

THE LIDDON LECTURE 2012

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Marriage and the family between Tradition/traditions and contemporary life in Orthodox Spirituality [with some references to St. John Chrysostom]

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Preamble

Pauline tradition speaks of marriage in an antithetical and paradoxical way: joy and suffering are both present in the life of spouses: "You are bounded to a woman? Do not seek absolution. You are released from a woman? Do not seek a woman. If, however, you are married, you have not sinned. But those in this situation will have pain in their body, and I would like to spare you "(1 Cor. 7, 27-28).

Faithful to this guidance, Father Emilian Simonopetritul from the Mount Athos makes a surprisingly clear and precise analysis of marriage, addressing a monk. He sees the marriage both as a way of pain, sadness and test, and as one of love and mutual devotion¹.

Marriage: path of pain and suffering

Father Emilian called companionship between man and woman *together-yoked, or marital living*. In other words, the work of the two, man and woman, is always a work or a common task. Marriage is a *together-voyage*, a shared portion of pain, but, of course, also of joy. During the marriage ceremony the priest gives the couple to drink from the same cup (chalice) called "the common cup" because together they will bear the burdens of marriage. It is the glass of the deprivations, sorrows, joys, but also of the failures. Therefore he says that when two people get married, it's like saying "Together we will go forward hand in hand, through good and bad times. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow, burdensome, monotonous hours. However, in the depths of the night, we will further believe in sun and light". Family life is not a party, as some imagine, but a continuous struggle for survival. It is like a vast ocean, not knowing when you are thrown on shore, not knowing when you will wreck.²

Orthodox spirituality, in general, talks about marriage as a school of courage, of sacrifice, and it portrays it even with a cross, but with one that flourishes and occasionally displays its beauty and light. But it would be a mistake to believe that it is simply a road to happiness because it involves experiencing pleasant suffering, where the pain turns into love. Only those who have really suffered can truly love. Thus, sorrow is one of the fundamental and necessary features of marriage.

¹ "Cea mai frumoasă cuvântare despre taina nunții" (The most beautiful oration on the Wedding Sacrament, IV), *Familia Ortodoxă*, October 10(33) (2011),11.

² *Ibid.*,11.

Marriage: path of love and mutual devotion

A journey of love brings with itself, the creation of a new human being, of a new person after the Gospel words "both will become one flesh" (Mt. 19: 5). From this union, freely consented to by two people, proclaimed before God and their peers, a new human being is born, in the sense that each becomes a presence and a living reality in the heart of the other. This union is not only a temporal commitment, but one eternal, where two strangers, sometimes of different ethnicity, with very diverse cultures and traditions belong together in such intimacy that one lives through the other and none of them feels that he/she is complete or a whole unless he/she is with the other. The husband becomes part of his wife, of her body and her soul, and his wife becomes part of her husband. Furthermore, for each, this will be accomplished not only *with* the other, but also *because* of the other³.

Marriage is a mutual spiritual growth. Therefore man should not seek only the external beauty of the woman, but her inner beauty, to seek her kind heart and mind, measured meditation and kindness. St. John Chrysostom says:

“Seek thou for beauty of soul. Imitate the Bridegroom of the Church. Outward beauty is full of conceit and great licence and throws men into jealousy, and the thing often makes thee suspect monstrous things. But has it any pleasure? For the first or second month, perhaps, or the most for the year: but then no longer; the admiration by familiarity wastes away. Meanwhile the evils which arose from the beauty still abide, the pride, the folly, the contemptuousness. Whereas is one who is not such, there is nothing of this kind. But the love having begun on just grounds, still continues ardent, since its object is beauty of soul, and not of body”⁴.

Marriage teaches spouses about Christ and the Church not only by taking of some abstract concepts, but by concrete life experience. Just as Christ came in flesh to save us and to restore us through the mystery of His sacrificial love, the same happens in a marriage where the spouses have the opportunity to live a similar experience. Giving of and to each other is to replace selfishness and self-love with love for the other. Therefore, authentic Christian marriage is an embodiment of the Gospel and the spouses themselves become prophets for their descendants, but also for each other and for the whole world.

