which the principle of the members of the body is observed (1 Cor 12:27).”²⁵ In the seventh chapter of his *Longer Rules* St. Basil explains the reasons for preferring community life for the monks. Here I shall present some of them which are relevant to the topic of this paper.

The first very practical reason for living in *koinonia* consists in the fact that we need one another for providing the necessities of life, simply with regard to bodily needs.²⁶ Here St. Basil uses the image of a human body explaining that one foot, surely having use of its own powers, is in need of other foot and other members of the body in order to fulfill its own activity and be sufficient to endure. So it is with the life in community, “because God the Creator ordained that we have need of each other, as it is written, so that we associate with one another (Gn 2:18; Sir 13:16; 1 Cor 12:25).”²⁷

“In addition to this,” writes St. Basil, “the very character of Christ’s love, does not permit an individual to seek his own interests, for Love, says the Apostle, seeks not its own (1 Cor 13:4).”²⁸ Referring to St. Paul, he emphasizes that a monk should seek not his own advantage but that of the many, so that they

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*

²² St. Basil the Great, LR 3, in *The Asceticon*, 172; PG 31:340.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 24, in *The Asceticon*, 224–25; PG 31:369.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁶ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 7, in *The Asceticon*, 181; PG 31:345–248.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

might be saved (1 Cor 10:33).²⁹ The life of a monk in *koinonia* is aimed at perfection of charity by seeking the good of the others and contributing to their salvation.

Furthermore, as St. Basil explains, “the individual does not easily recognize his own faults and vices if he has no one to reprove him and set him right with gentleness and compassion.”³⁰ Mutual correction in the life of community effects the personal development and formation of an individual character and helps in the process of purification from vices and growing in virtue.

St. Basil continues by saying that “the many commandments are more easily fulfilled by many living together, but not at all by one alone, for in fulfilling one commandment, another is hindered.”³¹ If the life of the monastic community is well ordered then the fulfillment of the commandments of Christ is more effective and dynamic, since more are involved at the same time in doing “good works” (Mt 5:16).

“Moreover,” writes St. Basil, “if all of us have been gathered up in the one hope to which we were called (Eph 4:4), then we are one body having Christ as head and we are each members of the other (Rom 12:5).”³² St. Basil emphasizes here “serving the common good in that dispensation which accords with God’s good pleasure,” and the preservation of the harmonious “relation and service of the members towards each other,” as well as the aspect of the subjection to Christ in the community life.³³

Furthermore, as St. Basil articulates, “no one is sufficient of himself to receive all the spiritual charisms. Instead, the supply of the Spirit is given according to the proportion of each one’s faith (Rom 12:6), such that, in communion of life the individual charism becomes the common possession of fellow-citizens (Eph 2:19).”³⁴ Thus, in a monastic community life the activity of the Holy Spirit in one monk passes over to all alike—“when the many live together, each enjoys his own gift, even as he multiplies it by sharing it with others, and reaps the fruit of others’ gifts, as if they were his own.”³⁵ St. Basil also emphasizes the importance of common prayer by those “praying together with one mind and heart, with the result that from many persons, through the grace which is in [them], thanks are rendered to God.”³⁶

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 182–83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 183–84.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 184. Besides the above-mentioned reasons, the life in monastic *koinonia* has many other advantages, as described by St. Basil. I shall not discuss all the reasons here but only those that closely relate to the topic of this paper.

A monk is called to perfect his charity for God and neighbor through a life of virtues by fulfilling the commandments. So doing, he serves the common good of the body of the monastic community, as well as of the whole Body of Christ, the Church, in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. This is realized in a life of a loving mutual relationship by serving one another in subjection to Christ through the monastic obedience, thus fostering the harmony of the community life. Even the spiritual gifts are shared between the monks living in *koinonia*.³⁷ In such a way each member of the community can enjoy his own gift, even as he multiplies it by sharing it with others, and he can reap the fruit of others' gifts, as if they were his own.³⁸

The *Communio Personarum* of Christian Marriage

Christian spouses are called to holiness in their domestic community. Thus, first I shall define what I mean by this community. In his Letter to Families, St. John Paul II writes that the family “is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum*.”³⁹ As St. John Paul II explains it “only persons are capable of living ‘in communion.’” Now, as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach, “the family originates in a marital communion as a ‘covenant,’ in which man and woman ‘give themselves to each other and accept each other.’”⁴⁰ It is in this context of the “covenant” of marriage that Christ confirms and makes it clear to all that the basis of the common good of the family is the indissoluble character of marriage.⁴¹

The words of the marriage consent that the couple pronounces during the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony define and express what is essential to the common good of the spouses and they indicate what ought to be the common good of the future family: love, fidelity, honor, the permanence of their union until death.⁴²

³⁷ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 7, in *The Asceticon*, 183–84; PG 31:346. For English translation of LR 7 see also *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, ed. Lowther Clarke, 164–65.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*. February 2, 1994, in Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II (Rome: Vatican Press, 1994), no. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.* “If the Master confirms it ‘now,’ he does so in order to make clear and unmistakable to all, at the dawn of the New Covenant, the indissoluble character of marriage as the basis of the common good of the family.”

