

THE MYSTERY AND MEANING OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

(A series of talks and discussions for young adults.)

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ONE

LOVE WITHOUT COMMITMENT IS A LIE

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and do not have love, I am as the sound of brass and a noisy cymbal...Love is longsuffering and kind; love does not envy; love does not boast of itself nor is it puffed up. Love does not behave itself in an unseemly manner, nor seek to have its own way; it is not easily provoked and does not think evil. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but in truth; it bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became an adult, I put away childish things ...Now, there abides faith, hope and love: but the greatest of these is love" (1Cor.13).

Of all the faculties, senses, capabilities, attributes and virtues of the human race, it is committed love that bestows upon us our humanity and relates us to the Divine. Love is the dynamic force which gives meaning to our lives in this world, and hope for eternity. While the nature of genuine love may seem elusive and indefinable, it is clearly a force which takes us outside ourselves and unites and bonds us to a greater reality in a positive and creative manner.

It is a tragedy that the word "love" is so often used as a metaphor for "gratification," "self-fulfillment," or for using another person to fulfill our sexual passions.

In fact, love gives meaning and purpose to life by spiritually bonding us together with another person (as in marriage), with other people (as in a parish or other extended family), and with God, in a way that gives depth, meaning, permanence, commitment and a positive, creative dimension, to all that we share in life and, indeed, to life itself. Love, for an Orthodox Christian, is above all the dynamic force of salvation, of ascension toward God. Marriage is, first and foremost, a path of salvation.

There is no such thing as love without a firm commitment. Not realizing the full meaning and implications of love is one of the main reasons young people engage in pre-marital sexual relations, and also the single most important reason that so many marriages fail.

The commitment of love is expressed in the sincere desire, arising from the depths of heart and soul, to forsake every consideration of self, and subject every other attachment for the sake of the one we love. In true love, ambition for self-glory and advancement is transformed into a desire to

please and care for the one we love. Individual interests are replaced by mutual interests, "my" life is dissolved into "our" life. We commit ourselves to a spiritual bond which is a type and likeness of Christ and the Church, a likeness of self-sacrifice which brings with it the joy of hope and expectation, and of salvation and everlasting life. Marriage is a type and likeness of redemption itself.

Many times, people think that they "fall in love", but this is almost never true. A couple may like each other very much __ even intensely __ and feel a strong sexual attraction to each other, and these powerful feelings are interpreted as a strong love. Unfortunately for the girl or woman in such a situation, if they fall into pre-marital sexual relations, they will find that the man's "love" was often no more than his drive for conquest, and that there was no bases for a genuine commitment.

It is, therefore, important that children and young people always be taught the absolute bond between love and complete commitment. Love is a "growth situation." No one actually "falls in love." People may like each other deeply and be strongly attached to each other, but love comes only from a long-term experience. Commitment to one another is the prime expression of love and it gives strength to a relationship so that it can have time to grow and develop into a full and complete love. Without a fulfilled commitment, sexual relations are merely using another person for the most selfish of reasons.

Love pertains not only to the things we find positive and attractive in a person, but also to the negative aspects of their personality and the things we discover about them over the years that we find unattractive. This is why actual love is not instantaneous. It is a process of growth and maturity.

None of us are "complete packages." We are all constantly changing, hopefully growing and developing. No two people grow and develop at the same rate and to the same degree. Unfortunately, some of us actually stop growing mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and begin to stagnate and then degenerate. Very often the elusive, almost indefinable gradual breakdown in a marriage is precisely this difference in the growth and development of the partners. It does not matter whether both partners are working outside the home or the wife is working in the home, one of the two will almost certainly mature more quickly and more completely, and the spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth rate may very easily be different. This difference in development can cause the subtle arising of a gulf or division between a couple, and often, neither party realizes the source of the gradual feeling of "drifting apart." If they do realize it, it can be difficult to discuss in a positive manner. Men often feel threatened by a wife's growth and women who work in the home often feel oppressed and "cheated" of the opportunity to grow.

Actually, in a relationship with true love and commitment, a couple should grow and develop not merely *with* each other, but *because* of each other. It is important to realize the possibility of this problem arising and discuss it at the very beginning of a marriage. Indeed, it should be an integral part of the pre-marital counseling. Personal and individual growth, maturing and development is something that should be planned for and, from the very beginning of an Orthodox marriage, it should be resolved that this process is going to be founded on genuine spiritual growth. It should be clearly understood that mutual spiritual growth and development is

a fundamental *reason* for an Orthodox marriage in the first place. If this is clearly established, and the possibility of differing rates of intellectual and emotional maturing is understood from the beginning, it will be infinitely easier to cope with such a problem if it should arise. Any family, whether it consists only of husband and wife or includes a number of children, must constantly *struggle* to grow, develop and mature spiritually, emotionally and intellectually together, as a unit. This is difficult to accomplish and, from an Orthodox perspective, it requires much prayer and a clearly Christ-centered family life.