He who truly loves gives himself with joy. He does not give just to receive something in return, but to give a gift is an expression of his personality and his life because, on one hand he gives willingly, on the other hand, he gives from the largeness (overflow) of his heart. His love is creative, the love that builds.

His love is not sterile (fruitless), but it causes in turn love inside the beloved, who, in his/her turn, becomes the giver. When a man is capable of this self-giving, then he sees the other as a part of himself. The other's welfare, her interests, her future are almost entirely identified with his.

³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.13, ed. Philip Schaff (1867; reprint, Grant Rapids: Eerdemans, 1994), 145.

Love in marriage compared to the love of those who are in love, is in the same relation that is between the big tree and the small one from which it grew. As time passes, the marriage, just like the tree, deepens its roots and the husband and wife grow more than the branches in order to blossom and to bear fruit. The transfer from the romantic love to conjugal love is not, however, automatic, but under a warm sun of mutual testing, which is becoming more stable every year.

The true fulfilment is acquired not only in the flesh. Each of the people who participate in a genuine relationship brings into it his or her intellectual and emotional gifts. Husband shares, for example, his power and skill with his wife and wife shares with her husband her femininity, sensitivity and delicacy. Virtues and talents of each are not only a source of joy and pride for the other, but in time they make the union between them. Spouses exchange their virtues and talents, and thus, they fulfil each other⁵.

Different authorities (competences)

Saint John Chrysostom says that God has ordained from the beginning that family tasks should be divided between men and women. He does not allow that all the work in a marriage is to be done only by the husband, because it would lead to a total dependence of his wife on him and, moreover, even to a depreciation of her. Therefore, God gave women a role as important as that of man⁶, which is revealed even in the biblical words "Let's make a support for him."(Genesis 2:18)And so He did. But this does not imply the recognition of any superiority of man over woman, but of a complementary nature that God emphasizes through the diversity of the characteristics with which He endows both of them. Based on these features men and women are assigned with specific tasks.

According to Scripture, God divided these tasks into two categories, namely: those that are in the house He reserved for women, and those outside the home, for men. Saint John does not see as being appropriate the change of this ordinance, considering that each can do a better job if he/she is left to deal with what he/she knows best⁷. In other words, a family household management should remain the responsibility of women because here she is more orderly, more organized and more skilled than men, as always craftsmen are most skilled in their jobs than unskilled workers. Men, however, have the duty to bring home, through their work outside the household, the need for family subsistence, so that there should be no lack. Although in the first place, to acquire the needful for the daily living seems to be a more difficult job, in reality, the management of these resources requires a common sense and intuition traditionally associated with women.

⁵ Filoteu Faros & Stavros Kofinas, Căsnicia. Dificultăți și soluții (Marriage. Difficulties and solutions) translated from Greek into Romanian by Șerban Tica(Bucharest: Sofia Publishing House,2012), 254-255.

⁶ St. John Chrysostom, "Despre căsătoria a doua a văduvelor" (Concerning the second marriage of the widows) translated from Greek (P.G., XLVIII, col. 609-620) into Romanian by D. Fecioru, (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 2007), 173.

⁷ Ibid., 173.

It sometimes happens that a man, because of his great need to earn, but also because of his constant absence from among the family, cannot help with anything which contributes to the flowering and stability of a family, but rather to an instability and, ultimately, even to its disintegration, if he does not have the understanding, patience, intelligence and mastery of women⁸. Nothing can be built unless the value and importance of each job are recognised, depending on the gifts with which they are endowed by God and the efforts he or she made for their improvement.

On the other hand, despite their specific features suitable to the divine purpose for which they were created by God, men and women are ontologically equal, meaning they have the same nature and therefore they have the same honour in His eyes. Equality in honour does not exclude the biologically (or anatomical) differences, or those relating to the tasks that each of them has to accomplish.

