

Invited article

A Treatise on the Understanding of Marriage: A Plea for the Necessity of Pre-Marital Counselling

Stephen Holley

*Deacon
Pro Vita Association,
Iași, ROMANIA*

Abstract:

The Lord Jesus, answering a question from the Pharisees concerning divorce said concerning marriage: “Have ye not read, that He Who made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt. 19:4ff). Thus, marriage is as old as creation itself, as old as the separation of the sexes: *male and female*. There was no other man for Adam to “marry;” there was no other woman on whom Eve could bestow her God-given affections. In one dynamic sentence the Lord Jesus ruled out homosexual unions of any kind (as well as human/”other” relationships which will naturally follow the legalization of homosexual “marriage” in the warped intentions of the Evil One!), as well as, the freedom to dissolve the Sacramental Union of Holy Matrimony for frivolous reasons! Therefore, it behooves every one of us who is contemplating marriage before God to “think it through” thoroughly before entering into this Sacramental relationship. We need to be like the King who counted his armies before going to battle and the builder who counted the cost before building his tower (Lk. 14:28ff), lest we begin to build and not finish, and what had been started and left unfinished become a mockery to us and to our lives in Christ.

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In the event that you, the reader of this article, are not aware of the statistics on divorce in today’s world, let me inform you that the divorce rate today is approaching sixty percent of all marriages. This means that six out of every ten marriages world-wide, will end in failure and dissolution. There are several classes of marriage “types” that have been

identified and categorized by those who study marriage for a living. These categories range from very poor quality marriages (designated as “shipwreck” marriages) all the way to the highest quality marriages (“exceptional” marriages). To this highest quality, only fifteen percent of all marriages attain, and half of those are second marriages. Thus, only about seven percent of all married couples “get it right” the first time, their one and only time, around. These statistics alone should put the “fear of God” into any of us contemplating marriage today!

What can we do about it? Should we all become as St. Paul and remain unmarried; become Monastics and join a Monastery or a Convent? This, of course, is not the answer: this is merely running from the problem and not facing it squarely and dealing with it. After all, any good Monastic knows and will tell anyone that comes to the Monastery as a refuge from life that the Monastery is not a refuge *from life* but a refuge *of life* only for those called by God specifically to come there for His purposes and Glory. It is a calling, not an escape.

By the same token, marriage is a calling as well. There are some who would tell us that the monastic life is superior to the married life: marriage is as much a pathway to holiness as is the monastic life. They are two paths that arrive at the same destination: the Kingdom of Heaven.

No matter what path we choose, it will not be an easy road. We can liken it to the discussion the Lord Jesus was having with his Disciples in Matthew 19:23ff wherein He began the discourse by saying to them: *Verily I say to you, a rich man shall scarcely enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* This, of course, shocked the Disciples because the common wisdom of the day was that earthly riches indicated the favour of God for a particular person and family. Thus, if the highly favoured of God were struggling to enter the Kingdom, what chance did they who were poor and in misery have of reaching that same Kingdom? He says, just to emphasize the point, that it is *easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.* To this the Disciples respond: *Who, then, can be saved?* in great shock. The Lord’s answer to their question is a very simple one: *With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*

It is very difficult for an Holy Monk or Nun to be saved because they are constantly having to resist the Evil One who is hurling temptations at them feverishly and they must battle him at every turn. The Evil One never sleeps! Ironically, the rich man has no worries about the Evil One assailing him because he has been lulled to spiritual sleep by his riches and the Evil One has no need of tempting him. Father George Calciu writes in his autobiography of a situation in a small Romanian village. There was a widow with many children who prayed very much for her children: around her home were many demons, very active and aggressive toward her. In the same village was a tavern where men sat drunk all day: in that tavern was one lazy demon who rested most of the day because he had no need to assail those already, and willingly, under his power!

I am getting side-tracked, however, from the point I am trying to make, which is this: the married life gets much the same attention from the Evil One as does the monastic life. The monastic is removed from society at large in the Monastery, but he or she is there praying the hours for all of us who cannot do so because we have families and/or worldly (in a good sense, *e.g.*, a doctor or nurse, or Parish Priest who ministers to others in need) concerns that prevent us from the prayers in which we all should be engaged. To attack the Monastic is to attack the power source behind society; they are the *fifty righteous persons* of Genesis 18:24ff for whose sake God would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. As long as Abraham kept asking God for His mercy on the wicked cities for the sake of the righteous, God responded with His agreement to spare the cities. Abraham bargained God down to *ten righteous persons* but it was there that he stopped interceding and the Lord destroyed the wicked cities because only Lot and his family (four people: Lot, his wife, and their two daughters) abode there. God did, however, spare Lot and his family from being destroyed (except for his wife who looked back at the city against the instruction of the angelic visitors, and was turned into a pillar of salt) by leading them forth from the city before its destruction.

The family structure, those who are married and bearing children, is the mechanics of society. The family is the basic building block of any society. It is the place from which we take our identity as individuals, and this identity comes primarily from the father in the household. If the Evil

One will destroy mankind, he must attack the place where a person finds his identity in this life. The father's surname is the "family name" by which we are known; to not know one's father, directly or indirectly, is to be without identity in life. The father in the home stands in the place of God the Father in the eyes of his children: no matter how much we instruct our children at home, in school or in Church, they will relate to God in Heaven in the same manner as they relate to their earthly father, the Grace and Mercy of God notwithstanding. Read Hebrews 12:4ff and see how being forsaken by God because of sin, as St. Paul writes, is a definite sign that the one *not* being chastised for sin does *not* belong to the family of God: *For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (vs. 6). Then he goes on to say that we are to endure that chastening in order to be corrected back into the way of life. Following this, he tells us rather pointedly in vs. 8: *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons*. The word *bastards* here is the Greek word νόθος, an adjective which means "illegitimate," a person without a father, thus, without the identity of a family. Saint Paul's argument in this passage relates to one of the three key elements in a family structure, *i.e.*, responsibility, on which we further elaborate later.

