

An Open Ecclesial Communitarism Dispar-Mixed Marriages and Adult Conversions

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Summary: Status Quaestionis; Marriage: an ethno-religious arena or a communion of persons?; Church Theology; 1. Ecclesiastical (*Canonical*) marriage; 2. *Dispar* (*Interreligious*) marriage; 3. Mixed (*Interchristian*) marriage; 4. Civil (*according to state law*) marriage; Conclusions – Proposals.

Status Quaestionis

The problem caused by the issue of “Mixed Marriages and Adult Conversions” must be clarified and urgently resolved in our time when *lack of freedom and compulsory double religious belonging* can no longer stand in the light of our pluralistic civic society, much less in the light of Church Theology. However, it seems that the practice followed by the Church both in the last years and nowadays, has not given proper attention to the problem and has fallen into the pitfall of lack of freedom, pushing its own members or those of other confessional and religious Communities towards a compulsory credal or double religious belonging, not to mention that it could reflect — which would be much worse — other deeper and serious alteration of the ecclesial body. Without going as far as to denounce a radical alteration of the Church, it is questionable whether we must reduce the problem specifically to double belonging or rather avoid any kind of exclusivism in general.

In other words, mixed marriage, as well as *dispar* marriage, which was historically anterior to mixed marriage, must exist both now and in the future in such a way that they guarantee, as they used to, the

wilful adherence to a certain Community, when required, and the prevention, by all means, of compulsory conversion which paves the way for a double-community perspective.

Marriage: an ethno-religious arena or a communion of persons?

In the framework of the coexistence of Religious Communities within a pluralistic civic society, marriage was, and still is, either a *meeting point* or an *entrenchment point* between Communities, as well as between their members. Through the ages, practices have not been the same in all places and at all times. Certain practices were adopted in single-culture societies, or in “*millet*”, ethno-religious islands within an empire, and other practices developed *de facto* in multi-culture societies. Especially, the procedure of the homogenisation (and confessionalisation) of the marriage in an intra-community perspective was achieved principally on the “*millet-aristic*” concept, which was inherited within the Orthodox Church, in parallel with the completion of the nationalisation’s interactions.

It is also true that at some point in human life and History, marriage was adopted as a factor for building and stabilising a homogenous and united Religious Community (*Community endogamy*). However, when marriage was *used* only for that purpose, it actually made people entrench themselves against others instead of widening out and meeting them. The *use* of marriage as a means to achieve that purpose brought about national entrenchments validated through custom and law, thus deepening the said entrenchments later on. As a result, nowadays, in the universal struggle for unity among peoples, marriage, which is defined as an event of love and a centripetal communion of persons, as well as an orientation to the Kingdom, has become a dominant factor for frictions and disputes between the members of the couple-family, producing centrifugal trends. And this is still happens with the institutional, open or silent, approval of the Religious Communities.

At this point, if we want to situate the issue in a historical context, we could say that the theological stance maintained by the Orthodox Church on this issue was, prior to the Fall of Constantinople (1453), different from the one maintained later on, from the Fall till today. The reason for the change does not have to do with the theological stance itself, but mainly with the change of an established order and even with reasons of historical survival. These reasons, however, led to the current dominant theological stance, which, in view of the change of socio-political givens, naturally needs to be reviewed. Let us take a brief look at how this theological stance is outlined and what its recent historical development has been.

Church Theology

Above all, according to the Liturgical Tradition, Church Theology holds that marriage is one of these which accomplishes the mystery of life, the communion of persons and the unification of two beings into one body, as economised by God (cf. Mat. 19:6; Mark 10:8; Eph. 5:31). The term “marriage” had been exclusively adopted to characterise the *union of man and woman*, founded, after the fall of man, by God Himself, in order to accomplish His cosmogonic visions. Every marriage event, regardless of Religion or hierology, fully accomplishes the cosmogonic objective and the cosmogonic wish of God, which we express in the Service of Marriage, that is for «mankind to be fruitful and multiply» with a perspective of co-creation (Gen. 1:28; 9:1, 7), as a condition for receiving and then transforming the one and only humankind into the communion of the Kingdom. That is why the word of the Bible insists: «What God has yoked together let no man [or Community] put apart» (Mat. 19:6; Mark 10:9). The conjugal relation introduces the man and the woman – and both together – into a new perspective, into a new mode of existence, and brings about a *communional constitution* “of a single body”. The vital/mysteric aspect of this new creation does not limit itself to the ceremony itself, but

should last and strengthen throughout the life of the concerned persons.