The power of Tradition

In Orthodox spirituality the family was from the beginning, with the Church, the most important institution in society. It was not only the symbol of continuity but also of unity. There were some clear rules voluntarily undertaken by all, even if they sometimes -very rarely- were violated. Respect between generations, the one between women and men, were almost sacred. Habits that defined this relationship were so strong that they were considered part of their existence. Who did not respect them was excluded from society, marginalized. Therefore, each knew his place and position in the community: men, women, and children. Nobody tried to replace another and that brought stability and peace in family life and, by extension, in society life.

Family tradition was so rooted in the hearts of the people, so that nobody thought that almost all these habits, apparently without a religious significance, were an extension of the sacred in their lives. Of course there were distortions of their religious symbolism, but they did not alter their substance or essence.

Price of emancipation

Nowadays family life has changed so much, and for some people so quickly, that they can hardly adapt to the new situations. Inter-family relationships are different. Society itself has become more permissive and more understanding to certain attitudes and behaviour that in the early times were treated harshly.

Woman has assumed for herself responsibilities that - by tradition - were for man, with the risk of losing even her femininity. Brutalization of women, however, is the last thing that man has expected from his beloved woman. That is why, rightly, it has been said that the harmony in a family that supports this new type of interpersonal relationship between two spouses, considered modern and progressive, is based on man's adaptation to the new requirements of woman and can lead to a lifestyle which risks uncertainty and insecurity⁹.

⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁹ Ioan C. Teșu, „Familia contemporană între ideal și criză” (Family between ideal and crisis), in *Familia în societatea contemporană (Family in contemporary society)*, ed. Viorel Sava and Ilie Melniciuc-Puică (Iași, Romania: Doxologia Publishing House, 2011), 272.

It is true that the feminist movement started from a generous idea of women being emancipated from intellectual, cultural, economic and institutional stereotypes, in order to achieve an equalization of opportunities with men. Here we are talking about raising the level of education, access to science, art and even to the political life. Unfortunately, it was reached, in some countries, at the expense of the natural relationship between two people of different genders who have decided to start and nurture a family. Today, nobody says that women should be denied access to certain jobs or dignities, but it is not good that, through them, women try to behave like men, as also is not good for men to feminize their behaviour. Men sometimes transfer some of their traditional economic responsibilities, which they assumed through marriage and raising a family, to their wives, and to undertake domestic tasks, equalling in this way, their major decisional investment in the family with the women¹⁰.

The price of this emancipation, characterized by a radical change of the inter-human relationships in a marriage, has been, in many cases, the collapse, reduction and ignorance of the concept of the traditional family, which can lead, ultimately, not to happiness, but to emotional instability, stress and disruption at the inter-family level and, by extension, at the social level. For this reason, marriage has lost much of both its religious and social meaning, and of its moral authority. It has turned into a relationship between a couple which has derived nothing from the sacramental charge of a marriage, but is of a purely sexual and emotional character. In the Orthodox tradition, with its intrinsic traditionalism, marriage has lost, to some extent, even the linguistic connotations. Instead of family or marriage, , today we talk, maybe not as often, also about the *partnership institution*, about a *test marriage*, or simply *concubinage*, all once considered taboo¹¹.

Some natural habits, such as kissing the hand of a woman by a man, with a slight bow, or the gesture of opening the door to let her enter before him, have nearly disappeared from people's actual behaviour, being considered a sign of discrimination, of inequality, of contempt, and not of consideration, charm and politeness, as they were before.

Changing roles between man and woman is a distortion of the desire (will) of God. It is, finally, an emotional imbalance that should be avoided. The most serious problem is that they have changed not only the responsibilities, but even their anatomical physiognomy.

Equality in Diversity

Let us turn to that phrase: man is *the head* and the woman is *the body*. Although that today seems rather reminiscent of an old concept and obsolete, it is based on a well patristic- anchored Tradition.

