

# C21 Resources

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## A Marriage Proposal

BY TIM MULDOON

Many people in the United States—especially young people—approach marriage with a good deal of trepidation. What we know from census data is that many people are living together outside of marriage, marrying later in life, having fewer children, and frequently getting divorced. Moreover, significant numbers of people live much of their adult lives without children.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, the social institution of marriage has weakened over the last several decades. No longer is it possible to speak of marriage as a natural stage of adult development, with shared cultural understanding, expectations, and structures. Instead, marriage has become one option—albeit a still comparatively popular one—in U.S. society, alongside other social arrangements we broadly describe with terms like “single life,” “cohabitation,” “serial monogamy,” and others.

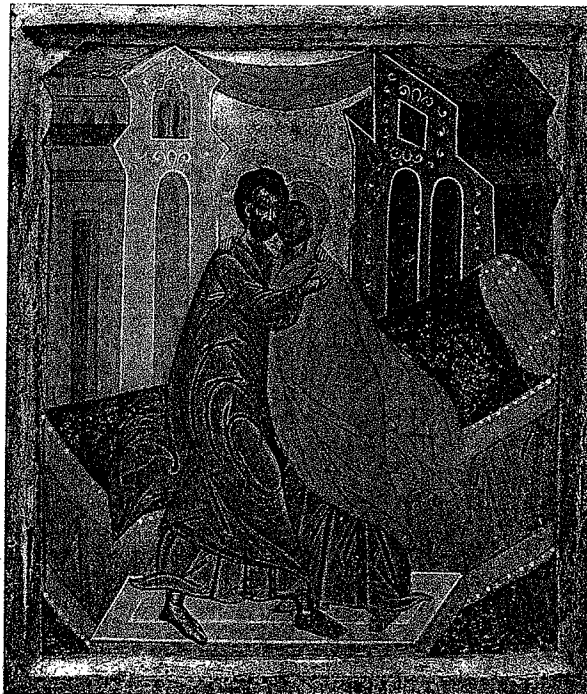
It is difficult to make the case that Catholics are markedly different in their practices around marriage than other members of U.S. society. On the whole, the story of U.S. Catholics is a story of becoming assimilated to the mores of the wider culture,<sup>2</sup> suggesting that they are not likely as a community to hold attitudes toward marriage very different from other Americans.<sup>3</sup> What this observation suggests is that the rather long history of Catholic reflection on marriage as a sacrament—a privileged place where God self-reveals in the ordinary course of human living—is not fully persuasive to many Catholics, if indeed it is understood at all. A particular challenge that the Church in the United States faces, then, is to articulate a theology for married people that invites them to see marriage as a particular kind of invitation to a life that is holy—and by this I mean a life that is fully free precisely because it is lived in faithfulness to the will of God. Today, we have the benefit of a good deal of research from

the human sciences which points to the individual and social benefits of marriage.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps even more fundamental is the grounding of the Catholic vision of marriage in the longer narrative of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, a vision which invites us to consider marriage (and every other form of vocation) as the place where we live out the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of our lives, all in pil-

grimage toward God.

The starting point for such an invitation comes from God’s observation in Genesis: it is not good to be alone (Genesis 2:18). This observation reflects what people know through experience: a happy life depends upon friendships.<sup>5</sup> And from this general observation it is possible to move to a more specific one:

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Temple Gallery, London. Joachim and Anna. Greek, 16th C. Gold ground and tempera on panel.

human beings desire not only friendships, but also a deep, intimate relationship with another person. For only in such relationships are people capable of exploring that which is most intimate to one’s own experience, and therefore most precious, most holy. Marriage is not fundamentally about sex, or childbearing, or social status, though it may include all of these things and may, in fact, be motivated by one or more of these things. It is fundamentally about seeking out a person whose solitude complements my own, because it is not good to be alone. In a word: marriage is a sacrament of communion. If Christian faith is oriented toward the fundamental commitment to invite human beings to grow in love, then our teaching and preaching on marriage will flow logically from this most basic commitment. Following Augustine, our invitation must be simple: love, and do what you will.

There are two corollaries to this basic thesis. The first is that solitude can be an authentic means toward the greater end of communion. Hence what we posit about chastity and celibacy ought therefore to open us up in love toward God, God’s creatures, and the rest of God’s creation. The second corollary is that we must consider single life carefully, because sometimes it is chosen and other times it is not. In both cases, the pastoral challenge is to help the person understand single life as no less an invitation by God into communion.