Many, many people in this world are on a never-ending quest to find out *who* they are and, by extension, to find out what their *purpose* in life is meant to be. They spend their whole lives asking the question: *Who am I?* Too many of them never find the answer and thus spend their whole lives in vain, with no purpose. They cannot relate to themselves and thus cannot relate to other people, especially in a legitimate love relationship because they will feel the call to "move along" in their endless quest for identity. Stability is something of which they know nothing at all.

The problem stems from the fact that they are asking the wrong question. In lieu of asking *Who am I?*, they should be asking the question: *Who's am I?* The answer to this question will give them the stability for which they search in vain; it will tell them who they are!

This is why the family is so important and why the Evil One wants so desperately to destroy it. Without a solid family structure in which to grow up and mature properly, people are, as St. James describes them,

like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed (Jas. 1:6). They are also described by St. Jude when he writes: *clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever* (Jude 12bf). Again I say with all caution, this can all be changed in an instant by the Grace of God in anyone's life because our God loves us and continually reaches out to us in Love and Mercy! It is up to us, however, to respond to that Love and Mercy with faith and trust; God will never force us to love Him.

Once we understand *who's* we are, then we will know who *we* are, and then we can properly relate to other people as well as physical realities. This relates to the idea of responsibility which I mentioned earlier. Again, I am getting a little ahead of myself, but there needs to be a mention of that aspect here as well. We certainly can understand relating to other people, but what about inanimate physical realities?

This revolves around the concept of private property. Where am I going with this? Let me explain.

When we think of private property and its great significance in the Constitution of the United States of America, we naturally think that Americans would be consumed with private property laws because America is such a rich country, founded upon the principles of free enterprise, etc. They would naturally be concerned with "keeping what it theirs." The truth of the matter is this: the founding fathers of the United States of America were godly men who understood the real meaning of private property. Just like they understood the words which they wrote for the good of their posterity guaranteeing every citizen "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." When we read the word "happiness" therein, we think of mirth, gaiety and the like. This, however, is not the meaning of the word as they penned it. What it means is the "pursuit of whatever one wishes to make *happen* in one's life," e.g., if one wishes to become a doctor or a Priest or a lawyer, one has the guaranteed right to pursue that dream: to "make it happen" to the best of one's ability. In our more modern parlance, the words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" might be expressed as "life, liberty, and the freedom to be whatever one wants to be" (within the law, of course!).

By way of an historical note concerning the godliness of the founding fathers, I heard this depiction of incidents from the life of George Washington (the father of the United States of America), told on a television program one evening some years ago. It was told by a renowned expert on the life of George Washington. It was said of him that he gave his own money to found Churches in the colonies (even Churches other than his own Protestant denomination!) because he believed so strongly in the place of God in the country and in the individual home and family. He would often, as General of the Colonial Armies during the Revolutionary War in America, go off by himself for hours before battles and get down on his knees and pray for God's help and blessing upon his men and their quest for independence. He rode a great white stallion and always was at the forefront of the battle on that great horse, leading his men in battle against the British. He did not hide himself from the conflict but stood at the front, making himself an easily-identifiable target for enemy snipers and combatants, who were very much aware of the necessity of killing the leaders (especially the supreme leader!) of the enemy. In all of this, George Washington *never* once was wounded in battle by an enemy. The more amazing thing about it, however, is the fact that there are still remnants of his uniforms on display today that show bullet holes through the material! He trusted God supremely and God protected him throughout his lifetime.

The rest of the founding fathers were just as committed to God as was George Washington: Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, all the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress, and they had a huge hand in penning the Constitution of the United States of America. When they drafted the Constitution, they had God as their Guide and Instructor.

This brings us back to the issue of private property and how it relates to our discussion. One must have ownership in something in order to take pride (in the good sense, of course) in it and care for it as is necessary for its longevity. In the United States, many "families" consist of only a mother and several illegitimate children, usually sired by different "sperm donors" (a term used for men who are only there for the sex and vanish when a pregnancy results). The reason for this growing phenomenon is the simple fact that the government pays these women

money (welfare payments) because they have children and do not work. The Church used to be the ones helping these people until the government took that responsibility away from the Church for the simple reason that these people will vote for anyone who gives them “free money!” The Church tried to rehabilitate the people and keep families together. The government wants nothing to do with solid family structure because that weans them away from needing assistance to live. When one makes one’s own decisions, one votes for the ones who will help them the best way. By keeping these people indigent, they are helpless without government. The more children they beget and bear, the more money the government throws at them to “fix” the problem.

The problem, unfortunately, only gets much worse because the children are all brought into and raised in this “welfare system” and find it almost impossible to pull themselves out of it. They are mostly all illegitimate and, therefore, have no identity at all. They soon turn to gangs and drugs to find their “identity;” and the Evil One is always there to help them along this road to destruction!

They own nothing at all of their own; they have never earned anything from their own labours in their lives. The children drop out of school at an early age with dreams of being the “drug lord” of their block or having a career in athletics or pop music. It all revolves around having lots and lots of money for doing nothing.

One would think that when one is handed something for nothing, one would be grateful for having received it, but this is not the case. The government, as part of its programs to fix the homeless and indigence problem, has taken to building what are called “projects,” housing complexes of apartments with all new furniture, washers and dryers for their clothes, everything one could want in decent living. The “projects” soon become eyesores, covered with graffiti and smelling like sewers. The washers and dryers, the furniture and everything usable has been sold by the resident “gang/drug lord” to buy more illegal drugs and, in a short span of ten to twenty years, the “projects” have to be demolished because they have become rat-infested, trash-laden monuments to the government’s total lack of understanding. When the wrecking ball is demolishing the buildings, homeless “activists” are on television demanding that the government build them more housing because it is

their “right” to have it; and that they do not want any government supervision telling them how they should live in the free housing!