¹⁰ Teşu, 271.

¹¹ Teşu, 272.

St. John said: “*Thou art the head of the woman, let then the head regulate the rest of the body. Dost thou not see that it is not so much above the rest of the body in situation, as it forethought, directing like a steersman the whole of it? For in the head are the eyes both of the body, and of the soul. Hence flows to them both the faculty of seeing, and the power of directing. And the rest of the body is appointed for service, but this is set to command*”¹².

The fact that man is considered head of a family is not a privilege (not to be regarded as an attribute of the master, the despot), but rather a huge responsibility, because as the head is centre for the body, the engine that makes that body act in one way or another, although the heart provides emotional support, so the man should be the worthy and wise guide for the whole family.

There is even a popular expression that, in an anecdotal manner, but with deeply Christian content, says that "man is the head, but woman is the neck and the neck is the one which determines the head to move in any direction she wants."

Today's attitudes are certainly not as they were in the past, when it was considered that the major problems, both in family and society, should be discussed, analysed and solved by men. In the writings of St John, the tasks of the spouses were very well-defined in accordance with natural data of each. For him, the men had public responsibilities, economic and social, with a primary role in society, while the woman was considered *lady of the house*, the one who controlled all family matters (all current issues). There was no interference from one in the affairs of the other¹³.

Seen in a modern manner, in the specific time that we live today, this division of tasks, this separation of responsibilities, is seen as backward, discriminatory and offensive to women. But if we further explored this type of relationship, it could be seen that it brought not only a stable family unity, but also a social balance in a world marked by political, economic and social instability, and more than anything, a protection of the spouses' identity, in accordance with the nature of each.

It may seem somehow pejorative to have such a hierarchy of responsibilities of husband and wife in the family, but it fits perfectly in its attempt to create a smooth transition from a society marked by inequalities and major social inequities (the Roman Empire), to one where relationships between people were different, based on mutual love according to the teaching of Christ (Christian society), without causing major disruptions, but ensuring a stability and not a social and political instability.

St. John Chrysostom was a convinced supporter of the need for order in society, order that would have provided for the material and spiritual welfare of the people. In other words, he estimated that well-defined roles of men and women in the family, and therefore in society, had a great significance in maintaining civil order¹⁴. And this apparent simplification of these issues came from his own life experience. It's true that, by subjecting himself to some very clear rules of conduct, he created a big

¹² St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Thessalonians*, V, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.13, ed. Philip Schaff (1867; reprint, Grant Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 397.

¹³ David. C. Ford, “Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur” (Man and woman in the vision of St. John the Golden Mouth), (Bucharest: Sofia Publishing House, 2004), 244.

¹⁴ Ford, 245.

problem even to those who wanted him for the position of Archbishop of Constantinople.

Perhaps the radicalism of St. John displeased people even then and, to some extent, still does so today, but it was meant to make more easier the transition from one type of society based on inequality and discrimination to another where inter-family/ inter-human relationships are designed with a theological and spiritual horizon, , where the love and care of spouses to each other are likened to those between Christ and the Church.

He is the one who, though he lived in an era of slavery, when the master had the right to life and death not only for the servants, but even for his wife and his children, argued that the spouses should be fully equal in honour and dignity. He sees the family as a well organized army unit, able to wage an invisible war against the evils of all kinds faced by man, to defeat them and earn the right to enter the kingdom of heaven, to gain salvation. Therefore, the family, as any well formed and trained army, should be based on a strict order and a clear hierarchy, with a functional strategy led by husband or male. He does not understand, as it may seem at a superficial reading, any discrimination against women, or a minimization of her role in the family and society, because, although she is placed in second, she enjoys the same honour with the first place.

In other words, expounding in a new manner Saint John's conception of the relationship between spouses, we can say that there is no discrimination, but rather a harmonization of strict social attitudes with Christian values, where the family led by the husband and cared for by the wife should not be seen in terms of hierarchy, but of the collaboration and cooperation of them both in synergy¹⁵.