It is evident that this growth and development is something which must be carefully planned for in pre-marriage discussions and during the early years of a marriage. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, it is an essential part of the *reason* for a couple to want to marry each other and it is a fundamental aspect of the very *nature* of marriage.

If there is a firm commitment to each other between two people, then there can be a *mutual* growth and development in love, no matter what other divergent directions the two people's development may take. Their common ground for growth and development, indeed, the pivot point of their lives, should be their spiritual advancement. With this shared in common, their commitment will be firm and certain and their growth in love will be permanent and continuous. If the common ground of Orthodox Christian spiritual growth and development is established and accepted as the basis of a couple's life, then divergent paths of growth in other areas will not create difficulties in a marriage. The commitment of love requires that we keep our priorities clear.

Man was not created to exist in egoistic isolation, and man and woman are not two totally separate beings, for neither can, on their own, fulfill God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Rather, they are two halves of one whole, called upon to dwell together in a sanctified unity, drawing together in an increasing love, so that in such a state of oneness, they may rise from carnal to spiritual love and so aspire toward the Creator, having discovered through their own ascent in love the hint of that higher and more perfect love which seeks freedom from the bonds of fleshly passions.

Marriage provides us with an opportunity and a means to grow and develop in the spiritual and emotional realm, but this growth and development can only take place on a firm foundation of genuine commitment to each other, and a mutual, sincere commitment to God. The bond of unity and ever-growing love between husband and wife is designed to give humanity a basic experience and awareness of a growth in love toward unity with God, made possible by Jesus Christ. Marriage, according to the Apostle, is a type of Christ and the Church. It is intended to instruct us, not by means of abstract concepts or in books or words, but in an actual living experience, about Christ and the Church, and our whole relationship with God.

Love is intended to be, first and foremost, a path of salvation, a path of ascension toward God. The *commitment* of love is an important aspect of this, for it defeats our ego and self-love, which are hindrances to our salvation and our relationship with God.

Marriage is not a legal or magical ritual for "making sexual relations moral." It is perfectly possible for sexual relations *within* a marriage to be immoral. If one party has entered into the

marriage under false pretenses and is living in it without genuine love then, for that person the relationship is not moral, but merely a matter of utility or self-gratification. Love itself is the factor which makes the union moral. It is wrong to consider that the crowning ceremony is a magical means of changing something immoral into something moral. For, though a marriage is sanctified by the Church, it is the condition and transformation of the heart which perfects and transfigures and saves.

All these things should be discussed in detail, and prayerfully, not only with a couple who have decided to be married, but with teenagers, and in a more simple form this should be gently woven into the children's church-school classes. The depth of commitment in marriage must be stressed, and the priest should make it clear that the commitment in marriage is not only a commitment of two people to each other, but a commitment to God which involves the salvation of the soul. Marriage is, above all, a union of two people for the sake of mutually working out the salvation of their souls. Marriage is a means of ascent toward the heavenly kingdom.

TWO **THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE**

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"Shall I tell you how marriage is also a mystery of the Church? Christ came into the Church, and She was made of Him and He united with Her in spiritual intercourse...So marriage is a type of the presence of Christ." (St John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians).

In the beginning, God created man and woman and called on them to unite as one, to live in unity and harmony, putting every other relationship aside. They were to be so spiritually united that they would be "as one flesh." (Gn.2: 24) In paradise this unity was real. After the fall, however, divisions of all kinds took place in our human nature and the bond between husband and wife was corrupted. Because of this corruption, divorce was permitted (Nm.30:10-14) because mankind's heart had become hardened (Mt.19:7-8). There was a certain amount of protection for a woman, particularly with relation to her dowry but, apart from some social restrictions, divorce was simply a matter of the man telling the woman that the marriage was over. Marriage had lost its divine purpose and become only an agreement to live together, to "co-habit." Technically, it was reduced to a social and sexual function.