Without personal identity that can only come from a family, there is no respect for anything given to them without personal cost. If one legitimately works and sweats for something because they want it, one will respect it and care for it in an appropriate manner. When one is asked by another to watch over something as a favour or as a paid job-responsibility, the best words one can hear from the caretaker are: “I will treat it as if it were my own.” This attitude can only come from understanding the value of personal property and how it makes one a better citizen. In some places, only land-owners are allowed to vote and have any participation in government. This is because they understand the value of private property for which they and their families have worked over many years; they do not want people who have never worked for anything and own nothing to be making the laws in regard to that for which others have worked. Personal responsibility does not come upon one overnight in a sudden flash, it is learned in the solid family structure, and private property is a great part of that learning process.

The Lord Jesus spoke of this phenomenon when He uttered one of the great “I AM” statements in the Gospel according to St. John when He declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd. He said: *I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep* (Jn. 10:11ff). In this passage, notice that the hired help, to whom the sheep do not belong, leaves them to protect himself (the one thing that he does own, his own life!). Also notice that it is the Son’s relationship to His Father that is the grounds upon which the Son lays down His life for the sheep. The sheep belong to the Father, but he has given them as a possession to the Son, so they are His own possession, *i.e.*, private property. Compare this with what the Lord says in John 17:12 of those sheep: *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy Name: those that Thou gavest me I have*

kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

As I write this, please understand that I am speaking of the general situation as we find it. There are many stories, however, that do not fit this scenario. Many people, by the Grace of God and through hard work and determination, have pulled themselves out of this downward spiral and made great successes of their lives. Many have even done it totally apart from God (as we know Him), either in another religion apart from Christianity or as agnostics or as atheists; this is due to the fact that the principles within mankind being created in the Image and Likeness of God (even if they will not acknowledge it!) are still at work in the universe, just because of the special uniqueness of man as the pinnacle of God's creation!

I mentioned earlier that there are three key elements at work in the solid family structure, responsibility being but one of them. It is now time to explore the other two.

The first and most important of these is trust. Trust and faith are synonymous in this context, just as they are in any biblically-centred context. The first thing we learn to do within the family structure is to trust one another. This can only happen properly if those at the head of the family are trustworthy. This is why it is imperative that when two people "fall in love," they fall in love with each other's mind and spirit, the place from whence trust is spawned. I am amazed at the phenomenon that occurs so often in today's world wherein two people who are engaged to be married must first establish a "pre-nuptial agreement" before they marry. This is a legal document that limits the money and property a spouse may receive should there be the death of one of them or a divorce. It separates money and property into "his and hers" so that the other cannot get their hands on it for any reason. If two people do not trust one another that much to necessitate a pre-nuptial agreement, why are they getting married in the first place!?! This is the epitome of lack of trust in a marriage and it starts the marriage out on the wrong foot!

Trust is something that must be earned by an individual; it cannot be demanded apart from good reason to trust someone. When one enters a new relationship, such as courtship with a view toward marriage, both parties must be weaned away from trust in or faithfulness to anyone other

than the one whom they will marry. This highest level of trust and commitment is reserved only for one's spouse. There are, of course, lower levels of trust that we will retain, *e.g.*, one's doctor, or one's confessor, or even one's butcher who has the freshest and healthiest meats in his shop, or one's barber, etc. The highest level of trust and commitment *must* be to one's spouse or the marriage will be deeply flawed, and those flaws will be perceived by the children of such a marriage and damage them as well.

This is why it is so imperative that all ties of loyalty must be broken with the parents of the wedded couple. The Holy Scripture makes that clear when it states emphatically: *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh* (Gen. 2:24). This was the Commandment of God from the very beginning, on the very day that God made Eve from the rib of Adam in the Garden of Eden and gave them to one another. Adam, of course, had no father and mother to leave because he and Eve were the father and mother of all mankind, but the precedent was set from the very beginning of making one's fidelity to one's spouse alone. The Scripture does not specifically say that Eve, the wife, was supposed to do the very same, but it is implicit in the understanding of the passage. In many forms of the wedding ceremony, especially Protestant and even in Western Rite Orthodoxy, the bride is given away by her parents (or by someone else if the parents are deceased or not present) to the groom symbolizing the severance of the bond between the bride and her parents and of her belonging now to her husband.

The word "cleave" is a very unique word in the sense that it means two things that are opposite one another. A diamond-cutter cleaves a raw diamond, separating it into several parts separate and distinct from one another. On the other hand, one can be said to cleave to something so as to make it one with oneself, as in the biblical statement: *Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave, and swear by His Name* (Dt. 10:20). The cleaving of a husband and wife must be complete, both aspects of the definition must take place!

One of the worst things that can happen in a marriage is for the parents of a couple to "take sides" with either the husband or wife when they are having a dispute over something. It is especially bad for them to take the side of their own child. This leads to criticizing the "other" side

and eroding whatever trust that remains in the relationship. If parents and well-meaning friends of the couple truly want to help them resolve their differences, they will not “take sides,” but encourage the couple to rationally talk over their differences and resolve the issue peacefully and permanently. If the dispute is serious enough, a marriage counsellor may need to be engaged. When sides are taken, there can be name-calling and many other things detrimental to the relationship that is expressed in the heat of passion. Many times these things will come back to haunt the one who spoke out of turn in an effort to comfort or “be a pal,” and this can damage the secondary relationship severely.

From whence does trust come? It, like Faith, comes from knowledge, knowledge of the other person. Saint Paul writes in Romans 10:17, [...] *faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*. It is as the Holy Fathers teach: Knowledge *must* precede Faith. One of the great problems of this modern world is the fact that truth is no longer a valued commodity. We live in a world of expediency that condones any form of deceit required to obtain a desired end. This is very true in the arena of marriage today. One person sees another who appeals to them for the basest of motives, superficial attraction, and it goes by the misnomer of “love” (when it is really no more than the *lust of the flesh*). The one (or sometimes both) of them who “wants” the other one will change his or her behaviour and pretend to be someone they are not in order to obtain what they want. If this relationship ends up at the altar, one or both will be in for a great shock the next day after the “objective” is won: they revert back to their true selves and then the nightmare, instead of the honeymoon, begins!

