

Marriage for Clergy and Laity.

Marriage Bond and Dissolution in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

This presentation aims to give a compact picture of what is happening in Eastern Orthodox Christian Church about marriage, divorce and remarriage of Christians, priests and laymen.

In Theory and in Practice, both in the ancient and in the contemporary Eastern Orthodox Church, celibacy and marriage are considered to be a matter of free choice for all Christians, clergy and laity.

This is how the Church puts into practice the words of Saint Paul, in view of the second and glorious return of Christ to earth: *“Not everyone can receive this saying (to stay unmarried), but only [those] to whom it is given”*¹.

I. Clergy

Regarding the Clergy, men can be ordained at the first two levels of priesthood, as deacons and priests, whether married or not.² So, we have two categories: married and unmarried priests. Nevertheless, after their ordination, they cannot get married.³ In this case, “clerical marriage” is forbidden.

Now, in order for someone to climb the third and last stair of priesthood, to become a Bishop, he must be unmarried.

We must mention that this situation was not in force in the ancient Church. It is written that: *“an overseer (in Greek «ἐπίσκοπος») must be ... the husband of one wife”*⁴. This has been interpreted in various ways, including that the overseer was not allowed to remarry even if his wife died.⁵ Consequently, there were married Bishops, and furthermore, some of them, even became saints.⁶ There is also an interesting Apostolic Canon⁷ which gave warn: *“Let not a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, put away his wife under pretence of religion; but if he put her away, let him be excommunicated; and if he persists, let him be deposed”*.

¹ Mat. 19:11

² «Orthodox theologians advocate optional celibacy for theological reasons. But, in addition, they prefer parish priests to be married as a means of preventing moral failures and scandals in the Church, even though they realize that marriage does not necessarily solve the sexual problem. It is not unknown for married priests to violate the moral code, and the danger of preoccupying themselves with family concerns is not absent from their lives». DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church, in magazine “CONCILIUM”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 36.

³ «Marriage of the clergy was not recommended after ordination and special canons made this a tradition. For example, the first canon of Neocaesarea (314) forbade the marriage of presbyters after ordination. The fifteenth canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council forbade the marriage of deaconesses after their tonsure. The fourth canon of the Synod in Trullo forbade marriage after ordination for all ranks of the priesthood. Despite these restrictions, however, there were deacons and presbyters who married after ordination. This custom, though, was once again attacked in the tenth century by imperial legislation». DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church in magazine “CONCILIUM”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 33.

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:2

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clerical_marriage

⁶ For example: Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Elder of Nazianzus, Spiridon of Trimithoundos and others.

⁷ Canon V of the Canons of the Twelve Apostles.

Ecclesiastical reasons⁸ at a certain period imposed the obligatory celibacy of Bishops.⁹ There were not dogmatic reasons but matters of canonical – spiritual discipline¹⁰ and “management” of the internal life of Church¹¹ (e.g. nepotism¹² & the interference of the wife in the administration of local Church).

It is nevertheless still possible for a bishop to have children and, even further, a wife, if he is a widower or – according to the holy Canons –his wife remains –by her own will– in a monastery as a nun¹³.

According to the Holy Canons and their “instructions”, a member of the Clergy cannot get married for a second time; if something like that happens or tends to (in the sense that he is living together with a woman who is not his wife) this man would be deposed. Such a situation used to be a problem, for many priests throughout the centuries. But it became an intense problem for the entire Orthodox Church in the twentieth century (mainly for widowers) and even more so in the twenty-first century (for widowers and men who were separated or abandoned by their wives)¹⁴.