The struggle for domination between spouses is pathological and harmful because it brings with itself subjugation of the weak by the powerful, transforming persons into objects, cancelling their freedom and will. Struggle is healthy and useful only when the fight of each spouse manages to create unity one with the other without losing their own identity¹⁶. Marriage should be an emotional-affective interplay of two people, where they keep their different identities in a functional link. The two persons must be joined in marriage so that they appear to be one, but to remain at the same time each with his/her particular personality¹⁷.

St John believes that the fight for supremacy in the family is a consequence of original sin that can be overcome only in the spiritual dimension, through mutual love¹⁸. Love transforms the tyranny of blind obedience into gentleness, and despotic authority into kindness and thoughtfulness. Therefore, love is what directs the struggle for primacy, in the mutual service of the spouses, and of them together, towards the good of the whole family. In order that better understanding between spouses is not disturbed, they need to work together to grow that sacrificial love, in which each one gives himself to the other fully, without retention. The ultimate goal

¹⁵ J. Mack, *Guide to acquire harmony in Orthodox families*, trans. into Romanian by Doina Rogoti, (Bucharest: Sophia Publishing House, 2007), 88.

¹⁶ Filoteos Faros & Stavros Kofinas, 109.

¹⁷ Faros & Kofinas, 104.

¹⁸ Tesu, 288

of marriage is that husband and wife must help each other to enter the kingdom of heaven. By sharing life in common they are called to bring each other closer to Christ¹⁹.

Therefore, in Orthodox spirituality, in the family, husband and wife are together workers for their perfection. One of them is no more important than the other. There is equality between them and they are worthy collaborators with / in Christ in the ministry of the spiritual perfection.

Migration

Formerly, the departure of the people from Eastern Europe, mostly Orthodox (that is, the Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Russians or Ukrainians), to the West, was very rare, but in the last twenty years has become common. These moves from a part of Europe to another, generally for economic reasons, bring with them substantial changes in family life, because of the new social realities that they need to adapt to, which are not easy at all. The Orthodox Church does not deny this human condition of the family, with its limits and fragility, because it cannot be dissociated from the culture and evolution of the society at large, but militates for a common sacrificial resistance. The Church insists that spouses should not succumb to this regression, but to hold together, because the family, even if is not paradise, keeps some of the promises of heaven: marital communion²⁰.

Migration is, without doubt, alienation, with an indefinite duration, which creates a serious problem both for those who establish abroad, but also for those who stay at home. The economic crisis coupled with a desire for higher earnings often leads to real family drama. Many people abandon their families in their own country and go to work abroad illegally, leading to social and emotional imbalances hard to describe.

Those who suffer the most are often the children

When both parents leave their children, the parental roles are assigned to their big brothers, grandparents, relatives or even neighbours. Such situations lead to a worsening of the education of children who, deprived of parental care and supervision, are at risk of physical and psychological behaviour. Spiritual ties are also being weakened, through no psychological contact between parents and children, and this will hinder their normal socialization process²¹. The parents' long absence causes the child severe emotional disturbances, affects his interpersonal relationships and performance. He is no longer motivated to study or to have civilized conduct, because he has no family with him that works both as a permanent support, as well as a careful and considerate "correction". The child becomes lonely, or, on the contrary, loses his time in insignificant things or with unsuitable companions, at first without a deleterious effect on his development, but later leading to irreversible repercussions. Maintaining high rates of labour migration is one of the biggest problems which

¹⁹ David & Mary Ford, "Căsătoria – cale spre sfințenie" (*Marriage - path to the holiness. Lives of married Saints*), (Bucharest: Sofia Publishing House, 2007), 8.

²⁰ Ioan Bria, "Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul spiritualității române" (Orthodoxy in Europe. The place of the Romanian spirituality), (Iasi: Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei Publishing House, 1995), 222-223.