That is how the early Christian Community experienced marriage and how the early theological voice of the Church, the apostle of Nations Paul, expressed it when he called it “a Great Mystery” (Eph. 5:32) in itself [monogamous, heterosexual, conjugal and communal aspect], but in the perception of the world by the Church, he strongly expressed the liturgical wish of accomplishing this mystery «in Christ and in the Church» (Eph. 5:32). This is because, for the Church, Christian marriage is one form of the image of the love relationship between Christ and *all* His Body (*totus* Christus), His Church “across the Cosmos” (Canon 57/Carthage-56/Quinisext), but also with the whole world – called to become Church. This marriage finds its sublime meaning through its participation in this relationship. In this sense, marriage essentially consists of an *ecclesial* reality [cosmogonic, sacramental/mysteric, ontological and soteriological aspect]. Thus, according to Church Theology, marriage is the event that brings about the “union of a man and a woman” (Roman Jurist Modestinus) which marks out the *image* and refers to the *resemblance* (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1), since it has to do first with the Mystery of the Creation of the world, regardless of whether the man and the woman in question acknowledge/know or accept that this union be made “in Christ and in the Church”, in imitation of the mystery of the Salvation of the world, as a continuation of the first mystery of Creation. And this must be accepted, if Church Theology wants to be consistent with the creative Word of God...

Today, pastors and theologians of the Church should consider this problem if they want to construct a coherent theology of the world. For when the Church addresses itself to the world and to society, it does not address itself to a foreign and separate body. There is no ontological dualism between the Church and the world, between the sacred and the profane. No form of life and culture escapes the universality of the Incarnation. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16)

in its state of sin. The victory of Christ, which had led to the descent into hell, reveals a cosmic dimension which abolishes all borders (cf. John 10:16). According to the *ktisiology* of the Fathers, the universe advances towards its end through the *total* perspective of Creation, *total* since it is directed towards the Incarnation. Christ *assumes* and achieves, completing what had stopped since the fall, and expresses salvational Love without omitting anything from His plan for mankind.

If that is the case, we could divide marriage into four types, recognised as such by the Church, regardless of whether all these types of marriage are celebrated inside or outside the Church. These types, in chronological order of appearance, are:

1. Ecclesiastical (*Canonical*) marriage
2. *Dispar* (*Interreligious*) marriage
3. Mixed (*Interchristian*) marriage
4. Civil (*according to state law*) marriage

These four types, theologically speaking, as we have seen and will see below, are valid marriages for the Church. The first three are celebrated, even if the ritual differs, inside the Church, whereas the fourth one is contracted outside it. And “outside” refers exactly to a marriage contracted in the City Hall, or in a house of prayer of another non-Orthodox Christian Community, or finally in a house of prayer of another non-Christian Religious Community.

1. Ecclesiastical (Canonical) marriage

Almost throughout the first millennium, marriage is a communal event contracted as part of the one and only Church Mystery. Since it used to be celebrated during the Holy Liturgy (cf. canon 11/Timothy), and never apart from it – given that it concerned member-believers of the ecclesial body – there was a type of benediction prior to the holy communion (Tertullian-Ignatius of Antioch), which

blessed the joint decision of common life that started with the joint communion and the common cup.

We all know that the Holy Liturgy of St. Basil the Great of Caesarea (4th century) and of St. John Chrysostom (5th century) is divided into two parts: the Liturgy of Catechumens (Liturgy of the Word) and the Liturgy of Believers (Liturgy of Eucharist), which starts with the following exclamation: “The doors, the doors...”. In the case of a couple where one member is a baptised believer and the other is a non-baptised catechumen, such a form of marriage blessing could not practically be a part of the Liturgy of Believers, since the non-baptised catechumen had to withdraw at this moment and was not allowed to stay. That is why the Church was forced to move the moment of the marriage blessing and make it a part of the Liturgy of Catechumens, because otherwise the couple would have had to wait for up to three years, the duration of the Catechesis before baptism. The special benediction and marriage blessing were placed before the apostolic and evangelical reading, and this practice has actually survived at this same moment during the marriage ceremony today, for both types of marriage (both in the Holy Liturgy and in the marriage ceremony).