Another interesting point of the theology of priesthood in the Orthodox Church¹⁵ concerns a man who wants to be a priest. He is not allowed to do so if he is married to a

⁸ «It is historically true that attempts were made to impose celibacy upon all the clergy, but they failed in the Eastern Church. The first serious attempt was made in the First Ecumenical Synod in 325 by Hosius, the bishop of Cordoba, and certain other bishops from Greece proper. But their views did not prevail. The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (Socrates: Ecclesiastical History, I.xi; Sozomenus, Ecclesiastical History, I. xxiii) relates that: “It seemed fit to the bishops to introduce a new law into the Church, that those who were in holy orders, I speak of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, should have no conjugal intercourse with the wives whom they had married while still laymen... When discussion on this matter was impending, Paphnutius [Bishop of the cities in Upper Thebes in Egypt] having arisen in the midst of the assembly of bishops, earnestly entreated them not to impose so heavy a yoke on the ministers of religion: asserting that ‘marriage itself is honourable, and the bed undefiled’, urging before God that they ought not to injure the Church by too stringent restrictions. ... Gelasius of Kyzikos (+ca. 475) adds that Paphnutius considered obligatory celibacy as an *hyperbole* of excessive imposition, which went beyond the demands of human nature. Hyperbolic zeal in issuing canons forbidding married bishops, priests, deacons and subdeacons to continue living with their wives, of imposing celibacy upon the new clergy can possibly hurt rather than serve the Church. “Not all can sustain the heavy burden of exercising the mortification of natural desires” (Gelasius of Kyzikos, “Historia Concilii Nicaeni”, XXXII MPG, vol 85, cols 1336-1337). Commenting on the decision of the First Ecumenical Synod, Gelasius writes that optional celibacy was adopted for the benefit of the Church». DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church in magazine “*CONCILIUM*”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 32-33. Retrieved by: [http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/arhu/content/docs/djc%20archive/Marriage%20and%20Celibacy%20of%20the%20Clergy%20in%20the%20Orthodox%20Church\(1\).pdf](http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/arhu/content/docs/djc%20archive/Marriage%20and%20Celibacy%20of%20the%20Clergy%20in%20the%20Orthodox%20Church(1).pdf)

⁹ «Until the first quarter of the sixth century, there was no discrimination against married bishops and no distinction between married and unmarried candidates for the episcopate». DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church in magazine “*CONCILIUM*”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 33.

¹⁰ IOANNIS SIDIRAS: The Orthodox Church and the issue about the second marriage of the Clergy (in greek), 30/10/2015. Retrieved by: <http://www.enromiosini.gr/arthrografia>

¹¹ «The celibate episcopate prevailed after the Synod in Trullo (691-692), not only because of the increasing influence of monastic ideals, but as a reaction against nepotism, which tended to create problems within the Church». DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church in magazine “*CONCILIUM*”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 35. ALSO: «With a married episcopate there would automatically come the danger of episcopal favouritism to a bishop’s children, sons receiving the best parishes, daughters being married to property etc etc». (Source: St John’s Orthodox Church-Colchester, Orthodox England on the ‘net, “Why Orthodox Bishops are Celibate”. Retrieved by: <http://orthodoxengland.org.uk/celbish.htm>)

¹² Nepotism is where the ecclesiastical dignity is passed down from father to son and becomes a sort of family empire (something that the Church can never be). Retrieved by: http://www.stmaryorthodoxchurch.org/orthodoxy/articles/married_bishops

¹³ The presumptions are to be the children adult and to be in a good state.

¹⁴ See: Metropolitan NIKOLAOS of FTHIOTIS (PROTOPAPAS): Endogenous and exogenous problems of hieratical diakonia in nowadays society, Lamia 2010, pg. 22-25 (in Greek)

¹⁵ In relation to the need of a real catholic theology of priesthood, as is written at the very self-critical and profound article of BASILIO PETRÀ about “The Theological and Ecclesial Meaning of Married Priesthood (some reflections)” which has been published at the INTAMS Review, Journal for the Study of Marriage & Spirituality, vol. 21 (1), summer 2015, ed. Peeters, pg. 23.

woman who is a widow or has been divorced. Behind this prohibition lies the idea that the priest must be the perfect representative of humanity in order to be dedicated to God¹⁶.

The only “solution” -sad but necessary- for an ordained man who wants to enter a second marriage is to be deposed by the Court of the Church [in simple language we call this: to hang up his stole (his epitrachelion)¹⁷].

“A heated discussion concerning a second marriage for priests and deacons in the Orthodox Church was conducted in the 1920s.