When Samuel the Prophet was instructed by God to remove King Saul from the throne of Israel, he was sent to the House of Jesse to select the new King. Jesse was asked to parade his sons before Samuel and he did so from the eldest to the youngest. When Samuel looked on the first of Jesse’s sons, Eliab, he said within himself, *Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him*. The Lord, however, said to Samuel, *Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart* (1 Sam. 16:6f). When the Spirit of God did not identify to Samuel the one to be chosen after seeing

seven of Jesse's sons, Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons whom he had not yet seen. Jesse answered that he had one more but that he was a mere boy out tending the sheep. So Jesse brought his son David to Samuel and he was identified as the one whom the Lord had chosen. Saint Paul in his preaching to the Jews in a Synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, said of King David, *I have found David the son of Jesse, to be a man after My own Heart, who shall fulfil all My will* (Ac. 13:22).

It is the heart and the mind that tell us who a person really is; this is why the Lord Jesus said, *Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also* (Mt. 6:21). Long before those words, Solomon said, [...] *as he thinketh in his heart, so he is* (Prov. 23:7), speaking of the man with an *evil eye*. As the Lord Jesus also told us in the same passage, *the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness* (Mt. 6:22f). When He speaks of the *eye* here, He is speaking of the *voũç* which is the "window" of the soul. It is part of the intelligible part of the soul which dwells within the heart of a person. If the *eye* is turned upward toward God, then it is full of light (the Uncreated Light we see as depicted by haloes in Iconography). If, however, it is turned inward on the person, then it has no light and is darkened, seeking only to consume for itself upon others: always taking and never giving. The *treasure*, then, of the latter, darkened soul is what that person can take from others.

A person that is always taking and never giving (except to get what he or she wants: one must give a piece of cheese in the trap to catch the mouse!) must disguise his or her intentions if they will succeed. This is very prevalent in many pre-marital relationships: one or the other of the couple is disguising their real self (or selves) in order to obtain a "treasure" that is desired. Let us take, for example, a couple wherein the boy desires to marry the girl but she is "turned off" by his behaviour. He, then, changes his behaviour to mask who he really is so as to make her think he is someone whom he is not. After the marriage, he reverts back to his normal self because he has attained his goal. The poor wife wakes up to find she has married a complete stranger and another marriage becomes a nightmare instead of a lifelong romance.

I know of a particular situation that illustrates this scenario perfectly. Two young people from good, Christian families were engaged to be married. The young man was the owner of his own business and had his own home; he made a nice living and seemed, on the surface, to be the ideal “catch” for his bride-to-be. She was a college graduate, working at a good job but still living at home. They planned an elaborate Church wedding and seemed to be heading for a fine life together. She was to continue working for a while until the time came for children, at which time she would cease working outside the home and become a full-time mother. They married and all seemed well. Shortly thereafter, he insisted she quit work and stay at home all day. He gave her money to run the home, every penny of which she had to account for to him with receipts. He would call her at home every so often and demand to know exactly what she was doing at any given moment. She was to dissociate herself from all her friends and have no social life at all apart from her husband. He monitored her phone calls, demanding to know whom she called and for what reason. She was not to go out of the house alone without his permission, and then only for absolutely necessary things such as grocery shopping (for which she had to account for every penny!). Her life became a nightmare of being absolutely controlled by her husband in every detail of her existence. What seemed to be a “perfect match” ended in an ugly divorce within a year of their marriage! He was a “control-freak” but he hid it perfectly from her and her family until they were married: he was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!

These things happen, perhaps not to the same degree of, but they happen quite frequently and are no less a nightmare for the one caught unawares in the other’s trap. All this can be avoided if we *look on the heart and not on the outward appearance* alone. This is the only way we can build trust in one another, by being ourselves and examining the other person inwardly and not just relying on the external to furnish us a foundation for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The internal provides us the opportunity to see if the object of our affections is a *house built upon the rock* that will withstand the winds and waves and floods of life. The external alone will prove only to be a *house build upon the sand* that will crumble at the first sign of trouble (Mt. 7:24ff).

In any relationship, especially the marriage relationship, there must be an established base of trust and faith in one another in order for there to be a relationship at all. We *must* know we can trust the other person in the relationship when trials and tribulation attack the union. Two separate individuals have become *one flesh* and the individual does not have rule over their own body; it belongs to the other person (1 Cor. 7:4, speaking of the sexual relationship); therefore, what we have pledged in the wedding ceremony cannot be held back (and used as a “bargaining chip” at any convenient time!) for any reason. This is our trust in one another. In Western Christian marriage ceremonies, the bride and groom pledge their trust one to another with the words (before God!) “I plight thee my troth,” which is older English for “I pledge to you my trust.” If a foundation of trust has not been established, how can it be pledged wholeheartedly and unreservedly before God?

The idea of pledging these things before God is not to be taken lightly, either. As Solomon, again, tells us: he who vows before God and breaks it is a *fool* (*The fool hath said in his heart, “There is no God!”* Ps. 14:1, 53:1) and that it is better to not vow than to vow and break that vow (Eccl. 5:4f). If nothing else, this should tell us how serious the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is in its essence; and yet, the divorce rate is approaching sixty percent!

There is no substitute for trust as the foundation of a good and lasting marriage that will endure every hardship and trial that the Evil One will bring in his efforts to crush that holy relationship. We trust in God, *and* we also trust in our spouse whom God has provided to us as our best hope of reaching the Kingdom of God. The husband is the wife’s best hope of attaining to the Kingdom of God; and the wife is the husband’s best hope of the same. Trusting what (or whom) God has provided is the same as trusting God Himself! This trust must be absolute. It will not be at first, but it will build as the relationship matures; as long as we have chosen one in whom we can place our absolute trust. In the words of Job, referring to his trust in God in the midst of his trials: *Thought He slay me, yet will I trust Him.*

Once we have chosen one in whom we can place our absolute trust and have determined that this one is “the one,” then we can begin to build upon that foundation. The next level up from trust is love. Once we have someone whom we trust, then we can begin to love that person in the proper sense.