Thus, here is the first historical evidence regarding the practice of marriage: in addition to the marriage between two baptised believers, the Church celebrated a marriage between a baptised believer and a non-baptised catechumen, even during the Holy Liturgy! This occurred precisely because the person was a catechumen, but was not baptised. What happened when a non-baptised person that was not a catechumen, ie. an idolater, wanted to marry a baptised believer — or even a non-baptised catechumen — who was a member of the Church? It is exactly this context and need that engendered *dispar* marriage, as has occurred more recently (end of 19th century) and for similar reasons, with mixed marriage.

2. *Dispar (Interreligious) marriage*

The *dispar* marriage was one ancient praxis of the primitive Church already at the epoch of the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:14). To those who doubt the historical authenticity and reality of such marriage, we would like to ask a question: at a given time in History, why did the Church — in addition to its practice of celebrating marriage as part of the Holy Liturgy (either that of Believers or that of Catechumens) — totally disassociate the ceremony of marriage from the Holy Liturgy and create a new form of Ceremony that is structurally identical to that of the Holy Liturgy, but lacks the Holy Communion and the common cup? In the course of time, did the Church take that action *in order to exclude* a certain category of persons (persons who were not baptised, professed other religions or were heterodox), or rather *in order to include* – in a way known only to the Church itself – to accept and to bless (1 Cor. 7:14, 16) not only its baptised member, but also his/her spouse? In other words, is the new liturgical non-eucharistic type of marriage established by the Church aimed at *exclusion* or *inclusion* and *receptive opening*? This issue is clear for the Church. This was done precisely to avoid imposing baptism as an *a priori* or preliminary condition, and to avoid Conversion, as is more generally required today. Simply, the practice which prevailed much later, setting institutional obstacles for the aforementioned reasons which will be analysed further below, brought about a change and today presents, on the one hand, a Church without openings towards Creation and the whole World and, on the other hand, an ecclesiastical body which, in self-defence, proposes solutions restraining freedom or forcing double religious belonging.

Let us specify that the Roman Catholic Church has kept that type of marriage in force, whereas the Orthodox Church has abolished it since the Fall (1453), ie. it no longer celebrates *dispar* marriages and, of course, does not recognise them. We can take a look, however, at what actually happened: the *dispar* marriage was already known in

the New Testament as praxis (1 Cor. 7:1-40). The early Church lived in a highly idolatrous environment, where idolatrous religions prevailed. Many members of the Church, who were baptised believers, got married to non-baptised idolaters. The Church blessed their marriage (1 Cor 7:14, 16). The evidence that such a marriage was truly accepted is its *separation* from the Holy Eucharist and its *removal* from the Holy Liturgy. In addition, when one member of a married couple of idolaters converted to Christianity, the early Church proposed not only that they should not divorce one another, but also should not “seek a separation” (1 Cor. 7:10, 16). Even more so – this has escaped our attention – the Church did not celebrate a new marriage, as it is done nowadays... This means that it acknowledged the marriage already contracted in the idolatrous religious community as a marriage-mystery of love. This precisely proves quite clearly that the Early Church was in harmony with its proclaimed Theology of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-40).

Without going into details as to what happened after the 10th century and the 4th marriage of Emperor Leo VI the Wise, when marriage was given legal significance, thus also becoming a State-related issue, it is interesting to take a look at what happened after the Fall of Constantinople in order to understand better the stance of the Orthodox Church towards the Muslim Community today. The Fall brought about a complete change of the established order, the Empire became a theocratic Muslim one, numerous efforts were made in order to convert Christians to Islam, and the law prohibited any conversion of Muslims to the Christian religion on penalty of execution. Thus the change of the established order, with mainly hostile intentions, and the need of survival of the “*Millet* of Christians” led the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for pure reasons of self-protection, to stop celebrating marriages between Christians and Muslims, thus abolishing *dispar marriage de facto*.

This canonical practice was also followed, for the same reasons, by the early Patriarchates of the East that lived under the same estab-

lished order, and later, by the recently founded Autocephalous and Patriarchal Churches of the Balkans, which are all (with the exception of the Church of Cyprus) a pre-jurisdictional territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. They all adopted the same canonical stance and practice as part of tradition and legacy. This canonical practice also created an ecclesiastical common law that prohibits the contraction of marriage between a Christian and a Muslim today.