The dialogue was initiated by the Church of Serbia which was faced with many widowed priests in the districts of Karlovitsi, Bukovina and Dalmatia. The Serbian Church appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarch who asked several theologians, clergymen and laymen alike, for their theological opinion. ... The consensus was that a second marriage for widowed priests was both doctrinally and ethically in order....

Unfortunately, the issue has remained under discussion to the present day¹⁸. After that, many Christians thought that the subject of “clerical marriage” would have become a matter of discussion in a Panorthodox Synod, like this one which took place in Crete in last June (2016), after decades of planning and preparation.¹⁹ But ultimately, it was not discussed. So, this matter remains “off-stage,” with priests who are widowers, abandoned by their wives, or divorced, trying to find any solution to their problem.²⁰

Finally, what the recent Panorthodox Synod has decided was that²¹:

1. *In accordance with the rigor (akribeia) of the holy canons, entering into a marriage after monastic tonsure is forbidden* (Canon 16 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and Canon 44 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council). *And,*

2. *Priesthood in itself does not constitute an impediment to marriage, but in accordance with the prevailing canonical tradition* (Canon 3 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council), *after ordination entrance into marriage is forbidden.*

This section about the marriage bond of the Clergy closes with a rather interesting historical reference to the marriage of the lower clerics, which was discussed by the local Synod of Ancyra (AD 314). In the 10th Canon of this Synod we read: “*They who have been made deacons, declaring when they were ordained that they must marry, because they were not able to abide so, and who afterwards have married, shall continue in their ministry, because it was conceded to them by the bishop. But if any were silent on this matter, undertaking at their ordination to abide as they were, and afterwards proceeded to marriage, these shall cease from the diaconate.*”

Later, the Canon was repealed by the sixth Canon of the Fifth-Sixth (Penthekte) Ecumenical Synod (AD 692). “*Inasmuch as it has been declared in the Apostolic Canons that of those being promoted to the Clergy only Anagnosts and Psalts may marry, we too, in keeping with this prohibition, decree that henceforth no Subdeacon, or Deacon, or Presbyter at all, after the ordination bestowed upon him, has permission to contract a matrimonial relationship for himself: if he should dare to do this, let him be deposed from office. But if anyone wants to contract a legal marriage with*

¹⁶ That’s why he shouldn’t be handicapped, not married with a woman of certain works, as actress (an inappropriate job for the byzantine times), not having pre-marriage sexual relationships etc.

¹⁷ It is the liturgical vestment worn by priests around the neck.

¹⁸ DEMETRIOS CONSTANTELOS: Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy in the Orthodox Church, in magazine “*CONCILIUM*”, Celibacy of the Catholic Priests, vol. 8, number 8, ed. Burns & Oates, October 1972, pg. 37-38.

¹⁹ Relatively see article of Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa His Eminence Seraphim (Kykkotis) under the title “Panorthodox Synod and marriage of Clergy”. Retrieved by: <http://www.amen.gr/article/panorthodoksi-sunodos-kai-gamos-twn-klirikwn> (in greek).

²⁰ The final thematology of the Panorthox is concluded at the official letter of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece with number 2251/1047/17.5.2016.

²¹ Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (6/2016): The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments. Retrieved by: https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents/-/asset_publisher/VA0WE2pZ4Y0I/content/marriage?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US

a woman before being admitted to the Clergy as a Subdeacon, or a Deacon, or Presbyter previous to ordination, let him do so.”²²

Nonetheless, we believe that earlier annulled canon declares the deeper thought and mentality of the ancient Church on this subject. Marriage was allowed only for Deacons and under the strict condition that he would declare this before he received holy orders.

II. Laity

With regard to the Laity, the Church finds it right, if someone does not want to remain in celibacy, in order to become monk or nun, that he or she should get married and maintain this decision for life.