One of the questions I ask any group that I address on the issues of marriage and pre-marital counselling is this: “What is love; how does one define love?” As a follow-up question, I also ask: “How many people here believe that love is a feeling?” Most people have no idea what love really is and many (at least half the room) believe that it is a feeling. This is completely wrong! How can one commit one’s life to someone based upon a concept that they cannot even define or understand?

When a young couple comes to me for pre-marital counselling, the first question I ask them is this: “Why do you want to get married?” The answer comes back, invariably, “Because we love each other.” I smile and tell them that that is the very *worst* reason for two people to get married! After they recover from the shock, I spend the next however many months it requires to explain to them what I mean and, at the same time, get them on a surer foundation for their relationship.

If love is merely a feeling, then how can it be a basis for marriage when feelings change, not just from day to day, but from moment to moment? Rather, love is a commitment, fully and completely. Love is always giving and never taking. Love is submission one to another. Love cannot be “defined,” as such; it must be demonstrated in actions and words. Thus, we read in John 3:16, [...] *God loved the world in this manner that He gave His Only-Begotten Son...* Also, in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, in his instruction to married couples, he says to the husbands: *Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it* (Eph. 5:25).

In John 14:15, while with His Disciples in the Upper Room, Christ tells His followers: *If you love Me, keep My Commandments*. In 1 John 5:3, St. John echoes these words when he writes: *For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments*. We can see from these passages that love is tied directly to giving, specifically the giving of oneself, all that we are and possess. Later on, in the Upper Room discourse to His Disciples, the Lord Jesus adds another dimension to this concept when He

says in John 14:21, *He that hath My Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me ... , and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.* The reward of love built upon trust is that the one whom we love will open themselves up to us, *I will manifest Myself to him.* The verb used here for *manifest* is the Greek εμφανίζω, which is a cognate of the root verb φαίνω, “to shed light upon, to reveal,” with the preposition εν, “with,” appended to the front for emphasis. It means, therefore, “to bring light to that which is hidden inside;” the person who is the object of one’s love begins to develop a deeper trust, so much so, that they are willing to reveal their true, inner selves. This, of course, makes them all the more vulnerable to hurt, embarrassment, and humiliation, but they are not worried about that because a strong base of trust has been developed and built-upon with true love! This why the Lord Jesus says in John 15:13, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* Laying down one’s life does not necessarily demand the literal sense (although many times it does!); we can lay our lives down in many ways. One of those ways is by making ourselves more and more vulnerable to the one in whom we place our absolute trust, our spouse. This is true love!

This has an added dimension that makes our relationship more pleasing to God and, thus, more apt to be blessed of Him to Whom we all belong. This added dimension is revealed to us in John 13:34f, where the Lord Jesus tells His disciples: *A new Commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another.* In this passage, as in all the rest, St. John uses the verb form or the noun form of the, so called, “highest form” of love, that of ἀγάπη love which is characterized by self-sacrifice, regardless of the recipient’s worthiness (or lack thereof) to receive it. It is one of the two words for “love” used extensively in the New Testament: ἀγαπάω and φιλέω, the latter being more in the area of “friendship.”

We can see these two words played off against one another when the Lord Jesus confronts St. Peter after the Resurrection on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where He elicits three affirmations of St. Peter’s faith in Christ to overcome his remorse over his three denials of the Lord outside the home of the High Priest the night of Jesus’ arrest and trial.

Saint Peter was overcome with grief over his failure to stand for Christ that evening, especially after having vowed his allegiance to his Master earlier (remember what we said about vowing a vow and not keeping it!). The Lord knew St. Peter had to experience forgiveness for him to be the man he was to become in Christian history. The Lord had already forgiven him based upon his having *wept bitterly* following his three denials. What the Lord needed from St. Peter was for him to forgive himself and put it all in the past! This is played out for us in John 21:15-19.

I will not take the time to go into great detail in explaining this interchange between the Lord and St. Peter; I will just give the pertinent facts as they pertain to this treatise. Saints Thomas, Nathaniel, James, John and Peter were at the Sea of Galilee. The Angel at the Empty Tomb had told Mary Magdalene and *the other Mary* to ... *go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goes before you into Galilee; there you shall see Him* (Mt. 28:7). As they are standing together, waiting, St. Peter announces, *I go a-fishing*. What he really said, literally was *I return to fishing*; not just *I am going fishing*. He was leaving his calling and returning to his former worldly occupation.

The disciples are fishing and they catch nothing all night. The Lord appears on the shore and asks them if they have caught anything and instructs them to cast their nets in a certain place. They do so and catch so many fish that the nets begin to strain under the load. Saint John realizes it is the Lord Jesus and tells St. Peter. Saint Peter puts on his coat because he is naked in the boat and then threw himself into the water. The nakedness of his body is indicative of the nakedness of his soul before God and his realization of his own sinfulness and shame from his three denials. This is the same reaction he had when he first met the Lord and He had directed St. Peter as to where to catch fish in Luke 5:8, ... *he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*.

The disciples drag the fish to the shore in their boat and Jesus has a fire lit and they all eat together. It is right after they eat together, a symbol of close friendship and camaraderie, that Jesus confronts St. Peter face to face, beginning in vs. 15. It is time to acknowledge the five-hundred-pound gorilla in the room!

He says to St. Peter: *Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?* The question reads, literally: *Simon, do you sacrificially love (αγαπαω) Me more than these fish you just caught?* Remember, St. Peter had just declared to his comrades that he was *returning* to fishing. I will proceed from here with literal translations to show the contrasts drawn out in this passage. Saint Peter answers: *Yes, Lord, You know intuitively that I am your friend (φιλεω)*. Based upon this declaration, the Lord Jesus then gives St. Peter a directive, a command, *Feed My lambs*. This narrowly denotes nourishment in Christian doctrine directed specifically toward the young, most vulnerable ones of the flock, *i.e.*, new Christians.

