

FR. HENRY ATWELL

Toward Tomorrow



A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, says the adage.

Most Americans begin their marriage with remarkably little knowledge of what it's all about and that's why American marriage is in such a dangerously critical condition today.

According to the latest statistics, 455 out of every 1,000 marriages begun this year will end up in the bitter and unhappy turmoil of a divorce court.

This average of 50 percent failure in marriage gives America the highest divorce rate in the world.

And, honestly, of the 50 per cent that remain out of the divorce court — how many of them are really happy, successful marriages? Are not a good share of them held together "for the sake of the children" or just because it's too embarrassing to go through the messy divorce proceedings?

An article by New York attorney Norman Sheresky and thrice-married author Marya Mannes in a recent Saturday Review of Literature proposes one way to stem the stampede into and soon thereafter out of marriage.

They point out, correctly, that our present laws make it easy to get into marriage but difficult to get out of it. It's easier to get a marriage license than a dog license or an auto license.

The Sheresky-Mannes article asks, "What if, for example, we made the tough part of marriage getting in instead of getting out? What if we obliged potential marriage partners to explore together in advance of marriage — and in writing — their motives for marrying, as well as the extent of their intended commitments with regard to children, property sharing, and future alimony, should the marriage fail?"

The authors admit that if we required couples "to take such a deep look at their motives and potential obligations before marriage, a good many people would never go through with marriage at all."

And that, they say, "is just the point."

But really it isn't quite all that simple.

The Catholic Church has tried to do this for at least the past twenty five years through its "pre-marital" investigation and instruction, and particularly through Cana and Pre-Cana Conferences. The whole process has often been endured as a bore, sometimes resented, seldom appreciated.

More recently, Father Robert Collins of the diocesan Family Life Bureau, has set up an "Intensive Pre-Cana" program for youngsters who want to marry. Many of these couples want a wedding "next Saturday" and if the pastor informs them of the requirement to attend this new program then the parents come storming in saying their daughter "has to get married, and soon." All kinds of statistics are available that this is the best way to set the stage for a doomed marriage.

Floods come and go and eventually we can scrub away the mud and rebuild the shattered buildings. But the flood tide of shattered marriages is still rising and at a more rapid rate day by day.

At least those people who want to be spared that heartache, or to spare their youngsters of such heartache, should recognize in the Church's pre-marriage programs a common-sense first step to success and happiness in their marriage.



FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side

avoided the abortion business with him . . .

"However, he brought up the issue himself in words like these. 'You know, I almost didn't bring my daughter here. Some of these people have actually slandered me and insulted me and brought what I thought pretty low picketing practices during some appearances I made. I didn't feel there was any good will toward me in this hospital, but the doctor suggested yours for my little girl's special care.' Then he went on to say how grateful he is for the care of his daughter and also for the consideration with which he was treated.

"I doubt that genuine kindness will quickly bring about a change in a man's convictions. But I do know that I changed my attitude toward Mr. S, and even toward other abortion promoters. Politicians who support abortion are still, in my mind, only a few degrees different from Hitler and his crowd. I still will not support any politician who is abortionist in view. I will continue to work against them, but I am convinced that we must work with our best weapon — love. Even with legitimate pressure in a democracy, politics cannot guarantee results. Look what Rocky did!

"No, Father. Love and prayers. They are our best weapons. Mr. S said that whenever he saw rabid picket lines he became more convinced he was doing the right thing. Pride? Anger? Only God knows that one. But our own righteous anger will not, I suspect, get as far as our love. As you mentioned, the goal is to eliminate lawful abortion . . ."

To quote again Theodore Westow: "Prudence aims primarily at achieving an end, and not at standing about in paralyzing timidity." And St. Paul reminds us: "Love is patient and kind; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right . . ." (1 Cor 13.)

I hope in calmer moments Mrs. Rochesterian will feel cooler under the collar, and know that the friends of Pro Life are very much with her.

This column for July 19 quoted Elmira Father Egan's PATRICIAN regarding tactics involving abortion legislation and legislators: "We hope that as moral insights develop, all men may come to see that all abortions are immoral, and the legal machinery of the state should be used to safeguard the rights of the unborn. But as of now not even among the enlightened editors and jurists of the state is this the majority view . . ." Father Egan's article was written with careful nuances, and I supposed that not all that was involved would be accepted.

A letter from A Rochesterian came July 24. "Pleasant do not print my letter. However I read your column this past week and almost gagged! I am still hot under the collar . . ." I regret that she forbade her letter being published because it is a good letter, with much sense. However another letter came in early August which may clarify both the column and the difficulties of Mrs. Rochesterian.

"I was particularly struck by your mention of the need for prudence in treating with the anti-life forces. I am working at St. Z hospital in New Jersey. A few months ago a leader of the pro-abortion group had a very sick child. The child was here for over a month and there were times when we thought she wouldn't pull through. She is okay now, thank God, but the stay in the hospital gave us all a chance to know the father and I think, gave us some insights into how best to fight this dreadful abortion business.

"Firstly, our Sisters and nurses were beautiful in their care for the child. Some are active, rather militant members of various pro-life committees and had written this fellow many times to urge him to back off the abortion business and truly represent the feelings of the people.

"I should like to think that all our patients get the same high level care. Perhaps they do. But I have the feeling that our people were quietly demonstrating to Mr. S. that while they hate abortion they still love him as Christians. Now, my own contact with Mr. S was not professional; and I purposely

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