²¹ Olga Gagauz, "Some reflections about us and migration", "Teaching Pro", 5-6 (45-46), December 2007, 6.

confront the Orthodox Christian family because it has destructive effects on its stability, leading to increased divorces.

The change of the function of education in migrants' families, deterioration of the relations between parents and children, and also of the links between generations, unfortunately lead to the alteration of the most important human institution, which is the family.

The new life into which immigrants move fluctuates between uncertainty and anxiety. Material needs of the immigrant heal more easily than those of the soul²². Lack of friends, of the home atmosphere from the country of origin, can make a situation often unbearable. The life of a "foreigner" is often synonymous with loneliness, sadness, nostalgia and despair²³.

Therefore, the Church plays a more important role in their life than at home. Basically, for many immigrants it is a *kind of home*. It's where they speak their native language and rediscover their identity. The Church is a country in miniature. Therefore, paradoxically, in addition to the negative aspects of this alienation from their native land, there is a positive aspect, namely their approach to the faith, because some of them find their membership of the ancient Church and Orthodox culture, precisely in such poor conditions. Although financially they have a better situation and they enjoy a better life, they face the problem of communicating with others, of the inter-human relationships. Communication is very important, and the place where they feel comfortable, where contacts are established more easily, is the Church. The Church plays a dual role for the Orthodox immigrant families. On the one hand it gives, as is natural, spiritual support, on the other, it is the institution that helps them to maintain the ethnic, cultural and religious identity. People come to church in their native and also in their adoptive country from the same reasons, driven by the desire to find each other in a community and pray to God for their daily needs. In church man finds comfort and hope, believing that his presence and prayers will help him overcome all obstacles of life. Problems are everywhere, but maybe they have not the same intensity. The Church offers for its believers the spiritual support they need, especially when the believer is separated from his family left in the country, his wife and his children. Many of the Orthodox believers become true practitioners in the West²⁴. At home in their native country, because normality brings with itself a touch of relaxation, they did not felt the need to be so close to their Church.

However, over time, due to the professional obligations, the new types of relationships, their life changes, and sooner or later they end up losing their habits, adopting others from the host country, not even speaking their native language well, and, through mixed marriages, slowly, slowly, the religious and even ethnic affiliation is endangered. They begin to organize their life by different rules, in accordance with the host country, often in total contradiction to what they experienced before.

²² Gheorghios D. Mettalinos, "Parohia. Hristos în mijlocul nostru" (Parish. Christ in our midst), (Sibiu: Deisis Publishing House, 2004), 134.

²³ Mettalinos, 134-135.

²⁴ Stefan Mărculeț, "Mulți români au devenit ortodocși practicanți în Apus" (Many Romanians have become Orthodox practitioners in the West), interview with Metropolitan Seraphim, *Ziarul Lumina*, June 17 (2010).

Moreover, the religious affiliation of the host country citizens affects the religious life of the Orthodox believers. This depends on the region where they have decided to settle²⁵.

Alienation within the family

There is also another kind of alienation, namely alienation within the family, when the society itself (although it wants to be the protector of the family!) requires attention to certain rules which force the people to alienate one another. Constraints of today's modern world will cause spouses to live almost parallel lives, to assume certain social roles separately, which often collide with the family interests. They are forced to wake up in the morning and head for different jobs, often returning very late, almost no longer really having a life together.

They even get to live like two strangers, sharing their expenses as two business partners, turning the family into a partnership, where loving commitment is often replaced by pragmatic calculations and marriage commitments are treated with a disarming easiness. Freedom of the spouses in such a family is seen as a normal thing, each having the right to make a decision on their own life, without any restriction, not even of the oath of loyalty which they made at the beginning of marriage.

In ancient times such a thing was unthinkable, as every event was experienced by both spouses together and with the whole family. Young people used to follow certain rules of conduct that imposed very severe restrictions on their lives together before marriage. Therefore, they felt a certain frustration that they could not spend all their time together, promising to each other that things would change dramatically when they became a family. But they viewed this restriction as a moral obligation of spiritual and bodily cleansing, as a divine command which was not discussed, but was fulfilled.