At the same time, the Economy and mercy (“philanthropia”) of the Church, based on the biblical words²³, accepts divorce “because of adultery”²⁴. Moreover, after this, Church allows a second marriage, and with great tolerance the third marriage.²⁵ Of course, the Church never encourages any remarriage, because of the eternal character of the marriage bond; but only tolerates it when, in concrete cases, it appears to be the best solution for a couple.²⁶

²² Interpretation: Since Canon XXVI of the Holy Apostles decrees that only Anagnosts and Psalts may marry after being ordained, the Fathers of this Council confirm that Canon by means of the present, and decree that from now on no Subdeacon, or Deacon, or Presbyter, after being ordained shall be permitted to marry. If he should do so anyhow, let him be deposed.[136] But if any of these wants to marry, let him marry before being ordained a subdeacon, deacon, or presbyter.

²³ Mt. 5:31-32

²⁴ See CHRISTOS ANDROUTSOS: Symbolic from the Orthodox aspect, Athens, 2nd edition, 1930, p. 387-389 (in Greek), and IOANNIS KARMIRIS: Dogmatic theology, Athens, 1995 (reprint), p. 339 (in Greek). A very interesting exegetic and pastoral approach to the subject of the term “adultery” regarding the divorce is given at the official site of Orthodox Church in America: “never seen a case that did not involve adultery—whether it be a case of giving oneself over to another person, or to another thing, such as alcohol, drugs, work, etc. One can surely put their spouse in a secondary position as a result of becoming infatuated, obsessed and/or controlled with/by another person; one can also surely put their spouse in a secondary position as a result of becoming infatuated, obsessed and/or controlled with/by power, wealth, addictions, careers, etc.” Retrieved by: <https://oca.org/questions/sacramentmarriage/divorce-and-remarriage1>

²⁵ Relatively, what happens today in Orthodox Russia is “The Church does not at all approve of a second marriage. Nevertheless, according to the canon law, after a legitimate church divorce, a second marriage is allowed to the innocent spouse. Those whose first marriage was dissolved through their own fault a second marriage is allowed only after repentance and penance imposed in accordance with the canons. According to the rules of St. Basil the Great, in exceptional cases where a third marriage is allowed, the duration of the penance shall be prolonged.” Retrieved from the official site of The Russian Orthodox Church. Department for External Church Relations at <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/kh/>

²⁶ JOHN MEYENDORFF: Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975, chapter XII. Divorce, pg. 54: “As sacrament, marriage is not a magical act, but a gift of grace. The partners, being humans, may have made a mistake in soliciting the grace of marriage when they were not ready for it; or they may prove to be unable to make this grace grow to maturity. In those cases, the Church may admit the fact that the grace was not “received,” tolerate separation and allow remarriage. But, of course, **she never encourages any remarriage—we have seen that even in the case of widowers—because of the eternal character of the marriage bond; but only tolerates it when, in concrete cases, it appears as the best solution for a given individual.** However, the Church always remained faithful to the New Testament ideal. Only the first and unique marriage was blessed in Church during the Eucharist. As seen above, second and third marriages, after widowhood, were concluded at a civil ceremony only, and implied a penance of one to five years of excommunication. After this period of penance, the couple was again considered as full members of the Church. A more prolonged penance was required for married divorcees (see canon 87 of Sixth Ecum. Council). The classification of the marrying divorcees among the adulterers—in strict conformity with the Gospel text—implied that they spent sufficient time standing in Church not among the faithful, but at the doorway, with the “weepers,” the “hearers” (i.e., those who listened to Scripture, but were not admitted to the sacraments), and the “prostrators” (i.e., those who held, during certain parts of the service, a prostrated position, instead of sitting or standing). The Church, therefore, neither “recognised” divorce, nor “gave” it. Divorce was considered as a grave sin; but the Church never failed in giving to sinners a “new chance,” and was ready to readmit them if they repented. Only after the tenth century, when it received from the emperors the legal monopoly of registering and validating all marriages, was the Church obliged to “issue divorces.” It did it generally in conformity with civil legislation of the Roman Empire, and later with that of the various countries in which it developed. But this new situation greatly obliterated in the consciousness of the marriage. Both the Church marriage and the “Church divorce” appeared as a mere formality giving external legality to acts which were generally quite illegitimate from the Christian point of view.”