If we begin by asking people to consider that God is inviting them into the Trinitarian communion by means of communion with the beloved, then by extension, everything in married life—from paying bills to shopping to nights out to struggles at work to raising children to coping with sickness and even death—becomes part of the shared pilgrimage toward ever greater communion. I find the metaphor of pilgrimage

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# A Marriage Proposal

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particularly compelling, as it suggests the importance not only of the destination, but also the path. In the Christian life, both the destination and the path are graced—and in the context of marriage this is especially true. Marital difficulties are fundamentally life difficulties, and it is therefore possible to invite couples to a deeper understanding of those difficulties as part of the very nature of pilgrimage. The act of faith on any pilgrimage is to give energy to the work of overcoming the difficulties, when it may seem easier to give up. The promise, however, is that there is a great good to be achieved not only through the perseverance on the pilgrimage when the road is difficult, but also by deepening one's communion with God by means of the deepening of communion with the beloved. In more pedestrian language, the fundamental act of faith in marriage is to face life's problems with someone you love rather than alone.

Of course, no one can enter into marriage—or any friendship, for that matter—without prior experience of other kinds of relationships. The life of the Church must be oriented around enabling people to grow in these relationships: with parents, sisters and brothers, peers, teachers and mentors, strangers, and even enemies. Jesus' exhortations to love the enemy can be read as challenges to overcome the most difficult barriers to communion so that we might grow in the love of God. Indeed, the very theme that Jesus preached, especially prominent in the synoptic gospels, of "the kingdom of God" is one in which the relationships between human beings mirror the relations within the Trinity, of self-giving agapic love.

This issue of *C21 Resources* takes up the challenge of exploring how the Church might continue to invite people to consider marriage as a religious vocation, a calling from God to live a life of service to what Jesus called "the kingdom of God."

It begins with a seminal reflection on human friendship as the basic sacrament, suggesting that through our experience of intimacy we come to know something of the way that God's love works. Next, Joseph Martos' essay explores the way that the notions of marriage and family have evolved in Catholic tradition, indicating something of the ways that the pastoral practices of the Church have adapted to

the peculiar challenges of different times.

We include two lists of findings from the social sciences that shed light on the state of marriage in the United States today. Perhaps more than any other subject, marriage seems to call from people anecdotes and folk wisdom, and so these studies help to broaden the perspective. The next three essays—by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Richard R. Gaillardetz, and Evelyn Eaton and James D. Whitehead—explore ways of thinking about marriage in the contemporary world, with an eye to questions of faith and social justice.

The subsequent essays are drawn from the recent C21 Symposium on Marriage, held in September 2007. The symposium drew together theologians and pastoral ministers whose work has sought to engage the Catholic tradition in thinking and teaching about marriage today, asking the fundamental question: what resources from Catholic tradition can help people in their thinking about and practices within marriage? William P. Roberts addresses the question of spirituality across the life cycle; David Matzko McCarthy invites us to think beyond the nuclear family to consider families as parts of larger communities of shared purpose. Mindful of the many Christians who marry someone from a different faith tradition, Lee Williams offers proposals for interchurch couples. Alejandro Aguilera-Titus pays particular attention to the questions of ministry to Hispanic and Latino Catholics; Andrew Lyke explores marriage in the African-American Catholic community; and Jonathan Y. Tan takes a look at what we can learn from Asian-American families. Julie Hanlon Rubio then raises questions about how Catholic parishes might contribute thoughtfully to marriage and family life.

The final essay, which is an excerpt from the "Theology of the Body" reflections of Pope John Paul II, points forward to an influential new approach to questions relating to sexuality and marriage. We hope this and the other essays will give readers some idea of the developing insights among Catholics about marriage, and provide further resources on our website.

Our hope is that this issue will help foster a conversation about the distinct way that the Catholic faith tradition has sought to invite people to see marriage as a

particular way of living out the gospel. This invitation challenges the social tendencies toward fracture and instability among people, to a life of difficult yet rewarding love toward another, in many instances to the point of bearing or adopting and raising children. As one of the seven sacraments of the Church, marriage represents a particular celebration for the entire faith community, a manifestation of the reality of grace alive in our midst.

### Endnotes

1 See the 2006 essay "Life Without Children," from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, and David Popenoe's "The State of Our Unions," part of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University (online at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2006.htm>), which explores the social implications of this development.