In the past, given that their concerns were generally common, spouses spent much time together. There was therefore a fulfilment of their dreams. Family tasks were well divided among themselves, but, often, were complementary, requiring the permanent presence of one of them in the other's life. Temporary separations were rare, and the tradition of the place was stronger than any trend of change.

Today, the situation is entirely different. The restrictions that I have mentioned were abandoned by an unsympathetic modernist culture, and the period before marriage has lost its charm and mystery.

Young people start their family life without a civil or religious commitment and the idea of a couple tends to permanently replace the one of a family.

In most cases, both spouses go to work in the morning and when they return, tired, they have to deal with other domestic issues, specific to any family. Some of them even have many jobs, and the time they spend in the family is extremely low, an

²⁵ For example, if they settled in northern Germany, where majority are Protestants, not so attached to the Church, then also the Orthodox Christians are influenced by the spirit of the place, if, instead they live in Bavaria and in other mainly Catholic Länder where tradition is more alive in people's lives, then also the Orthodox are positively influenced by the general atmosphere. (Stephen Mărculeț).

almost non-existent dialogue during a dinner prepared in a hurry. The discussions are limited to current issues of the day, paying bills, repairing the car or refrigerator, or who knows how many other little things that concern everyday human life in a carousel of lost illusions²⁶.

This repeated, endless, mechanical roundabout, without periods of relaxation in the family, without a permanent spiritual communication between spouses and between parents and children, can lead to the damage of the normal relations in family. Because, whatever the evolution of society, everyone should know their role in the family, to support and help each other, with the feeling of an obligation that he or she has willingly assumed when they decided to enter into marriage.

On the other hand, the rhythm of life imposed by a secular and consumerist society is very tiring and requires a very strong physical and mental strength of the contemporary person, which he cannot acquire, except with God's help. Therefore, the rediscovery of the family as a miniature Church, as the school of communion and of the mutual assumption by the spouses of all that is best in both the individual and the community, represents par excellence, its vocation.

Conclusions

In the Orthodox spirituality, the Christian family is seen as a sacrificial altar and a school of love and mutual devotion. In this relationship of love and giving and also in this dialogue of gifts, the spouses must give each other what they have that is more specific, more beautiful and of greater value, convinced that they give without becoming poor, spiritually enriching one another. Marriage is both a cross, because it bears in itself all the hardships, sufferings, failures of both of them, and also a "laboratory" of the work and enlightenment which are needed for salvation, because it becomes an arena of struggle against sins and passions and of the common exercise of good works and virtues, making their home a "little Church" or, better said, "The Church within the house"²⁷.

Therefore, all problems that are faced by the Christian family in contemporary society are direct consequences of the human alienation from God, the Church, and Christian values. The moral crisis of family life in general is precisely due to the not knowing, not practising or systematic ignorance of the spiritual teachings of the faith. Unfortunately, modern man is more willing to experience the impulses of the world where he lives, to follow up the temptations that assail him more frequently and violently, than the Christian teachings which appear anachronistic and increasingly difficult for him²⁸.

Therefore, the rediscovery and return of the family to the old Christian values, that had the capacity to provide meaning and fulfilment for mankind, motivation and desire for spiritual progress, is the surest way to the stability and strength of it. It is needed to create a genuine culture of marriage, which has to highlight the authentic

²⁶ Faros & Kofinas, 224-225.

²⁷ Gleb Kaleda, "Biserica din casă" (The Church within the house), (Bucharest: Sofia & Cartea Românească Publishing House, 2006), 5-8.

²⁸ Teșu, 298.

criteria of a family foundation and the status of the relationship between spouses, between parents and children, and between family and society.

Family is the fundamental heart of any society and ignoring its instability and insecurity may have a *tsunami* effect on the whole world.

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