With the coming of Christ, something dramatic took place which changed the way marriage is understood. Christ not only restored the original meaning of marriage, but gave it the *fulness* of its meaning. Christ not only restored, in Himself, the original condition of man, but in His humanity the destiny which Adam failed to attain is completed. As the "new Adam," He restores all things to their original intent and purpose. God's plan for mankind is re-born in Christ. The blessed condition of humanity in paradise was lost.¹

¹ Man was not perfect in paradise. He was in a state of spiritual infancy and was supposed to grow and develop spiritually. In the fulness of time, he would have been given all things of the garden. By the "blessed condition of humanity in paradise," we mean his state of innocence and of ongoing spiritual growth and development.

Christ has reopened the gates of paradise and, in the Holy Church, planted anew the garden of Grace.

The Kingdom of God has now been manifested on earth, and henceforth everything that takes place in the Christian life must be viewed in the context of the Heavenly Kingdom. Perhaps mankind has not yet returned to Eden, but paradise, in a spiritual form, has returned to mankind, and all who believe and accept the Kingdom must strive to draw away from the standards and concepts of the fallen world and come into accord with the standards and concepts of the Kingdom of God. Spiritually, with the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit, man must rebuild paradise in his heart, or rather struggle to allow the Holy Spirit to manifest it there. For the Kingdom must live within us now if we hope to abide in it for eternity.

Thus, for the Orthodox Christian, every step, every aspect of life is a Holy Mystery — a mystery of the Kingdom, and thus a part of the Mystery of Redemption. In the manifestation of the Heavenly Kingdom by Jesus Christ, marriage returns to its original intent, to the purpose for which it was created in paradise. It is once more a revelation of redemption, a type and likeness of Christ and the Church.

The being of mankind itself reveals the Church and its relationship to Christ our God — obscured though that revelation may have become. For the human race, working together with Satan, has enslaved itself with senseless passions and negative stereotypes. Western man has excelled in this, to such a degree that the true basis and purpose of human sexuality as a revelation has become completely obscured.

By sexuality we do not mean "making love" (sex). Sexuality is the whole fabric of an individual's being as either male or female. When human sexuality becomes imprisoned in stereotypes and moralistic bonds, then it is held back from rising to its true purpose and that purpose itself is obscured in blind negatives. Human sexuality is at once deep and powerful, and yet as fine and delicate and beautiful as a fragile spring blossom. It is fascinatingly simple and pure, while at the same time, one of the most complex, baffling and vulnerable aspects of our inter-human relations. These contradictory qualities are the conflict between the passions of the fallen nature, and the purpose of the creation of human sexuality.

Man was created for communion with God. He can find his complete fulfillment only in a life of communion, praise and giving glory to the Creator, living in a unison of love with God, by love drawing nearer to Him, toward sharing in His immortality, in His Deity. We know that man was not created for death, that it was not God's intention for him to die, but rather to live through unity with the Creator. Yet God, Who knows all things from eternity unto eternity, foreknew humanity's fall from this state of unity and thus, the advent of death. On account of this, He created Eve and provided every creature and living thing with a means of procreation. Man and woman were created in such a way that even in the fallen state they would have a means of a certain fulfillment in a type and revelation about Christ and the Church. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Ephesians about the Mystery of marriage (which is also, in fact, the mystery of human sexuality), says: *"This mystery is great, for I speak of Christ and the Church,"* and St John Chrysostom tells us:

"Shall I tell you how marriage is also a mystery of the Church? Christ came into the Church, and She was made of Him and He united with Her in spiritual intercourse...So marriage is a type of the presence of Christ."

Humans were not created to exist in egoistic isolation, but to dwell together in a sanctified unity, drawing together in an increasing love so that in such a state of oneness, they may rise in spiritual love and so aspire toward the Creator, having discovered through their own ascent in love the hint of that higher and more perfect love which seeks freedom from the bonds of fleshly passions. The bond of unity and growing love between husband and wife is designed to give man the first basic experience and awareness of his growth in love, toward unity with God, made possible by Christ Jesus.

Human sexuality is intended to reflect and thus to instruct us, not in totally abstract concepts or in books or words, but in actual living experience, concerning Christ and the Church and our whole relationship with God. In this revelation, the husband typifies Christ and the wife typifies the Church.

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Marriage is a very great mystery of divine Grace. As a type of Christ and the Holy Church, Orthodox matrimony is also a profound revelation about the nature of our redemption. It reveals to us the fallen nature and teaches what Christ has done to redeem human nature through His Holy Church. Since the mystery of redemption has nothing to do with fulfilling or satisfying justice or with purging some imaginary "Original Sin," but rather with the rescue and healing of the human nature, enslaved by sin and the bondage of death, marriage is an ideal reflection of our redemption.