2 See, for example, William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2001), which compares different generations of U.S. Catholics, or Dean R. Hoge, et al., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), which focuses specifically on young people.

3 A 2004 study by George Barna suggested that Catholics divorce at roughly the same rate as the rest of the U.S. population. The study, while critiqued by some, is one indicator of a more widely evident trend that U.S. Catholics do not vary from the wider U.S. population on many key issues today. (The Barna report is no longer available on its Web Site; however, a related *Dallas Morning News* story is reprinted on the adherents.com site at [http://www.adherents.com/largecom/baptist\\_divorce.html](http://www.adherents.com/largecom/baptist_divorce.html)).

4 See, for example, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's testimony before the U.S. Senate on the question of these benefits, at the National Marriage Project Web Site, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/Pub%20Whitehead%20Testimony%20Apr%2004.htm>.

5 I agree with Bernard Cooke's assertion that friendship is the basic sacrament, a thesis which he explores in *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004), chapter 7, from which an excerpt appears in this issue.

This essay is adapted from a paper given at the C21 Symposium on Marriage in September 2007, and which appeared in *Origins*, volume 37, number 18 (October 11, 2007). Reprinted with permission of the author.

# Human Friendship: Basic Sacrament

BY BERNARD COOKE

In the traditional short definition of Christian sacrament, the third element is a brief statement about the effectiveness of sacraments: "Sacraments are sacred signs, instituted by Christ, to give grace." Sacraments are meant to do something. What they do is essentially God's doing; in sacraments God gives grace.

Beneath all such formulations—which we are all familiar with in one form or another—lurks a basic question: What is this "grace" we are speaking about?

In trying to get a more accurate notion of grace, it might help to remember a distinction that was sometimes made in technical theological discussions, a distinction that unfortunately received little attention and so was scarcely ever mentioned in catechetical instructions about grace. This is the distinction between "uncreated grace" and "created grace."

Uncreated grace refers to God's graciousness toward human beings; created grace refers to that special ("supernatural") assistance God gives to humans to heal and strengthen them and to raise them to a level of being compatible with their eternal destiny.

We have learned to pay much more attention to uncreated grace; that is, to the reality of God, who in the act of self-giving and precisely by this self-giving transforms and heals and nurtures our human existence.

Under the impact of God's self-giving, we humans are radically changed; this fundamental and enduring transformation of what we are as persons is created, sanctifying grace. In various ways, sacraments—in their broader reality as well as in their liturgical elements—are key agencies for achieving this transformation. Although the effectiveness of the different sacraments is quite distinctive, each area of sacramentality touches and changes some of the significances attached to human life. As these significances are transformed, the meaning of what it is to be human is transformed; our human experience is therefore changed, and with it the very

reality of our human existing.

Perhaps the most basic sacrament of God's saving presence to human life is the sacrament of human love and friendship. After all, even the young infant who is baptized after only a few days of life has already been subjected to the influence of parental love (or its lack), which in the case of Christian parents is really the influence of the sacrament of Christian marriage.

Sacraments are meant to be a special avenue of insight into the reality of God; they are meant to be words of revelation. And the sacramentality of human love and friendship touches the most basic level of this revelation. There is a real problem in our effort to know God. Very simply put, it seems

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all but impossible for humans to have any correct understanding of the divine as it really is. God is everything we are not. We are finite, God infinite; we are in time, God is eternal; we are created, God is creator. True, we apply to God the ideas we have drawn from our human experience; we even think of God as "person." But is this justified? Is this the way God is?

As early as the writings of the first chapter of Genesis (which is part of the priestly tradition in Israel that found final form around 500 B.C.E.), we are given a rich lead. Speaking of the creation of humans by God, Genesis 1:27 says that humans were made "in the image and likeness of God." That is to say, somehow the reality of human persons gives us some genuine insight into the way God exists. But the passage continues—and it is an intrinsic part

of the remark about "image and likeness"—"male and female God made them." This means that the imaging of God occurs precisely in the relationship between humans, above all in the interaction of men and women. To put it in contemporary terms, some knowledge of the divine can be gained in experiencing the personal relationship of men and women (and one can legitimately broaden that to include all human personal relationships).

The text provides still more understanding, for it points out that from this relationship life is to spread over earth; humans in their relation to one another (primarily in sexual reproduction, but not limited to that) are to nurture life. And humans are to govern earth for God; they are to image and implement the divine sovereignty by this nurture of life that is rooted in their relationship to one another. As an instrument of divine providence, human history is meant by the creator to be effected through human community, through humans being persons for one another.