As for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, specifically due to this stance and to the fact that the aforementioned reasons are still valid in one way or another, one would not expect it to take an initiative for reintroducing *dispar* marriage at this very moment. This issue could be raised after Turkey is integrated into the European Union, which will improve the institutional relations between Christians and Muslims. However, it could take place in other free countries, as well as in the European Union member-states, where Christians and Muslims co-exist and live together in harmony, in a European climate of juridical and civil equality. In any case, *dispar* marriage freely accepts the religious otherness and does not require a change of religion, following the example of the Early Christian Communities (1 Cor. 7:1-40). The Church blesses its members in their choice of the *mystery of life*, which is what marriage intrinsically is.

3. Mixed (Interchristian) marriage

Mixed marriage shows the same difficulties in being accepted, but it is more easily legalised, because it is contracted between Christians, albeit heterodox Christians. The marriage ceremony for all types of marriage, as celebrated nowadays aside from the Holy Liturgy, is the natural liturgical area for celebrating a mixed marriage. At this point, let us add that this ceremony of marriage is also the natural liturgical area for contracting a *dispar* marriage. Or, more accurately, the marriage ceremony in question was established for *dispar* marriage and is perfectly valid for contracting a mixed marriage. Here, another ques-

tion is raised: how can it be that the Orthodox Church celebrates the same marriage ceremony between two Orthodox-members and between an Orthodox and a heterodox Christian, putting them on the same mysteric/sacramental footing? Precisely because this ceremony was created specifically for persons of different religions, because it keeps the formal structure of the Holy Liturgy intact, without being the Holy Liturgy itself, as well as the eschatological perspective of the fact-marriage without necessarily imposing participation in the holy communion (for the case of a heterodox Christian), exactly as in the case of *dispar* marriage, where the holy communion is not offered to an unbaptised person, or to a person professing a different religion, but is replaced festively and symbolically by offering the cup of red wine.

4. *Civil (according to state law) marriage*

This marriage, issue from religious wars in Europe (Napoleon 1st in France), is not accepted by the Catholic Church, for doctrinal reasons, whereas the Orthodox Church, for the theological reasons mentioned above, accepts it as accomplishing the mystery and purpose of life. Indeed, despite the initial negative reaction at the time when it was institutionally established – a symptom of the “Babylonian captivity of Orthodox theology” (G. Florovsky) – in majoritarily Orthodox countries, like Greece (1982), where civil marriage is an alternative to ecclesial marriage, a conciliar decision was ultimately taken by the Church of Greece recognising civil marriage as a valid marriage (2002). This decision specifies that *no ecclesial marriage shall be contracted after the contraction of three civil marriages*. In other words, a 4th (ecclesial) marriage cannot be contracted after three civil (recognised) marriages, according to and consistent with the perennial practice applied by the Church. However, this “exterior” marriage can also be justified as a “Mystery of love”, originating from the “*Mystery of love*” of *Trinitarian communion*, by a significant

word of Christ: at a time when somebody from “outside” His circle of disciples was accomplishing miracles “in His name” and his disciples “tried to prevent him because he [did] not follow [them]” (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49), Christ answered: “Do not prevent him [...] For whoever is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:39-40; Luke 9:50). Thus, every manifestation of Trinitarian communion within Creation should be favourably accepted by the ecclesial body...

In addition, let us make a comparison relating to confession, though we should not appeal to such arguments. If a man, by means of confession, declares to the Church that, prior to his imminent marriage, he has had affairs with five different women, the Church performs the ceremony as his first marriage. On the other hand, if he declares that he has already contracted three civil marriages, the Church *does not celebrate* [a 4th] marriage. That is why civil marriage constitutes an actual marriage both from a practical and, mainly, theological viewpoint, since this marriage is also a public engagement founding a *community of life*, a characteristic of the Kingdom of the coming century, in the presence of a community of persons.

Conclusions – Proposals

Presenting two examples from contemporary ecclesial reality might be the best way to summarise the above.

Example 1: The case of a non-baptised member (without Religions)

A member of the Church *loves* someone that happens to be non-baptised, and has chosen to remain non-baptised and without religion until they both come to Church and declare that they wish to contract a marriage with the blessing of the Church. We answer that they cannot, since one of them is unbaptised. Then, turning to that person we tell him/her that we will only celebrate the marriage if he/she gets baptised, otherwise such a marriage is impossible (both for the non-baptised and for the baptised person): a complete refusal

to offer blessing to a baptised person. However, such a refusal implies an obvious restraint of freedom. We improperly blame the believer of... *having unduly fallen in love* with an unbaptised person. The final argument which is given is: “This is our Tradition (*sic*)”! And so, once again, the “(ethno)cultural” prevails against the “theological” within the Church... But because the young couple is motivated by love, the unbaptised person finally gives in to the pressure and declares: “I will undergo baptism, though I do not wish it, because I love you and want to marry you”. This happens whilst we know very well that the fundamental condition for the celebration of the Mysteries within the Church is freedom... Every good intention which constrains the conscience becomes harmful and constitutes, as pertinently remarked by Berdiaev, “the nightmare of imposed good”, in which human freedom, desired and obtained by God Himself at the price of His death, remains unbeknownst.