Christ came to earth to redeem human nature from the bondage of the Evil One and to regenerate us through the mystery of co-suffering love, a love so great, so totally unselfish, that the Immortal One Himself laid down His life for our sake. As Apostle Paul says: *"Christ loved the Church and gave His life for Her"* (Eph.5:25).

The creation of man and woman as opposites, as two separate parts of one whole, was a provision God made, foreknowing man's fall. As such, it is a revelation about the separateness or division in the fallen human nature caused by sin, as St Basil the Great says:

"For there would be no divisions, no strife, no war among men, if sin had not made cleavages in human nature....And this is foremost in the Saviour's incarnate economy: to gather human nature to itself and to Himself and, having abolished this evil cleavage, to restore the original unity, as the best physician binds up a body that has been broken in many pieces...."

Thus, marriage is a sanctified union of two people with different aspects of the human nature. This union joins the struggle of two individuals into a stronger, mutual effort for salvation. By growing in co-suffering, unselfish love for each other and their family, they conquer the

fragmentation of human nature into isolated and self-centered individualism. This is stated clearly in the Prayer of Betrothal:

"O Lord, eternal God, Who has brought into unity and oneness the things which before had been separate, Who blessed Isaak and Rebecca declaring them to be inheritors of Thy promise, bless these Thy servants...."

These same ideas are evident in the prayers throughout the service of the Holy Mystery of Matrimony, particularly in the most notable part of the service, the crowning. Traditionally, the bride and groom are crowned three times with "stefana," wreaths of laurel and blossoms which, from ancient times, has symbolized victory. At the time of the crowning ceremony, the husband and wife are led three times around the analogion with the Gospel on it. As they process, three hymns are chanted which explain both the three-fold crowning and the profound meaning of marriage:

"Rejoice, O Isaiah! For a virgin was truly with child and bore a Son, Emmanuel, Who is both God and Man: Dayspring is His name, and magnifying Him, we call the Virgin blessed."

The bride and groom are crowned with a crown of rejoicing. For Christ, as the Prophet foretold, has come into the world to reunite and redeem human nature, uniting it to Himself and regenerating it in His Holy Church. They are crowned with joy as types of Christ and His Holy Church, symbolizing and typifying that very redemption itself, as they are united into one flesh by the Holy Spirit.

For the second crowning, as the couple processes around the analogion, the people chant:

"O holy martyrs who have fought the good fight and have received your crowns: entreat the Lord to have mercy on our souls."

The couple is crowned also with the martyr's crown. As Christ loved His Church and died for Her (Eph.5:25), so also now the husband and wife are called upon to sacrifice their ego and self-love, to cease being "I" and become "we." They will sacrifice themselves for each other and, later, for their children, willingly "martyring" themselves, overcoming their own individual ego and will for the sake of one another, out of love of each other. By this very act, they experience and grow in co-suffering love in imitation of Christ. In this, the human nature is healed and redeemed, if they will *"run with patience the race which is set before them"* (Hb. 12:1).

The third crowning, and circuit of the analogion and Gospel, is signified by the hymn:

"Glory to Thee, O Christ God, Boast of the apostles and Joy of martyrs who proclaimed the Consubstantial Trinity."

The victory crown of salvation is bestowed upon the couple, for marriage is a union of two people into one flesh so that they can mutually work out their salvation by means of love, hope, joy, self-sacrificing and spiritual struggle. They have become both martyrs and apostles of Christ, striving to live His Gospel and teach it to their children, shepherding their families as the

apostles and bishops shepherd the Church. Moreover, bride and groom have become something of a type of oneness of love of the Holy Trinity, since *"the two shall be one flesh"* (Gn.2:24; Mt.19:5), *"so that they are no longer two, but one flesh"* (Mt.19:6).

The original form of the Orthodox Christian marriage service was simple, direct and clear. The couple attended the Divine Liturgy and received Holy Communion together. They were then blessed by the bishop with a short prayer in which he asked God to unite the couple. The actual moment of the completion of the marriage was (and is) the joint reception of Holy Communion. This is straightforward and perfectly logical, since marriage is a type and likeness of Christ and the Church. The Liturgy is the divine wedding feast of Christ and the Church, and Holy Communion is that moment in which the faithful — the Church — are supremely united to Christ. Holy Communion is a central point in our redemption. Marriage, as a direct type of the unity of Christ and the Church, is thus an event in the realm of redemption.