⁴² Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 10.

Speaking of common good in marriage one cannot avoid mentioning the teaching of St. Augustine on the three goods of marriage—a first systematic theological work on marriage whose influence on later Christian thought has been immense.⁴³ “The good of marriage among all nations and peoples,” writes St. Augustine “lies in the purpose of procreation and in the faithful preservation of chastity. But for the people of God the good of marriage lies also in the holiness of the sacramental bond.”⁴⁴ This scheme of the three goods—the good of children, the good of fidelity, and the good of sacramentality—being elaborated by Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii*, had shown itself to be very appropriate for the dynamics of Christian action, where the divine promises, the goods, encompass and lay the foundation for the precepts.⁴⁵ The ends of marriage established by God are, precisely, the goods promised by him, and he has established his laws in their service, as the active intimate principle and external guide for the successful attainment of those very ends. The goods of marriage are the basis for a good and holy Christian marriage and family life.⁴⁶

As St. John Paul II writes in his Letter to Families, the good of both spouses, which is at the same time the good of each of the spouse, “must then become the good of the children. The common good, by its very nature, both unites individual persons and ensures the true good of each.”⁴⁷ St. John Paul writes that the common good of the family is realized in the newborn child.⁴⁸ “Just as the common good of spouses is fulfilled in conjugal love, ever ready to give and receive new life, so too the common good of the family is fulfilled through that same spousal love, as embodied in the newborn child.”⁴⁹ The good of children and their education “is profoundly linked to marital consent, with its solemn promise of love, conjugal respect, and fidelity until death.”⁵⁰

As St. John Paul II articulates, “love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually.”⁵¹ In his *Familiaris Consortio* St. John Paul II emphasizes that the spouses are called to love each other in their unified totality, namely, in their bodily and spiritual

⁴³ Cf. David Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 22.

⁴⁴ St. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, no. 32, in David Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 120, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, vol. 40. Paris (1845): 394.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ramon Garcia de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1993), 118–19.

⁴⁶ Cf. Yosyp Veresh, *The Anthropological Foundations of Spirituality of Marriage in the Christian East* (Uzhhorod: Lira Publishing Company, 2010), 126.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 10.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

dimensions.⁵² “Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love.”⁵³ In their conjugal life the spouses, “while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love.”⁵⁴ They are “no longer two, but one flesh (Mt 19:6)” and they are called “to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.”⁵⁵ Conjugal love is realized “in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death [...]. If the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally.”⁵⁶

The Gospel reveals the truth concerning the gift of self as being rooted “in the gift of God, Creator and Redeemer, and in the ‘grace of the Holy Spirit,’” which is poured out on the spouses during the celebration of the sacrament of marriage, writes St. John Paul II in his Letter to Families.⁵⁷ Without such an “outpouring” of grace, the spouses cannot live out their vocation of love and communion as a gift of self. They are called to realize that they have been redeemed at “great cost, by the price of the most sincere gift of all, the blood of Christ of which they partake through the sacrament. The liturgical crowning of the marriage rite is the Eucharist, the sacrifice of that ‘Body which has been given up’ and that ‘Blood which has been shed,’ which, in a certain way, finds expression in the consent of the spouses.”⁵⁸

As Christian spouses, the husband and the wife, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, are called to live out their mutual love and their life of communion in a supernatural way. They are thus called to grow in holiness by living out their married and conjugal love according to its true nature, by helping and assisting each other in their everyday practical life, by seeking the good of the other, both temporal and spiritual, by loving correction in the spirit of humility and service, by living a life of virtues and thus contributing to the harmony and common good of the community of their “one flesh” (Gn 2:24), by exchanging also the spiritual gifts they have, and by glorifying God through their common prayer that is rooted in the prayer of the Church and its sacramental life. All the above and many other characteristic values of the monastic spirituality could be applied for the spiritual benefit of Christian spouses and families by analogy. The life of domestic *koinonia* should resemble that of the monastic one by ordering

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*

⁵³ John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

and sanctifying their time and their life. Here too the rules of St. Basil could become the source of inspiration, for example, for scheduling common prayer of the day, for the proper mode of receiving guests, for the charitable works towards those who are in need and for serving the common good of the whole Church.