Now the Lord says to St. Peter *a second time*: *Simon, son of Jonah, do you sacrificially love Me at all?* There is no comparison to the fish or anything else now. Saint Peter answers Him again the same way: *Yes, Lord, You know intuitively that I am your friend (φιλεω)*. Based upon this second declaration, the Lord now says to St. Peter: *Tend My sheep*. This most broadly denotes the shepherding of all the Church.

Now the Lord says to St. Peter *a third time*: *Simon, son of Jonah, are you really My friend (φιλεω)?* This deeply penetrated the heart of St. Peter and he was literally brought to tears, just as he was after his third denial, because it grieved him so much that the Lord asked if he was really His friend. Saint Peter then answers the Lord differently than as before: *Lord, You know intuitively all things, but You know by experience that I am Your friend*. Based upon his third affirmation and his tears, the Lord gives St. Peter another charge, this time encompassing both of the previous charges: *Feed My sheep*. This charge combines the narrower concept of nourishment in Christian doctrine with the broader concept of the Church in general. Then the Lord Jesus spoke of St. Peter's death in which he should glorify the Lord. In conclusion, He says to St. Peter: *Follow Me*. Saint Peter is now fully restored!

What does all this say to us about trust and love in the marriage relationship? First of all, the Lord Jesus, by St. Peter's own words, *knows all things intuitively*: He knows the heart of every person ever created. Knowing St. Peter's heart to be a good one that just needs the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to be fit for the tasks given him as the leader of the Holy Apostles, He *gives* to St. Peter certain commandments that are, at once, very necessary for the Church to become what it was to

become, and very delicate, requiring the utmost of trust. Saint Peter, then, demonstrated his love for Christ by honouring those commandments and fulfilling them to the utmost, even unto his death by crucifixion, upside-down! God trusted St. Peter and he responded in love; St. Peter, reciprocally, trusted God and God responded in love. The same dynamics are at work in the marriage relationship. The more we come to know the heart and mind of the one we love, the more we can trust them; the more we trust them, the more we are able to love them by *giving* on the husband's side and in *submission* on the wife's side. The two words, *giving* and *submission* are synonymous and interchangeable. This is why St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:21, *submitting yourselves to one to another in the fear of God*.

I need to make one more point concerning love (especially for those of you who are not so convinced that love is *not* a feeling, but action derived from a particular mind-set). This comes from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians where he prays specifically for their well-being in 1:9f. He spends the first eight verses of the letter with the customary introduction of himself as the writer of the Epistle, and in telling them just how much he loves them and every remembrance of his time with them. He thanks them for their help in his defence of the Holy Gospel and he yearns to be with them again. Then, in vss. 9 and 10a, he says this concerning their love for others: *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement; that you may approve things that are excellent*.

He is praying for their *αγαπη*, self-sacrificing love, and he asks that it should increase to the point of overflowing and spilling out onto others. When we give out of *αγαπη* love, the resources from which we give are, of course, limited, but if we put others first, then God makes those resources continue to flow, even when we think there is nothing left. The best illustration of this is that of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:8ff. There Elijah the Prophet was directed by the Lord to go to Zarephath where he would be sustained during the famine and drought by a widow whom God had directed to feed him. She had only a few grams of flour left in the bottom of a barrel and a little oil left in a jar; she was going to make a fire and cook two small cakes for her and her son and then she and her son would go and die from the famine. As she was

gathering the wood for the fire, Elijah asked her for a drink of water and some bread. She told him of her situation and Elijah told her to make bread for him first and then for her and her son. He told her the Word of the Lord was that her flour and oil would be sustained until the end of the drought and famine. She did according to the word of Elijah and the flour and oil sustained the three of them for the remainder of the three and a half years of the drought.

Lest, however, we spend our self-sacrificing love foolishly, we must make sure that we give to the right people and in the right manner and for the right purposes. This is why St. Paul places parameters on their abundant love for which he prays. He uses the preposition *εν*, which denotes the sphere in which their love must operate so that he says, literally, that their love must *abound within the sphere of knowledge and of all judgement*.

The first word, *knowledge*, is the word for *experiential knowledge*, but with a preposition appended to the front of it: *επιγνωσις*. This word, unfortunately, remains virtually untranslated in most translations of the Holy Scriptures. It should be translated, *full knowledge* (literally, “knowledge which is ‘upon’ [the preposition *επι*] regular, experiential knowledge”) so that its import is that a full examination of the person or thing at hand is accomplished before giving oneself to them or it. Love is *not* blind here, as the expression goes; it is perceptive and very thorough-going in its research before committing itself. In the marriage relationship, one is giving their most prized and precious possession, oneself; and the Lord told us that we should never *cast our pearls before swine* (Mt. 7:6).

The second arena in which our love should operate is in *all judgement*. This is the expression, *παση αισθησει*, which means, literally, “taking all the information one has gathered (the *full-knowledge*) and making judgements based upon it.” It is like eating a fresh-caught fish: one makes sure it comes from a clean source and then one cooks it to eat. When one eats it, one, literally, swallows the good flesh and spits out the bones. The flesh will nourish a person but the bones can choke and kill a person!

This is further borne out by the fact that St. Paul then, at the beginning of vs. 10, states the purpose of this discerning attitude: *so that you may approve the excellent things*. When one undertakes any task, one usually has a definite purpose in mind, something that one wishes to accomplish. In this case, St. Paul chooses to use the preposition εἰς (literally, “into”) to express his purpose. When it is used this way, taking as its object an infinitive, it should be translated *with a view toward*, expressing purpose. The prepositions ἐν and εἰς are related and are often seen as being interchangeable by translators, but they are very different in import. If ἐν denotes a sphere of operation (picture a round ball, sealed off from everything outside of it), then εἰς denotes an arrow piercing that sphere, bringing something from outside that sphere into it. From this it is easy to see how it denotes purpose when used with the infinitive, in the way St. Paul employs it in this passage. It is worthy of note as a sidebar that prepositions, though they be very small, insignificant words, carry much of the force in the formation of Christian doctrine by the Holy Fathers in their interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

