Foreword

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"The heart of another is a dark forest," writes Ivan Turgenev in *A Month in the Country*. This is true, indeed, not only of the heart of another, but equally of my own heart: that too is "a dark forest." In the words of the Psalmist, "The heart is deep" (Ps. 64:6). There are profundities within each one of us which we have yet to plumb. Personhood cannot be exactly defined; we can provide an ostensive definition, pointing to what is meant and indicated by "being a person," but we cannot offer a systematic and exhaustive description. We do not fully understand what are the limits of our human nature, what are the possibilities as yet latent within it. It has been rightly said, "The mystery of the fact of being a person cannot be reduced to the facts of the appropriate sciences."[1]

This truth, that as human beings we are a mystery to ourselves, is clearly emphasized by a number of the authors in the present collection. The Greek fathers frequently quote the inscription at the Delphic Oracle, "Know yourself." "The greatest of all lessons, so it seems," affirms Clement of Alexandria, "is to know oneself; for if someone knows himself, he will know God; and if he knows God, he will become like God."[2] But the fathers would have been quick to add that to know oneself is not an easy task. Who am I? What am I? The answer is by no means obvious. My personhood stretches out of time into eternity, out of space into infinity. We need to be both subtle and humble in our approach to this human mystery, standing before it in awe, and fully prepared for surprises. If this is true of our human personhood in general, it is true more particularly of the complex questions that arise concerning gender and sexual identity, including the subject of homosexuality. As John Behr insists, "What it is to be human and how our existence as sexed and sexual beings relates to our common humanity" is "perhaps the defining question of our era." In the past, Orthodox have usually been reluctant to discuss such matters; but the questions cannot now be avoided. Silence is not an answer.

In this exploration of the meaning of our personhood, there are three points which we do well to keep in view, and all three are rightly considered in the present volume. The first is that anthropology, our theology of personhood, is integrally linked to Christology. We are to view all things in the light of Christ. Our understanding of what it is to be human is disclosed above all through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As perfect God and perfect man, he not only reveals the divine realm to us, but he is also

[1] David Jenkins, *The Glory of Man* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 10.

[2] Clement of Alexandria, *The Pedagogue* 3.1, in *Fathers of the Second Century*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 2 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Translation modified.

the mirror in which we see reflected our own human face. He is our archetype and paradigm. As is said in a homily attributed to Saint Basil of Caesarea, the birth of Christ was also the birthday of the whole human race.[3] Until the Son of God had become incarnate, the dimensions of our personhood had not yet been made manifest. Christ is the first genuine human being. In the words of Saint Nicholas Cabasilas quoted by John Behr, "It was not the old Adam who was the model of the new, but the new Adam for the old. . . . The Savior first and alone showed the true human being."[4]

In the second place, we are to view our human personhood not in static but in dynamic terms. Humanness is not just a "given," a fixed and accomplished fact, but it is a project, an as yet uncompleted task. We are to say not "I am human," but "I have yet to become human." Saint John assures us, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). Marcel uses in this context the phrase *Homo Viator*: we are not inert and immobile, but travellers on a lifelong journey.[5]

A third leitmotif in this volume is relationship. It is only through our relationship with other persons that we ourselves become fully personal. The early Christians used to say *Unus Christianus, nullus Christianus*: one Christian, isolated from other Christians, excluded from the communion of the Church, is no Christian at all. We can extend the aphorism: *Una persona, nulla persona*: one person, subsisting alone, lacking any bond of fellowship with others, is not a real person. Personhood is social, or it is nothing. Even the hermit is united to others through the invisible interchange of prayer. As Christos Yannaras maintains in this volume, it is only through transcendent love that we can transform "biological necessity" into "the freedom of relationship." It is not without reason that the Greek word for person, *prosōpon*, means literally "face" or "countenance." I can only become an authentic person if I "face" others, looking into their eyes and letting them look into mine.

Christianity, it has often been said, is a liturgical religion. The Church is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second. To appreciate, then, the meaning of personhood and sexuality, we do well to look at the liturgical rite whereby marriage is blessed. I regret that more emphasis is not given to this in the present volume. It is true, as some contributors point out, that the marriage service in its present form is relatively recent, dating perhaps from the ninth or tenth century. Yet in the course of the last thousand years it has been used on millions of occasions, and so it carries far greater weight than the opinions of individual thinkers. In the case of each single person who has read what Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Maximos the Confessor have to say about marriage, there will be countless myriads who have taken part in the marriage service.

What, then, has the liturgical rite to tell us about the meaning of marriage and sexuality? In the service appointed for a first marriage, the prayers are entirely positive. Two purposes of marriage are mentioned: mutual love and the procreation of children. Thus prayers are said for the couple, first, that they may be given "perfect and peaceful love," "love for one an-

[3] Basil of Caesarea (attrib.), On the Nativity *of Christ, Patrologia Graeca* 31, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–86), 1473a.

[4] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, trans. C. J. deCatanzaro (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1974), 6.12.

[5] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951).

other in the bond of peace," "oneness of mind and body" (note the reference here to the body: mutual love includes sexual union). Second, we pray that "they may be granted children for the continuation of the race"—"may they behold their children's children round their table like a newly planted olive orchard." Nowhere is it said that one of these two things—either mutual love or the procreation of children—is the *primary* purpose of marriage; the two things are mentioned side by side, without any preference being expressed for the one rather than the other. Indeed, the two are obviously connected; for in most cases the mutual love, expressed sexually, will lead to the birth of offspring.