We shall not go here into a detailed discussion of various practical and pastoral aspects of spiritual life of marriage and family. This paper attempts to show that there does exist a certain similarity between the spiritual life of monastic community and that of the community life of Christian marriage; namely, in both states there is a call to perfection of charity—as a gift of oneself in a supernatural dimension—and this call to a self-giving love is realized in the context of living in *koinonia* (communion) and serving the common good. The call to holiness is the same for both states, but the mode of the realization is, nevertheless, different.⁵⁹

The Inner Discipline of Love

What is the measure of love for God? St. Basil answers this question in the following way: “To be ever stretching the soul beyond its strength towards the will of God, having his glory as its goal and desire.”⁶⁰ This idea of straining forward or stretching beyond (*epektasis*)⁶¹ in the spiritual life is taken from St. Paul (Phil. 3:13) and is quite popular among some Eastern Fathers. However, it requires an inner discipline or self-control that orders properly and harmoniously the powers in man. The term used by St. Basil for self-control is *engkrateia*,⁶² which could be literary translated as ‘self-governance’ or ‘self-discipline.’ St. Paul lists it as one among the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). In the monastic spiritual tradition, the ascetic is called, by the grace of the Holy Spirit and his virtuous life, to live out self-control in a very dynamic way by

⁵⁹ One shall recall here the teaching of the Catholic Church about the excellence of virginity and of celibacy and of their superiority over the married state as it was revealed by Christ, taught by St. Paul, explained in the same way by all the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and was solemnly defined as a dogma of divine faith by the holy council of Trent [Sess. XXIV, can 10]. See Pope Pius XII, Encyclical on Consecrated Virginity *Sacra Virginitas*, no. 32. May 25, 1954, accessed July 31, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25031954_sacra-virginitas.html.

⁶⁰ St. Basil the Great, SR 211, in *The Asceticon*, 389; PG 31:486.

⁶¹ Cf. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 513.

⁶² Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 16; PG 31:358–59; See also Lampe: *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 775–76.

bringing under a harmonious rule all the aspects of his being and thus giving himself completely and wholly to God.

St. Basil teaches that self-control is necessary for the fulfillment of all the commandments.⁶³ Thus, it is necessary for perfecting love, since according to St. Basil, progress in love towards God (*Theon agapes*) is to fulfill the commandments.⁶⁴ The life of *engkrateia* enables a person to live out his love in a very dynamic way.

It is through self-control that the rigorous treatment of the body, and its being brought into subjection (1 Cor 9:27) is accomplished.⁶⁵ Self-control brings about peace and harmony in man. Training in self-control “extends to abstinence from everything that harms us, by which we may be gratified but are also wounded in soul.”⁶⁶ Abstinence that is necessary for those training themselves to piety—is an “abstinence from all that those who live according to passion crave to enjoy.”⁶⁷ St. Basil writes, “Self-control declares one who has died with Christ (Col. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11) and mortified his members that are upon the earth (Col. 3:5). We know that it is the mother of temperance, the sponsor of health, the effective remover of obstacles to bearing fruit in Christ through good works (Eph. 2:10).”⁶⁸

The term used by St. Basil for temperance is *sophrosyne*, which signifies moderation and chastity coupled with other virtues.⁶⁹ It is understood in Eastern spiritual tradition as purity or chastity not only in its narrow sense but rather as a kind of integrity of a person in his dedication to Christ. We find a similar idea on chastity in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that defines the virtue of chastity as involving the integrity of the person and the integrity of the gift: “Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual dimension.”⁷⁰

In this context, a monk lives out the integrity of his person, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as a gift of self to Christ through a life of self-control (*engkrateia*) lived out in virginity—in perfect chastity. Thus, “ever stretching

⁶³ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 16, in *The Asceticon*, 207–208; PG 31:358–59.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 163; PG 31:336.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 205; PG 31:358–59.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 207; PG 31:359.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ St. Basil the Great, LR 18, 212; PG 31:361–62.

⁶⁹ St. Basil the Great, LR 18; PG 31:362. Cf. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1370. In the Church Slavonic languages the word used for purity or chastity is *Cilomodrije*; see *Polnij Cerkovno-Slovyanskij Slovary (A Complete Church-Slavonic Dictionary)* (Moskva: Otchij Dom, 2001), 806.

⁷⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 2337.