The purpose of discernment in love is to *approve the excellent things*. Picture a clerk sitting at a desk with hundreds of request forms coming to him daily. He must read each one carefully and discern the ones that merit funding because they are good and useful. He stamps them with a stamp reading APPROVED and the rest he stamps DISAPPROVED. In the human soul, the Holy Fathers call this “guarding the νοῦς” whereby a person examines every impulse that invades the soul (all enters the person through the νοῦς, the “window of the soul,” the eye of Mt. 6:22). One examines every impulse to see what its origin is, above or below; if it is from above it is allowed to pass into the person for “processing.” If it is from below, it is rejected and sent away, never to be processed, God willing. This is the equivalent of the Lord’s saying to St. Peter in Matthew 16:23, *Get thee behind me, Satan!*

The *excellent things* we are to approve are things which are not just acceptable, but of the finest and superior quality. Saint Paul uses the verb διαφέρω which literally means “to bring, carry through.” It is a compound verb φέρω, which means “bring, carry, bear” with the preposition δια, “through” appended to it. Here it is a neuter plural participle, *things which are excellent*. To understand its meaning denoting

excellence, think of a refiner's fire used to refine gold. The gold ore has impurities in it along with actual gold. The fire burns the impurities as the ore is passed through the fire and the ore emerges purer as the impurities are burned away in the fire. The fire is heated more and more and the ore is passed through it over and over again until all the impurities are burned away but the pure gold is left intact. We are left with only the pure gold and all the "bones" are discarded!

It is interesting to note that this word was found in a marriage contract in a papyrus fragment dated to AD 127: εαν δε τι διαφερωνται προς αλληλους, "whatever is mutually excellent" (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III, 496⁸ as cited by Moulton and Milligan 1974: 156).

So many people in the world have little to no idea of what love really is and how it is expressed, that it is no wonder the divorce rate is so high and climbing. This phenomenon of almost total ignorance of the meaning of love contributes also to the rising numbers of couple who cohabit with one another outside the bounds of Holy Matrimony. If those statistics were to be included in the divorce-rate figures, the numbers would be overwhelming! The accent for so many couples today is on the fleshly aspects of marriage. The focus *must* be on the spiritual and mental, *not* on the physical, for marriages to succeed amidst the trauma of the modern world and the raging of the Evil One against God's Holy Institution of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

The unenlightened mind and heart will put the focus on the physical because we live in the physical realm. When God is not at the centre of one's life, then He is ignored and one lives by what can be felt and experienced physically. Yet, God is right there, reaching out to anyone who will seek after Him (Ac. 17:27f) but, as St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Hebrews, *...he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him* (11:6). We must approach God and His Holy Sacraments on *His* terms, not our own; if we do this, we will experience joy and peace in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Another helpful illustration comes from the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches. The Orthodox do not belong to this movement nor to this Council (for a time the Orthodox were "observers,"

looking to see if any good may come of it) because the liberal “theologians” among the member churches pushed very hard for having their version of the Holy Eucharist together *before* they ironed out their differences. This is profoundly not Orthodox in nature! The liberals want to *begin* with the symbol (for them it is a mere symbol; for us it is an Holy Sacrament!) of unity of Faith, even while they have many differences in beliefs and practices. They think that beginning with unity, their differences will dissolve away and they will all sing “Kum By Yah” together in harmony. This will *never* happen but they have already desecrated that of which can only be partaken in unity of doctrine and Faith. This is perfectly analogous to couples wanting to have a physical relationship *without* being one in spirit, mind and heart! It will never work because there is no foundation for unity on mere external levels. This is why the Orthodox will never participate in the W.C.C., because we will not sacrifice the Body and Blood of Christ for mere show of external unity when we are worlds apart doctrinally and in practice. Just as in the Church, married couples *must* be unified in mind, heart and spirit, *before* they can be successfully united physically!

This brings us back to the third key element that must be present in the marriage relationship: responsibility. We have discussed it at length already from a negative perspective, showing how lack of responsibility is a huge detriment to any society. Taking personal responsibility for oneself and one’s actions and words is becoming a lost commodity in today’s world. The reason for this is due to the fact that science, chiefly medical science and anthropology has taken it upon itself to relieve the average person of responsibility for his or her behaviour by making them “victims” of some external cause that is out of their control. There are now, supposedly, any number of “genes” present in many people that make them “susceptible” to any number of behaviours, such as alcoholism or homosexuality, etc., so that their behaviour is no longer “their fault.” They are now victims of things beyond their control and, therefore, they are absolved of all responsibility, before society in general, and God in particular!

This has even been extended to include such things as homelessness and poverty as “valid” reasons for robbery and murder. People are looked upon as “victims of their circumstances” and not to be held responsible. Many cities in the U.S., such as San Francisco, CA, refuse to obey federal immigration laws and hand over illegal aliens when they have the ability to do so. All this is done under the pretext of being compassionate (“love” not based upon *full-knowledge*!). The problem is that many of these illegal aliens are criminals with long records of antisocial behaviour, even to the point of being guilty of multiple murders of innocent citizens who happened to be in their way of what they wanted at a given moment! If there is no fear of punishment and no responsibility, from where does self-restraint come in the human heart that is *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked* in the words of Jeremiah the Prophet (17:9)?

These things must be developed in the individual by his own family; they cannot be learned anywhere else, save the Grace of God. The first Commandment given in the Holy Scriptures to Adam and Eve was to ... *be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth* ... (Gen. 1:28): this means that men and women are to marry and raise families. We are to fill the earth with people created in the Image and Likeness of God. As parents, specifically fathers, it is our responsibility to bring up our children *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4). The meaning of this familiar passage hinges upon the understanding of the two words, *nurture* (Gk.: παιδεια) and *admonition* (Gk.: νουθεσια).

The former word, παιδεια, means “instruction, training” and carries with it the idea of discipline. Thus, it refers more to the physical training of the child to observe the Commandments of the Lord. This includes both intellectual and moral training. It is coupled in a second century B.C. papyrus fragment (Moulton and Milligan 1974: 474) with the word σωφροσυνη, “good judgement” (literally, “a wise mind”).