At the moment of baptism, which here, let us stress, is performed for no other reason than to fulfil the marriage requirement – a requirement which never previously existed in the Church – the candidate is asked whether he/she has come for baptism of his/her own free will, and he/she answers “yes” (*sic*), following which he/she is asked to make a Confession of Faith, “I believe in one God, Father, ...”, though it is clear to everyone that his faith does not issue from a free choice. This behaviour obviously abolishes a major parameter, that of the free voluntary, wilful, unforced and self-motivated adherence to Christianity and to the Church of Christ. Thus, we are deceiving the candidate, God and ourselves. In such an environment of coercion, we abolish the freedom that is a *condition sine qua non* for love, since the person being converted has seen anything but love in this environment lacking in freedom and authentic spirituality... Thus, the candidate only gets baptised in order to get married, following which he/she never goes to Church again, and oftentimes neither does the baptised spouse...

Example 2: The case of a person that professes another religion

Almost the same is true for this example, too; the only difference is that the “non-baptised” person is a Muslim, a Jew, a Buddhist, etc. The answer is always the same; this time, however, there is more meaning to it: “Marriage cannot be celebrated because you are a member of another religion, and not a Christian”! We are thus regressing, consciously or unconsciously, towards the distant past, even before the incarnation of Christ and the New Testamentary age, and we adopt the Old Testamentary practice of *endogamy* which totally deviates from the eschatological perspective of the ecclesial body, and directly contradicts the theology of the Church as explained above. Here, besides the practice of *community endogamy*, we must add the various ethno-cultural obstacles... Out of love, the member of the other religion decides to... convert and become a Christian, either openly or secretly, only to make the celebration of marriage possible... However, things are far more complicated here, since, as previously explained, personal pressure is exerted, leading to double religious belonging. The member that converts to another Religion and gets baptised starts coming to Church, because he/she is now baptised or out of social obligation, but naturally also continues to go to the mosque, the synagogue, or the religious house of prayer. However, the other member feels compelled to do the very same thing, in a manner occasionally taking the shape of a mysteric and perichoretic participation. Thus we cause the religious syncretism of two communities with unpredictable interpersonal consequences, having an uncontrollable effect on the family...

The two aforementioned examples, unacceptable from the point of view of the Church’s spirituality, can clearly explain why young couples have avoided getting married in Church, and contracting any public or community engagement (civil marriage), and instead live together without getting married.

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In conclusion, without asserting that this present paper is a thorough and in-depth study, much less that it is a research having exhausted all relevant historical sources, we would like to risk making the following conclusions and proposals:

- The Apostle Paul makes use of two terms: «in Christ» and «within the body of Christ». In some sense, these two come together and converge, though they are not completely equivalent. On one hand, the expression «within the body of Christ» refers to life *within* Christ's Body, as lived in communion (*common life*) with the Head of the Body. This is impossible, even inconceivable, *outside* the «Body of Christ». This fact explains the reason why Ecclesial (canonical) marriage properly takes place within the Divine Liturgy. On the other hand, for the Apostle, the eschatological intervention of God on human history is made possible precisely «in Christ». This is clearly reflected in the *eschatological intervention of blessing and reception* by the Church of the human existence through dispar marriage, of those who are united in a dispar marriage. Indeed, how is it possible for the «Jew» and the «Greek» to be «*one* in Christ Jesus» (Gal. 3, 28)? Precisely because they are united «in Christ», even if not in the fullest sense «in the Body of Christ». It is this distinction made by himself which can probably explain his position vis-à-vis of the marriage taken in his 1st Epistle to Corinthians (chap. 7). Perhaps we have in this image also an explanation of how there can be a ecclesial-canonical «marriage “within the body of Christ”», as well as a dispar «marriage “in Christ”»... If this is the case, however then, it is also necessary to examine the exact ecclesial status of mixed marriage (cf. John, chap. 10). For we must also ask: How is it possible to unite two persons sacramentally in the communion of marriage in Christ, without however offering them the Eucharistic Body of Christ?