(*epekteinesthai*) the soul beyond its strength towards the will of God,⁷¹ the monk lives out his direct and dynamic love to his Lord.⁷²

St. John Paul II in his Letter to Families writes about an interior discipline of the gift: “The person realizes himself by the exercise of freedom in truth. Freedom cannot be understood as a license to do absolutely anything: it means a gift of self. Even more: it means an interior discipline of the gift [...]. All this is made real in the ‘communion of persons.’”⁷³ Love, as a free gift of self in truth, requires an interior discipline. This may be sometimes very demanding. Love is demanding, as St. John Paul II explains it: “But this is precisely the source of its beauty: by the very fact that it is demanding, it builds up the true good of man and allows it to radiate to others [...]. Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and gives it to others.”⁷⁴

The practice of self-control helps Christian spouses to live their conjugal life according to the true nature of marriage and human sexuality by living in “conjugal chastity.”⁷⁵ In the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* we read: “By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown.”⁷⁶ The document also explains that through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions the spouses render mutual help and service to each other and they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day.⁷⁷ The intimate union of the spouses and the good of the children are ultimately rooted in the authentic life of chastity in marriage.

Chastity, which is “the successful integration of sexuality within the person,”⁷⁸ comes from the integrity of the powers, those powers (*dynameon*) which, as St. Basil teaches in his rules, “are implanted in us from the beginning like seeds.”⁷⁹ Life of self-control (*engkrateia*) disciplines each spouse and orders his and her emotions, feelings, and desires in a proper and harmonious way. To grow in their interior discipline of the gift the spouses are advised

⁷¹ St. Basil the Great, SR 211, in *The Asceticon*, 389; PG 31:486.

⁷² Normally one would discuss monastic chastity together with the two other monastic vows, namely, obedience and poverty, called the evangelical counsels. The perfection of charity in a monastic life in a very special way appears in the practice of these counsels. In his rules, St. Basil does not treat them separately as three evangelical counsels, but considers them in a broader context of the call of the Gospel to perfection in charity. I shall not consider each of these three counsels here but will focus on chastity only.

⁷³ John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2345.

⁷⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48.

⁷⁷ Cf., *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2337.

⁷⁹ Cf. St. Basil the Great, LR 3, in *The Asceticon*, 172; PG 31:340–41.

by St. Paul and encouraged by the Christian experience to practice temporal abstinence from conjugal life, for a certain period of time, by mutual agreement and for the sake of deepening their devotion in prayer to God (1 Cor 7:5). This practice of self-control, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, will help them to grow in temperance (*sophrosyne*) and thus to exercise their gift of self in their conjugal life according to the truth of the Gospel. Following the counsel of St. Paul, they will learn in their bodily and spiritual dimensions how to act as free human persons in their prayerful dedication to God, how to grow in mutual respect and how to build up a proper way of living together as a *communio personarum*. So, what is the measure of love for God in the life of Christian spouses living in conjugal chastity? In the words of St. Basil, we could say: "To be ever stretching the soul beyond its strength towards the will of God, having his glory as its goal and desire."⁸⁰

Conclusion

I shall conclude with a short eschatological consideration. In the first prayer of the Great and Angelic Monastic Schema, in the Byzantine tradition, the following is read:

Rejoice therefore with joy and exult with exultation, for today the Lord God has selected you and set you apart from life in the world, and has set you, as before his face, in the post of the Monastic order, in the service of the angelic life, in the height of the life which imitates Heaven, to worship him angelically, to serve him wholly and completely, to seek those things which are above. 'For our way of life,' according to the Apostle, 'is in the Heavens.'⁸¹

Monastic life is a participation already here on earth, in a certain way, in the angelic life in Heaven. It is the realization of the eschatological dimension of Christianity. The monk, being set apart from the world, through his angelic worship and service, lives out his direct and dynamic mode of love to his Lord. In a special way, he points to the eschatological reality by his monastic chastity. Our Lord Jesus Christ affirms that at the final resurrection man and woman "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mt 22:30). The state of the resurrected man shall be a perfect state of integrity

⁸⁰ St. Basil the Great, SR 211, in *The Asceticon*, 389; PG 31:486.