The latter word, νουθεσια, means, literally, “to place in the νοϋς,” which refers to the training of a child in becoming aware of the presence of God in his or her life. It is more slanted toward the “rationale” behind παιδεια. If παιδεια teaches the child to be good and moral, then νουθεσια teaches him or her *why* they need to be good and moral.

If we look at the beginning of Ephesians 6:4, we see that St. Paul prefaces this command to parents with a negative injunction: *And you*

fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath. The way in which fathers and mothers do this is by teaching their children one thing and living their own lives as if the opposite is true. When a child questions a parent as to the difference between what he or she is taught to do and what his or her parents do, the answer usually reflects the old adage: “Do as I say, not as I do!” This introduces the idea of hypocrisy to the child and breeds anger within him in the form of, “Why must I do something he will not do?” This is addressed to the fathers specifically because the father stands in the place of God in the home and, no matter what parents do in the way of education, Church-going, etc., children will take their understanding of Who God is from their relationship with their father! A stern, unloving father will cause the child to understand God as being that way as well, no matter what he learns in Church, school, etc. A doting father who fails to discipline (παιδεῖα) his children will see them fail to understand the need for repentance and salvation. This is why the father is so important in the home.

The mother is, obviously, very important in the family also, but in a subordinate level to the father. If the father represents God, the Father, to his children; their mother represents the Church to them. As is the Church’s, the mother’s is a “reflected” glory, just as the moon has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the sun even though it appears to be a light in and of itself. The mother performs the tasks delegated to her by the father, who is ultimately responsible before God for the completion of those tasks, while he is away at work supporting the family. These tasks include educating the children and handling the “day-to-day” raising of them. As I always tell my young lady friends who are in turmoil over what to do with their lives: “If God calls you to be a godly wife and mother, do not lower yourself to become the President!” Being a godly wife and mother is the most important job in the world because they shape the lives of the next generation of leadership in the world at large, and in the Church in particular.

When I worked as a regional sales manager for a company, when we hired people, especially in the sales department (there is an old joke: How can you tell when a salesman is lying? When his lips move!) where honesty and integrity are of tantamount concern, we always chose the person we believed to be the most trustworthy and honest. He or she was

out there representing our company and products and were a reflection of us and who we are. One can teach anyone product-knowledge, but we could never teach them to be honest and trustworthy. Honesty and integrity must be ingrained in a person by his or her family!

The parents raise children to be responsible, mature adults in their proper time. These responsible, mature adults, then, are ones who trust and can be trusted, and, thus love and can be loved. This begins the whole family cycle over again and produces a godly heritage and lineage of interrelated families who will be to the visible world what the Monastic is silently and unseen. The Holy Scriptures tell us that *Children are an heritage to the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward* (Ps. 127:3). Our children do not belong to us: they are on loan to us from God. They are His and we are but stewards of His Grace in raising them for Him. How we perform that task will be I believe, a major issue at the fearful Judgement Seat of Christ!

I have tried to outline some of the major elements in the family dynamic which all begins for everyone the moment they are born into the world. The family into which we are born is our training ground to prepare us for the task of being trainers ourselves of the children God will bestow upon us for whom to care for Him. Many families, unfortunately, enter this cycle totally unprepared for the tasks required of them, thinking that a flawed, at best, definition of “love” will see them through all the trials they will encounter. They have no idea that the Evil One is truly “out to get them” (1 Pet. 5:8) with deceits and pitfalls they never dreamed existed. If this were not sufficient enough to put the fear of God into us, then the fact that marital collapse is happening to Priests and their families whom we assume and somewhat expect to be “exempt” from these, and at an alarming rate, this should wake us up to the dire need for pre-marital counselling. This is most especially true for Orthodox couples who are entering into an Holy Sacrament before God when they marry. To do so in an unprepared and naïve manner is asking for trouble, and the Evil One will certainly see that we get it!

I want to close with an illustrative story from my past as an Evangelical Protestant Christian. I was just finished seminary and was working as a security guard at a small company. There was a young girl there named Virginia who had become a Christian fairly recently. She

spoke openly about being a Christian and going to Church. She was still smoking cigarettes and doing certain things that were in direct contrast to her claims of being a Christian. I sat down with her one day and we talked about the difference between her words and her actions. It was good because no one else was around and I had her full attention. Whenever I would ask her about her smoking and some of the other things she was doing she would say, "It's not sin because Jesus paid for it!" and other such nonsense as that. There is no understanding of the concept of conversion in much of Protestantism. I explained to her about conversion (Lk. 22:32; Ac. 3:19) and what it meant, *and* that sin was still sin, even if "Jesus paid for it." She came to understand, I believe, because she said to me at the end of our conversation through tears of repentance, "No one ever told me any of this!"

This is why this article is sub-titled "A Plea for the Necessity of Pre-Marital Counselling," because someone needs to tell us these things and the place it needs to be done is in pre-marital counselling (when it has not already been done in the home!). A trained Priest or trained counsellor needs to get involved before an Orthodox couple commits themselves to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony which is an Eternal Sacrament by the Lord's own words in the holy Gospels (Mt. 19:3ff), and affirmed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10. It is not an estate into which anyone should enter lightly. As a Protestant minister, I performed the wedding of my own half-sister, at the request of my Step-mother. I took the young couple to our apartment for dinner and some pre-marital counselling one evening (to which they came very reluctantly!). After dinner I tried to point out some of the dangers of which they should be aware. Every point I made was greeted with, "Oh, that won't happen to us; we *love* each other." After a few hours of this, I made sure they wanted to go through with it, and committed them to God and His Grace. The day of the wedding came; I married them, and the marriage lasted a whole *six hours!* I have detailed the events in my book, *How Do I Choose the Right Partner for Life?* Which has a complete Romanian manuscript and I hope one day to see published here. It is available in the U.S. through Light and Life Press in Minneapolis, MN.

May God touch just one heart, or one set of hearts, with these words that I have written so that we can do something about the climbing rate of divorce in the world today, especially in the Holy Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church.

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

(Chinese Proverb)

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