Though the first and immediate aspect of the relationship between Adam and Eve as life-giving is their sexual partnership, the text does not confine it to this. Rather, Genesis goes on to describe the way Adam's own human self-identity is linked with Eve's. As Adam is given the chance to view the other beings in God's creation, he is able to name them, but he is unable to name himself until he sees Eve. The very possibility of existing as a self is dependent upon communion with another.

Implicit in this deceptively simple biblical text is a profound statement about the way human life is to be conducted. If life is to extend to further life, either by creating new humans or by creating new levels of personal life in already existing humans, it will happen on the basis of people's self-giving to one another. And, if women and men are truly to "rule" the world for God, they will do this by their love and friendship, and not by domination. To the extent that this occurs, the relationship of humans to one another will reveal the fact that God's creative activity, which gives life and guides its development (in creation and in his-

tory), is essentially one of divine self-gift. Humans have been created and are meant to exist as a word, a revelation, of God's self-giving rule; but they will function in this revealing way in proportion to their free living in open and loving communion with one another.

Whatever small hint we have regarding the way God exists comes from our own experience of being humanly personal.

For us to be personal—aware of ourselves and the world around us, aware that we are so aware, relating to one another as communicating subjects, loving one another, and sharing human experience—is always a limited reality. We are personal within definite constraints of time and place and happenings. Even if our experience as persons is a rich one, through friends and education and cultural opportunities, it is always incomplete. For every bit of knowledge there are immense areas of reality I know nothing about; I can go on learning indefinitely. Though I may have a wide circle of friends, there are millions of people I can never know; I can go on indefinitely establishing human relationships. There are unlimited interesting human experiences I will never share. In a sense, I am an infinity, but an infinity of possibilities, infinite in my incompleteness. Yet, this very experience of limitation involves some awareness of the unlimited; our experience of finite personhood points toward infinite personhood and gives us some hint of what that might be.

## God Revealed as Personal

What lets us know that the divine is indeed personal in this mysterious, unlimited fashion is the fact (which as Christians we believe) that this God has "spoken" to humans; God has revealed not just some truths about ourselves and our world, but about God's own way of being personal in relation to us. God in the mystery of revelation to humans is revealed as someone. What this means can be grasped by us humans only through our own experience of being human together.

All of this means that our experience of being truly personal with and for one another is sacramental; it is a

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revelation of our humanity at the same time that it is a revelation of God.

Among the various kinds of human friendship and personal love, the one that has always been recognized as a paradigm of human relationship and love, and at the same time a ground of human community, is the relation between husband and wife.

In this sacramental relationship, a Christian man and woman are truly "grace" to each other; they express and make present that uncreated grace that is God's creative self-giving. Although there certainly is mystery in this loving divine presence, it is revealed in the new meanings discovered in the lived relationship between Christian wife and husband. The trust required by their unqualified intimacy with each other and the hope of genuine acceptance by the other, which accompanies this intimacy, help bring about a new level of personal maturity. But this trust and hope are grounded in the Christian faith insight that open-ended love can lead to new and richer life. Perhaps even more basically, a Christian couple can commit themselves to this relationship, believing that it will not ultimately be negated by death. Instead, Christian hope in risen life supports the almost instinctive feeling of lovers that "love is stronger than death."

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Reprinted with permission from *Sacraments and Sacramentality*. Twenty-third publications, 2004.

# The Evolving Ideal of the Family in the Catholic Tradition

BY JOSEPH MARTOS

From their beginning as Jewish believers in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised messiah, Christians have regarded themselves as inheriting the traditions of Judaism and continuing the history of Israel. For this reason, Christians sometimes prefer to speak of the Judaeo-Christian tradition rather than simply of the Christian tradition. In addition, Catholicism, comprising the largest single body of Christians in the world, traces its institutional history from the time of Jesus and the Twelve, through the time of the Roman Empire, through the medieval period of European Christendom, through the Reformation and modern period, to the current cultural transition into what is sometimes referred to as post-modernity. The Catholic tradition therefore lays claim to some four thousand years of religious history from the time of Abraham to the present day, which is why, when I was asked to speak about the ideal family from a Catholic perspective, I felt somewhat daunted by the challenge.

If one were to oversimplify the picture, one could easily make the claim that the concept of the ideal family has remained constant during the four thousand years of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is a concept of fidelity between spouses, of mutual respect and consideration, of partnership in the work of the family of begetting and raising children to healthy adulthood, of children honoring their parents, and so on.