For Orthodox Christians, marriage is not simply a mutual agreement to live together in love and raise children in a legally sanctioned bond. It is a form of ministry, sealed by the Holy Spirit, in which the couple become living types of Christ and the Church, fulfilling the ministry of salvation toward each other, toward their children and toward the whole Orthodox community.

{3}

"How shall we describe the joy of a marriage which is prepared and arranged by the Church. It is given strength by the Eucharist, and the seal of blessing is set upon it; angels are present as witnesses and the Father bestows His consent upon it." (Tertullian)

Then a couple have had their marriage crowned by the Church, their union is one specially sanctified *"both on earth and in heaven"* (Mt.16:19), and their marriage is not theirs alone, but is a matter of the whole Church, the whole body of Christ. This is why there is no possibility of a "private marriage," which excludes *any* of the faithful from attendance. Marriage is a liturgical service which takes place in the presence of the whole "people of God." For the Orthodox Christian, the faithful — the people of God — are his or her immediate family, for they have a common father — God — and a common mother — the Church. A private, "by invitation only" wedding is not Orthodox, and is contrary to the very essence of Orthodox marriage. A priest has no reason to serve such a marriage, and if a couple seek to insist on such an arrangement, he should refuse on the grounds that they are not seeking to enter into an Orthodox Christian marriage. The Holy Mysteries are not a matter of the priest making magical pronouncements over people. The Mysteries are "liturgical," and this means "a gathering of the faithful," not "a ritual." An Orthodox wedding is a matter of the whole congregation (coming together) of the faithful in which the priest, as the ordained representative of the congregation, presides. The prayers are the prayers of the whole congregation, the "people of God," being led by their ordained presbyter. A wedding served only by the priest without the coming together of the congregation to jointly bestow the prayers and benedictions of the Church, is not proper and not Orthodox. A priest has no right to serve any Holy Mystery or Liturgical service of the Church at which a portion of the faithful are excluded.

What we have said here should also make it clear that Sunday is the proper day for marriage, that the couple should have their marriage crowned at the Liturgy and, if they are both Orthodox, receive Communion together. It is quite perverse to marry a couple on Saturday, without the Divine Liturgy and Communion.² This not only leaves the marriage un-sealed by the mutual reception of Holy Communion, but also puts them in the position of spending their first night together instead of preparing for Communion on the eve of the Lord's Day Liturgy, thus from the beginning, violating the essential meaning of marriage.

Marriage, as with all Holy Mysteries and liturgical services, is a matter of the coming together (synaxis) of the people of God--the congregation for mutual prayers and intercession. Marriage especially, should be served in conjunction with the Liturgy and the receiving of the Eucharist. The practice of replacing Holy Communion with the "common cup" can only indicate that one of the couple is not Orthodox and therefore cannot receive Communion. This is a subject for another discussion.

THREE

LOVE: AN EVER EXPANDING CIRCLE

Marriage unites two people in a growing bond of love and makes them "one." But marriage involves more than the two people being united. The relationship between each individual and their family and friends is going to change — sometimes dramatically. In some instances, old friendships will slowly disappear. Family relationships will not disappear, however, and each partner in a marriage will acquire a new or "extended family."

From an Orthodox point of view, parents and family are very important. An Orthodox couple who are planning to marry should work out their relationship with each other's parents and family before their marriage takes place. Much pain and difficulty can be avoided if there is a loving, harmonious relationship among the extended family, on both sides. The basis for this love and harmony is the love between husband and wife. A person is expected to "leave mother and father and cling" to one another. In reality, however, when a couple marry, each of them usually marries into a new family of in-laws. The manner in which each spouse relates to the new "expanded family" can have a dramatic effect on the condition of the marriage. It should not always be this way, but it usually is, and this should be taken into account in the early stages of planning for a marriage. There are two special reasons for this in modern society.

First of all, we do not have the cultural and social support which existed in previous times, and which controlled and helped shape our clan and tribal relationships. The old, clear and inviolable standards of relationships — even the beautiful and enduring Serbian "Kumstvo" — have all but vanished in the modern hi-tech and highly mobile society.

² Presumably, one could have a marriage crowned on any non-fast day, provided the "Wedding Liturgy" was served and Holy Communion sealed the marriage. Even with a Saturday Liturgy (which is offered in behalf of all departed souls and is not appropriate for a wedding) it is difficult to see how one can justify spending the first night together on the eve of the Lord's Day. This does not mean that there is anything wrong or even slightly "off" about the sexual relations of the married couple, but Saturday is the day of preparation for the Eucharist of the Lord's Day.