⁸¹ *Rubrics and Service of the Great and Angelic Monastic Schema*, accessed October 2, 2014, <http://orthodoxmonk.blogspot.co.at/2007/05/rubrics-and-service-of-great-and.html>.

of the human person, not destroying human sexuality, but bringing it to perfection in a mode of virginity.⁸²

How do we understand this? In his General Audiences on the Theology of the Body St. John Paul II writes that the final resurrection from the death “will consist in the perfect participation of all that is physical in man in what is spiritual in him.”⁸³ At the same time, resurrection “will consist in the perfect realization of what is personal in man.”⁸⁴ Thanks to the love of a perfect union, the eschatological communion of man with God “will be nourished by the vision, face to face, of contemplation of that more perfect communion—because it is purely divine—which is the Trinitarian communion of the divine persons in the unity of the same divinity.⁸⁵ The just will have the “eschatological experience of the living God [that will reveal] in a deep and experiential way, the self-communication of God to the whole creation and, in particular, to man.”⁸⁶ And the worthy response of the resurrected man, while keeping masculinity and femininity, to that self-communication of God, will be a perfect personal gift of self in the state of virginity. St. John Paul II writes,

In this mutual gift of himself by man, a gift which will become completely and definitively beatifying, as a response worthy of a personal subject to God’s gift of himself, virginity, or rather the virginal state of the body, will be totally manifested as the eschatological fulfillment of the nuptial meaning of the body, as the specific sign and the authentic expression of all personal subjectivity.⁸⁷

To those who live out their Christian perfection in marriage St. Paul counsels to practice a temporal abstinence from conjugal life for a certain period of time, by mutual agreement and for the sake of deeper devotion to prayer (1 Cor 7:5). In so doing, the spouses will not only increase their charity to God and to each other, but, in a certain way, they will realize, though in a less perfect mode, the ideal of Christian chastity lived out in monastic state, pointing thus to the “eschatological fulfillment of the nuptial meaning of the body.”⁸⁸ Perhaps in our times of strong secularization and liberalization, there is a need to re-emphasize the importance of continence in the spiritual life of Christian spouses. We believe that it is this eschatological reality that should inspire those who work in

⁸² Cf. Yosyp Veresh, *The Anthropological Foundations of Spirituality of Marriage in the Christian East*, 294–95.

⁸³ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 241.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the pastoral care for marriage and family to look for authentic means of support for Christian spouses and their families in their call to holiness.

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L'amour en tant que don de soi-même :
Vocation à sainteté dans le mariage chrétien à la lumière
du monachisme de l'est

Résumé

Dans le monde contemporain, probablement à un degré plus haut que jamais auparavant, les époux chrétiens rencontrent des défis et difficultés concernant la réalisation de la vocation à vivre dans la sainteté. Dans l'histoire du christianisme, le monachisme constituait toujours un modèle de vie conforme à l'Évangile. La vie monastique constituait une icône vivante de la sainteté pour tous les chrétiens au monde qui se dirigeaient vers la sainteté. Le présent article analyse quelques aspects caractéristiques de la vie religieuse des moines et leur application éventuelle dans l'existence d'une communauté religieuse qu'est le mariage chrétien. Les textes du Saint Basile le Grand et du Saint Jean-Paul II sont deux sources essentielles de cet article. En commençant par les réflexions sur la vocation à la sainteté, l'article passe à l'analyse de quelques principales et typiques valeurs monastiques *koinonia* et *communio personarum* du mariage chrétien, ce qui conduit par suite à une discussion sur la discipline intérieure de l'amour en tant que don de soi-même. L'article finit par une courte réflexion eschatologique.

Mots clés : mariage chrétien, sainteté, *communio personarum*, *koinonia* monastique, amour en tant que don de soi-même, St. Basile le Grand, St. Jean-Paul II

Yosyp Veresh

L'amore come dono di sé:
Vocazione alla santità nel matrimonio cristiano alla luce
del monachesimo orientale

Sommario

Nel mondo moderno, forse in misura maggiore rispetto al passato, i cristiani sposati devono affrontare sfide e difficoltà nella loro vocazione a una vita di santità. Nella storia del cristianesimo, il monachesimo è sempre stato un modello di vita secondo il Vangelo.

La vita religiosa è stata un'icona vivente della santità per tutti i cristiani del mondo che aspirino all'eccellenza. Il presente articolo prende in esame alcuni aspetti specifici della vita spirituale dei monaci e la loro possibile applicazione nella vita spirituale della comunità, che è il matrimonio cristiano. Le due fonti fondamentali di questo articolo sono gli scritti di San Basilio Magno e San Giovanni Paolo II. A partire dalle riflessioni sulla vocazione alla santità, l'articolo passa ad esaminare alcuni dei valori fondamentali e caratteristici della *koinonia* monastica e della *communio personarum* del matrimonio cristiano, per poi passare a un dibattito sulla disciplina interna dell'amore come dono di sé. L'articolo si conclude con una breve riflessione escatologica.

Parole chiave: matrimonio cristiano, santità, *communio personarum*, *koinonia* monastica, amore come dono di sé, San Basilio Magno, San Giovanni Paolo II