“According to the Orthodox teaching, only one marriage²⁷ can contain the perfect meaning and significance which Christ has given to this reality. Thus, the Orthodox Christian tradition encourages widows and widowers to remain faithful to their spouses who are dead to this world but alive in Christ”.²⁸ When we have a divorce, we have the death of the marriage bond. “Since the Orthodox does not believe that marriage ends at death but lasts for eternity, the belief that a marriage can die spiritually has added force.”²⁹

As the Orthodox Titular Bishop of Diokleia, Kallistos Ware, explains: “in permitting a divorce when the partners have become irrevocably alienated, the Church does not bring the marriage to an end but simply recognizes a *fait accompli*”³⁰, an accomplished fact, something that has already occurred.

Today, we cannot ignore the fact that “we live in a divorce culture. As a result, when compared to previous generations, couples who are unhappy for extended periods of time are more likely to consider divorce as a solution to their unhappiness. The high divorce rate –hovering somewhere between 40 - 50%- validates this. This is a dramatic rise when compared to the early 1960s, when the divorce rate was around 10%.”³¹ This means that we cannot overlook this problem.

It is significant that even Pope Francis, on the return flight from his official (apostolic) journey to Rio de Janeiro (2013), when he was asked about second marriage, said: “The Orthodox have a different practice. They follow the theology of what they call *oikonomia*, and they give a second chance, they allow it. But I believe that this problem must be studied within the context of the pastoral care of marriage.”³²

In keeping with the view of Orthodox Church that divorce is a tragedy due to human weakness and sin, His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Belgium, some years ago³³ collected words of wisdom, about divorce, from the written Christian tradition. These include the following three quotations:

1. A very interesting quotation from the testimony of Cyril of Alexandria. “It is not the letters of divorce that dissolve the marriage in relation to God but the errant behaviour”³⁴.
2. The Holy John Chrysostom says in this regard that it is “better to break the covenant than to lose one’s soul”.³⁵ And,
3. According to Bishop Kallistos Ware, divorce is an action of “*economia*” and “expression of compassion” of the Church toward sinful man. “Since Christ, according to

²⁷ See P. BOUMIS: Relationship Civil and Religious Marriage, Confrontation and counting of civil marriage, (reprint from magazine “Theologia”), Athens 1992, pg. 705: “In Church the Sacrament of Marriage is the first marriage” (in greek).

²⁸ Official Site of Orthodox Church in America. Retrieved by: <http://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/marriage>

²⁹ ADRIAN THATCHER: Marriage after Modernity. Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times, Sheffield Academic Press, England 1999, pg 271.

³⁰ KALLISTOS WARE: The Sacrament of Love: The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage and its Breakdown, Downside Review 109 (1991) pg. 90

³¹ Fr. CHARLES JOANIDES: Interfaith Marriage Website, Info Straight Talk About Divorce, Official Site of Orthodox Church in America. Retrieved by: <http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/marriage/interfaith/divrempage/straighttalk>

³² SANDRO MAGISTER: The Myth and Reality of Second Marriages among the Orthodox. Retrieved by: http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350806?eng=v&refresh_ce

³³ Bishop ATHENAGORAS (PECKSTADT) of Sinope (now Metropolitan of Belgium): marriage, divorce and remarriage in the orthodox church, *Economia and Pastoral Guidance*, International Congress - Catholic University of Leuven (18-20 April 2005), Retrieved by: http://oodegr.co/english/ekklesia/marriage_divorce.htm

³⁴ M.P.G. 72, 380 D.

³⁵ M.P.G. 61, 155.

the Matthaean account, allowed an exception to His general ruling about the indissolubility of marriage, the Orthodox Church also is willing to allow an exception”³⁶.

“The Church has been faithful throughout the centuries to the principle referred to by Paul, that a second marriage is an aberration of the Christian statute. In this sense the orthodox doctrine confirms not only the “indissolubility” of marriage, but also its uniqueness. Every true marriage can be uniquely the “only” one”.³⁷ Furthermore a divorce does not heal the diseased marriage but kills it. It is not a positive action or intervention. It is about dissolving the “mini-Church”³⁸ that has been formed through the marriage relationship.³⁹ This is seen as a fall and sin”⁴⁰.