Alongside the presence of these two purposes of marriage, there is a significant omission in the service for a first marriage. Nowhere is it said, in negative terms, that marriage is a remedy against lust, a way of keeping under control our disordered passions and desires. This point is the more striking when we compare the service for a first marriage with that prescribed for a second marriage (for example, after divorce). The service for a second marriage has a distinctly penitential character. It is said with regard to the couple, "Purge away the offences and forgive the transgressions of your servants, calling them to repentance, granting them remission of their sins, and pardon of their errors, whether voluntary or involuntary. . . . Grant them the tears of the prostitute." In a further prayer it is stated that the couple have been "unable to bear the heat and burden of the day and the hot desires of the flesh," and Saint Paul's words are then quoted, "It is better to marry than to be aflame" (1 Cor. 7:9). Nothing of this kind is said in the service for a first marriage. Indeed, the language of the second marriage service is somewhat too outspoken for modern taste, and I suspect that it is not often used.

It is true, as is pointed out by some contributors to this volume, that many of the fathers, both Greek and Latin, without actually condemning marriage, are on the whole somewhat lukewarm and unenthusiastic in what they have to say about it. Yet against this we have to set the explicit and deeply affirmative testimony of the Church's liturgical practice, as it underlines the abundant *joy* of the marriage feast. With regard to homosexuality, the Orthodox Church today has undoubtedly to confront a series of difficult issues. Without accepting everything that is said by the three authors of the text "Jesus Christ and Same-Sex Marriage," I fully recognise that they are dealing with genuine problems. I can see at least three anomalies in our current treatment of homosexuals. First, until recent times, Orthodox thinkers did not make use of the concept of sexual orientation, as this is understood in contemporary psychology. More precisely, they assumed that there is *only one* orientation, and that is heterosexual. They considered that persons of homosexual inclination were such because of personal choice and were therefore willfully wicked. Nowadays Orthodox writers would normally prefer to make a distinction between orientation and action. Homosexual orientation, we would say, is indeed contrary to God's plan for humankind, being one of the consequences of the fall (incidentally, I am surprised that more is not said about the fall in the course of

this issue of *The Wheel*). But homosexual men and women are not *personally* guilty of their orientation, because this is not something they have chosen; they only become guilty if by deliberate choice they decide to live out this orientation in their actions. They can choose to be celibate.

This argument, however, places us in difficulty. Persons of heterosexual orientation have the option of getting married, and so in a positive way they can fulfil their erotic desire with the Church's blessing through the God-given sacrament of holy matrimony. But homosexuals have no such option. In the words of Vasileios Thermos, "A homosexual subject is called to lead a celibate life without feeling a vocation for it." Are we right to impose this heavy burden on the homosexual?

A second anomaly is to be found in the way homosexuals are commonly treated in the sacrament of confession. All of us recognize that there is an important distinction to be made between those homosexuals who engage in casual encounters, seeking out in some "gay" bar a partner for a single night; and on the other hand, those homosexuals who are committed to a permanent relationship, faithful and monogamous, in which deep love is involved. Surely no Christian is in favour of sexual promiscuity. Yet what frequently happens in confession? Let us suppose that the one who is promiscuous comes to feel a sincere revulsion for his way of life, and with genuine penitence resolves to pursue a life of purity in the future. In that case, he will probably be given absolution by the priest and will be permitted, perhaps with certain restrictions, to receive holy communion. For a time, he refrains from sexual activity, but then from frustration and loneliness he relapses into another casual encounter. After that he repents, and is absolved, and is once more blessed to receive communion. Then after a time he again lapses. So the cycle continues. What happens, by contrast, to the faithful and monogamous homosexual? Perhaps the priest says in confession, "Are you willing to give up your homosexual relationship?" The penitent may answer, "I cannot do that." The priest may rejoin, "You can continue to share a common life, marked by mutual affection; but will you abstain from further sexual activity?" The other may well reply, "I am not yet ready to undertake that." (Yet I have known homosexuals who have indeed transformed their relationship in this way.) The priest, faced with this refusal, may well feel that he cannot bless the penitent to receive the sacrament.[6] Now here certainly is a paradox. The homosexual committed to a stable and loving relationship is treated more harshly than the homosexual who is casual and promiscuous, and who is seeking not true love but passing pleasure. Something has gone wrong here.

There is a third question which we have to ask ourselves. The Orthodox tradition teaches clearly that sexual acts between persons of the same sex are not permitted. Yet at the same time, most of us recognise authentic spiritual value in deep friendships between such persons, even passionate friendships such as that formed by Father Pavel Florensky (see Giacomo Sanfilippo's contribution to this issue). Why do we put so great an emphasis upon genital sex? Why do we seek to enquire what adult persons of the same

[6] This would probably not happen in the Orthodox Church of Finland.

sex are doing in the privacy of their bedrooms? Trying to gaze through the keyhole is never a dignified posture. What harm are they doing to others? ("Ah!" it will be said, "they are doing harm to themselves.") I am not suggesting here that we should bluntly set aside the traditional Orthodox teaching, but we do need to enquire more rigorously into the reasons that lie behind it.

While not agreeing with all that is said in this volume—indeed, the contributors do not always agree among themselves—nevertheless I welcome this issue of *The Wheel*. I welcome it precisely because it does not claim to offer a systematic and definitive treatment of sexuality, but because its aim is to "initiate discussion," as the guest editor, Father Andrew Louth, notes. In the words of Brandon Gallaher, "To ascertain the truth we must experiment." And as Vasileios Thermos maintains, "Our theological treasury . . . is waiting to be discovered." Let us not as Orthodox be merely defensive and reactive, "running after the facts," as he puts it; but let us listen to one another with creative courage, with mutual respect and, more than that, with (in his own words again) "loving compassion." Let us acknowledge, moreover, the variety of paths that God calls us human beings to follow.

Here is a volume that can help us to identify some of the paths that are to be found within the "dark forest," and that can lead us to clearings where the sunlight breaks through. For that we may be firmly grateful. ❋

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