The second problem is complex; we find that marriages in which a young couple live at home and go directly from their family setting into marriage, are especially vulnerable. This was not the case when the former cultural and social frameworks were strong, but it is now. We now find that when two people have lived on their own for a while and "discovered themselves" before they enter into marriage, the marriage tends to be stronger. There are clear reasons for this, but it is an unfortunate situation. From a spiritual point of view, it is better if a person does not live alone, subjected to extra temptations. It is better to live with one's family, and leave home only when one marries but, in our society, this is only an ideal. When it does happen, each partner is obviously more closely bound to his or her family, and too often the other partner is not merely marrying the spouse, he or she is "marrying the spouses family."

It is important for the priest to discuss this with a couple who plan to marry. It is important for a couple to realize that their love is going to have to extend outward to their new relatives. Their love must expand beyond themselves and encompass the "new family" they are marrying into.

Each partner should weigh his or her relationship with and feelings toward the extended family and realize the full implications it holds for their marriage. This matter must be examined and discussed frankly as part of the priest's preparatory discussions with the couple.

In marriage, love must be an ever expanding circle. Our children naturally expand its boundaries, but each partner must expect and understand the full implication of "sharing their love" with each other's family. They should also understand the proper boundaries to this sharing of love, and firmly resolve that their love for each other and the marriage are their first considerations. The couple should carefully resolve, ahead of time, questions about the limits of their parents influence and involvement in their married life. They must put each other first and their marriage above every consideration, while resolving to love and respect each other's parents and relatives.

The priest, counseling a couple who desire to be married, should never neglect to discuss this important matter of relationships with the "extended family." Continued parental dependency in one or both marriage partners is a frequent source of conflict and stress. It occurs predominantly by (but not exclusively among) individuals who have not lived away from home before their marriage.

Over dependency on parents and/or parental over protectiveness can be a real destroyer of marriages if it is not recognized and dealt with effectively. Gentleness, compassion and understanding are necessary in these cases, but firmness and a primary loyalty to the spouse are equally necessary.

Other related problems are discussed in the section, "Stress Points in Marriage."

FOUR STRESS POINTS IN MARRIAGE

There are many stress points in marriage, and we cannot discuss all of them here. There is, however, one important and pivotal problem which must be looked at.

One major stress point which can be quite serious, and which often requires special love and work to come through, is the differing rate of growth and maturity which is often experienced by each partner in a marriage.

In this present context, let us repeat something that was said earlier. None of us is a "complete package." We are all constantly changing, hopefully growing and developing. No two people grow and develop at the same rate and to the same degree. Unfortunately, some of us actually stop growing mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and begin to stagnate and then degenerate. Often the elusive, almost un-definable gradual breakdown in a marriage is precisely this difference in the growth and development of the partners in marriage. It does not matter whether both partners are working outside the home or the wife is working in the home, one of the two will almost certainly mature more quickly and more completely, and the spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth rate may very easily be different. This difference in development can cause a subtle development of a gulf or division between a couple and, very often, neither party realizes the source of the gradual feeling of "drifting apart." If they do realize it, it can be difficult to discuss in a positive manner. Men often feel threatened by a wife's growth and women who work in the home often feel oppressed and "cheated" of the opportunity to grow.

Actually, in a relationship with true love and commitment, a couple should grow and develop not merely *with* each other, but *because* of each other. It is important to realize the possibility of this problem arising and discuss it at the very beginning of a marriage; indeed, it should be an integral part of the pre-marital counseling. Personal and individual growth, maturing and development is something that should be planned for, and from the very beginning of an Orthodox marriage, it should be resolved that this process is going to be founded on genuine spiritual growth. It should be clearly understood that mutual spiritual growth and development is a fundamental *reason* for an Orthodox marriage in the first place. If this is clearly established, and the possibility of differing rates of intellectual and emotional maturing is understood from the beginning, it will be infinitely easier to cope with such a problem if it should arise. Any family, whether it consists only of husband and wife, or includes a number of children, must constantly *struggle* to grow, develop and mature spiritually, emotionally and intellectually together, as a unit. This is difficult to accomplish and, from an Orthodox perspective, it requires much prayer and a clearly Christ-centered family life.

It is evident that this is something which must be carefully planned for in pre-marriage discussions and during the early years of a marriage. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, it is an essential part of the *reason* for a couple to want to marry each other, and it is a fundamental aspect of the very *nature* of marriage.