After this, His Eminence concludes: “Orthodox canon law can permit a second and even a third marriage “in economia”, but strictly forbids a fourth. In theory divorce is only recognized in the case of adultery, but in practice is also recognised in light of other reasons. ... A second or third marriage will always be a deviation from the “ideal and unique marriage”, but often a fresh opportunity⁴¹ to correct a mistake”^{42, 43}

At this point, it is natural to mention the viewpoint of the Church about the civil form of marriage. According to the doctrine and the entire teaching of the Orthodox Church, civil marriage is not a marriage, but merely a contract, a human agreement. Even “more,” the covenant of a free cohabitation agreement lacks even the suspicion of marriage, which a civil marriage can have.

There are many contemporary policies which try to match the classical Christian wedding with what they call other “alternative” forms of family. In this way, we have new preachers of the desecralisation of Christian marriage⁴⁴.

It is a fact that Church Canons do not recognize civil marriage as a marriage, in order to not to bless polygamy. This means that an Orthodox who marries outside the Church may not receive Holy Communion and may not serve as a sponsor, i.e. a godparent at a Baptism, or as a sponsor (witness) at a Wedding⁴⁵. But, when an Orthodox wants to get a permission to get married and has already contracted a second civil marriage, with a different each time person, then this marriage, the civil one, is counted. In this case, someone

³⁶ T. WARE (Bishop KALLISTOS): *L'Orthodoxie — l'Eglise des sept conciles*, (Orthodoxy - The Church of seven councils), Paris 1997, pp. 380-381.

³⁷ Bishop ATHENAGORAS (PECKSTADT) of Sinope (now Metropolitan of Belgium): marriage, divorce and remarriage in the orthodox church, *Economia and Pastoral Guidance*, International Congress - Catholic University of Leuven (18-20 April 2005), Retrieved by: http://oodegr.co/english//ekklisia/marriage_divorce.htm

³⁸ Relatively ALEXANDER M. STAVROPOULOS (Professor of the University of Athens): *Mystery of Love - Small Church, Marriage in Orthodox Church*, magazin “Koinonia”, vol 2, Athens 1975 (in Greek) and *Marriage and the family: Models and comparisons within the orthodox tradition* (in english). Retrieved by: http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/stavropoulos_marfam.html

³⁹ G. PATRONOS, *Marriage in theology and in life*, Athens, 1981, p.119 (in Greek).

⁴⁰ Bishop ATHENAGORAS (PECKSTADT) of Sinope (now Metropolitan of Belgium): marriage, divorce and remarriage in the orthodox church, *Economia and Pastoral Guidance*, International Congress - Catholic University of Leuven (18-20 April 2005), Retrieved by: http://oodegr.co/english//ekklisia/marriage_divorce.htm

⁴¹ Father Meyendorff explained concerning this that: “the Church neither ‘recognized’ nor ‘granted’ divorce. It is seen as a great sin, but the Church has never ceased to offer sinners a ‘new opportunity’ and she was always prepared to receive them again, as long as they were penitent”. See J. Meyendorff, *Marriage: an orthodox perspective*, New York, 1975, p. 64.

⁴² IGN. PECKSTADT, *Het orthodox huwelijk in Een open venster op de Orthodoxe Kerk*, (The orthodox marriage in An open window on the Orthodox Church), Averbode, 2005.

⁴³ Bishop ATHENAGORAS (PECKSTADT) of Sinope (now Metropolitan of Belgium): marriage, divorce and remarriage in the orthodox church, *Economia and Pastoral Guidance*, International Congress - Catholic University of Leuven (18-20 April 2005), Retrieved by: http://oodegr.co/english//ekklisia/marriage_divorce.htm

⁴⁴ TRIANTAFYLLOS BOLTETSOS: *The Decalogue (Ten Commandments). A different approach by the Orthodox Christian Pastoral Counseling of Marriage, Family and Child*, ed. Holy Metropolis of Fthiotis, Lamia 2016, pg 11 (in Greek)

⁴⁵ Saint George Greek Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago
Retrieved by: <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7101.asp>

who has already had three civil marriages would not in the end have one more that would be the fourth, religious one.⁴⁶

Globally, the Orthodox Church permits up to, but not more than, three marriages for any Orthodox Christian. But, even in Greece, there is a “current idea that in the Orthodox Churches there is a sacramental celebration of second and even third marriages and that communion is given to the divorced and remarried. In reality, this is not the case at all. Orthodoxy has always differentiated first and second marriages not only in ceremony but also in substance, as is clearly demonstrated by the strongly penitential tone of the prayers for second marriages”⁴⁷.