- The mixed marriage, celebrated outside the Holy Liturgy, is the historical remnant of the dispar marriage. This shows the relation between mixed and dispar marriage, the former being the historical continuation of the latter in the modern age. Both types of marriages

are historically related by the marriage ceremony of the Orthodox Church. Indeed, *dispar* marriage directly contributed to the creation of this ceremony which was celebrated at that time as it is now celebrated for mixed marriages.

- The Orthodox Church is invited today to restore the *dispar* marriage in order to cover the two categories of inter-religious and inter-confessional marriages (*dispar* and mixed respectively), as well as all corresponding heteroreligious and heterodox categories of marriages (Muslims, Jews and members of other religions on the one hand, and non Orthodox Christians on the other hand). In fact, the reason the existing ceremony of marriage of the Orthodox Church, which dates far back into the past, has been instituted is precisely to encompass all types of marriage. Besides, the revival of *dispar* marriage will contribute to the harmonious institutional coexistence of religions and to the peaceful cohabitation, freely and without pressures, of the members of different religions and churches in the pluralistic civic society of today and tomorrow.

- In view of all the above, when the Orthodox Church, which has sacramentally preserved the cosmogonic and eschatological perspective of marriage, does not recognise the marriage of other confessional Churches, regardless of hierology, it is inconsistent with perennial Church Theology and with the entire ecclesiastical practice prior to the Fall. The same applies in the case of marriages celebrated in various religious communities regardless of hierology. The same applies in the case of civil marriage, too. That is why the explicit condemnation of *dispar* marriages and implicit condemnation of mixed marriages in the name of a sacramental absolute, seldom reached by the Orthodox Christians themselves, seem completely inappropriate. These positions truly result from aberrant and absurd choices.

Our proposal is based on the following experience. The patristic spirituality focuses on the fact that the Evangel should be present in all the decisions and all the risks of human existence, all the more

so in this unique mysteric/sacramental event of marriage. God is ever-present in all the events of the world, though we are unable to perceive Him, to see Him. He stirs and probes people even through the thickness of their historical existence. If ecclesiastical reality, the ecclesial body, finally encompasses the whole of the aforementioned endo-confessionalistic – sometimes Old Testamentary – assets relating to marriage, Christianity will not be the future of the world, unless it can surpass and overcome all the representations which cause the modern and globalised citizen to feel alien. A lack of theological, in the sense sketched above, presence in the world is equivalent to a lack of evangelical faith. Modern day validity of the ecclesial message has to come not only from a Church that, as an eschatological partner, engages itself within the world, but also from the experience of mankind today.

Finally, it is high time that the Orthodox Church abolishes the cultural and nationalistic barriers raised in the recent past and becomes *theologically* more open and soteriologically orientated towards the heteroreligious communities, notably to Islam and Muslim Communities, given the long-lasting historical ecclesiastical precedent, and because this opening is objectively possible today. Konstantinos Pappargopoulos, a Greek historian of the 19th century, points out that after the Fall, the two Communities, Christians and Muslims, inside the same society and the same Empire, mixed like water and oil, and remained uninfluenced and independent. In this historically accurate example, the use of these two constituents shows that there had also been a deliberate institutional immiscibility. The abolishment of *dispar* marriage in the life of the Church has considerably contributed to this immiscibility. Nowadays, however, during the age of post-modern multiculturalism and in a pluralistic civic society, the Orthodox Church has all the necessary experience from its long and theologically rich past to initiate an opening towards every Muslim community across the world. That is why the entire Orthodox Church is invited to take part in the International Muslim-Christian

Dialogue commenced by St. John of Damascus (8th century),¹ continued by St. Gregory Palamas and others (8th-14th centuries),² and whose realisation is in progress today under the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In this context, the revival of *dispar* marriage is a favourable starting point for theological overtures and dialogue...

- 1 See Jean DAMASCÈNE, *Écrits sur l'Islam*, présentation, commentaires et traduction par Raymond LE COZ (Sources Chrétiennes, n° 383), Paris 1992, 272 p.
- 2 See Adel-Théod. KHOURY, *Les Théologiens Byzantins et l'Islam. Textes et Auteurs (VIII^e- XIII^e siècles)*, Louvain-Paris 1969, 334 pp. See also Manuel II PALÉOLOGUE [1350-1425], *Entretiens avec un Musulman (7^e controverse)*, introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Théodore KHOURY (Sources Chrétiennes, n° 115), Paris 1966, 233 pp.