Furthermore, according to the holy Canons, there is a period of time (for some years) in which Holy Communion is forbidden for them. According to the 1st Canon of Laodicea (4th century): “It is right, according to the ecclesiastical Canon, that *the Communion should by indulgence be given to those who have freely and lawfully joined in second marriages, not having previously made a secret marriage; after a short space, which is to be spent by them in prayer and fasting*”.

If both partners are entering a second or third marriage, another form of the marriage ceremony is conducted, much more subdued and penitential in character.⁴⁸

It is very interesting to read the marital blessings of a second or third marriage in the Orthodox Church. The second is granted out of Christ's abundant mercy, in the understanding of human weakness and our shortcomings, and to be able to marry a second time is due to the extension of God's abundant grace and deep compassion for mankind, not to a human right or privilege. Thus we see the penitential, almost sorrowful tone weaving through the Second Marriage Rite and climaxing with the joyous prayers of the service of crowning at the end. Also, the second marriage rite is distinctly penitential, with the priest praying specifically for the Lord to have mercy on the couple who have come forward to be married a second time. An extract of such a prayer is the following⁴⁹: “*O Lord Jesus Christ, ... who ... didst deliver us from the violence of the devil: Do thou cleanse the transgressions of thy servants ... unable to bear ... the burning of the flesh, they have come to a second communion of marriage, ... have mercy, and pardon, cleanse, cast off and forgive our debts, the God of them that repent...*”.

We should also add that sometimes, a couple happens to break up with divorce, and after a while to come back together. Naturally, the ceremony of the marriage as a mystery will not be repeated, because as we know, marriage is not repeatable. For this special occasion, the Orthodox Church performs a special ritual relative to this reconstitution.⁵⁰ Unlike the ritual of second marriage, the religious ceremony of the reconstitution of a

⁴⁶ P. BOUMIS, Relationship Civil and Religious Marriage, Confrontation and counting of civil marriage, (reprint from magazine “Theologia”), Athens 1992, pg. 696 (in greek).

⁴⁷ SANDRO MAGISTER, The Myth and Reality of Second Marriages among the Orthodox Retrieved by: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350806?eng=y>

⁴⁸ Saint George Greek Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago. Retrieved by: <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7101.asp>

⁴⁹ The whole prayer says: “O Lord Jesus Christ, Word of God, who wast lifted up upon the precious and life-giving Cross, and didst thereby tear up the handwriting against us, and didst deliver us from the violence of the devil: Do thou cleanse the transgressions of thy servants, for, unable to bear the burden of the day and the burning of the flesh, they have come to a second communion of marriage, in accordance with that which thou hast lawfully appointed by thy chosen vessel, Paul the Apostle, saying, because of our humble state, “It is better to marry in the Lord than to burn.” Do thou thyself, as thou art good and the Lover of mankind, have mercy, and pardon, cleanse, cast off and forgive our debts, for thou art he that tooketh our infirmities upon thy shoulders. For there is none that is sinless or without defilement for as much as one day of his life, save only thou, who, without sin, didst bear flesh, and who bestowest upon us eternal passionlessness. For thou art God, the God of them that repent, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages”.

⁵⁰ Retrieved by: <http://www.orthmad.gr/faq>

wedding is a chance of gladness for the Church. It is joy and celebration as the spouse receiving a special Christ's blessing. As it should be every bond in Christ.

Let me conclude by thanking INTAMS for the opportunity to present the position of the Eastern Orthodox Church with regard to marriage, divorce and remarriage before an audience of such a high spiritual and scientific quality.