Having said that by way of preface, I will not say much about the Jewish dimension of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, leaving that instead to more able Jewish scholars. Suffice it to say that three out of four literary sources of the Pentateuch (the Jahwist, the Priestly, and the Deuteronomistic traditions) speak, although not extensively, about the ideal family. In the Jahwist story of the creation of the first man and woman (Genesis 2:4-25), the ideal couple in paradise are partners, united as one body. The Decalogue preserved by both the Priestly

tradition (Exodus 20:2-17) and the Deuteronomistic tradition (Deuteronomy 5:6-21) commands children to honor parents and it forbids adults from infringing on the marital rights of others. Indeed, the entire covenant between God and the people of Israel, although it has often been read in a legalistic fashion, is better interpreted as an elaborate web of right relationships: the right relationship between God and humans, between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between people and their neighbors. For the purpose of the Torah, the Law is life, and indeed the enjoyable fulfillment of life through cooperative relationships. The wisdom and prophetic literature of the Hebrew scriptures speak eloquently if not exhaustively about the joys of children, the duties of wives and mothers, the responsibilities of husbands and fathers, even about the ecstasy of youthful lovers; but these riches we shall leave to be mined by researchers who are more experienced in these fields.

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Moving forward in time to the writing of the Christian scriptures some 1900 years ago, we find the same pattern of pithy but not extensive eloquence. The religious literature of any culture quite reasonably addresses those areas of life which, at the time of their writing, are problematic and hence need to be addressed by those with special insight. During the time of Jesus and his disciples, the family was not perceived to be

a social or moral problem. If anything, family-style relationships were seen by Jesus and the gospel writers as the solution to many of the problems that beset individuals on the one hand and society on the other. Jesus draws the alienated and rejected into community (Matthew 9:9-13), he invites social deviants to dine with him (Luke 19:1-10), he ministers to the sick in body and spirit (Matthew 8:1-17) and he invites his followers to do likewise (Mark 6:7-13), he commands his disciples to forgive one another (Luke 7:3-4) and to care for each other even to the point of laying their lives down for one another (John 15:12-13). Indeed, it can be said that, according to the teaching of Jesus, insofar as people treat one another as family, as brothers and sisters of the same heavenly Father, to that extent the kingdom of God is being realized on earth.

Nevertheless, some specific family issues are addressed in the Christian scriptures, most notably the question of divorce. Perhaps this issue was particularly problematic in a community whose founder had so emphasized love and forgiveness that the practice of divorce—whether the dismissal of one's spouse or the mutual separation of alienated spouses—seemed impossible and indeed a violation of the will of God. This is in fact the teaching of Jesus on divorce in the gospels (Matthew 12:1-9, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18): that divorce is tantamount to adultery, for God wants husband and wife to remain faithful to one another. Beyond this, Jesus himself does not seem ever to have addressed issues that are specific to the family.

The doctrinal letters of the New Testament, sometimes referred to as the epistles, devote surprisingly little space to the family and instead deal with relationship issues in a much broader and generic fashion: people's relationship to God and to Jesus Christ, and Christians' relationships to both Christians and non-Christians. It could well be argued that a perfect Christian would make an ideal spouse, parent, child or in-law, and that a family of ideal Christians would be an ideal human family, and so a separate

and specific doctrine on the family would be superfluous. Indeed, if one consults books on the family written by Christian authors and addressed to Christian audiences, one finds that much of what is said is general Christian advice on good relationships applied in this instance to family relationship issues.

One such epistle, the Letter to the Ephesians, reaches beyond this level of generality to speak specifically about the husband-wife relationship as analogous to the relationship between Christ and the body of his followers, the church, that is filled with his spirit. The epistle teaches that just as any man loves his own body, Christ loves his body the church, and since a man and a woman are one body in marriage, the husband should care for his wife the way he takes care of his own body. Conversely, just as the human body obeys its head, the church obeys its Lord, and since the husband is the head of the family, the wife should be obedient to him. Moreover, since Christ so loved the church as to give his life for it, the husband should likewise sacrifice himself for his wife's well-being (Ephesians 5:22-33). There is some advice for children and parents in this epistle, but it is limited to fundamentals: children should obey their parents and parents should not anger their children, rather they should train them in virtue (6:1-4). Further instructions found in the so-called pastoral epistles do get into some particulars, but they are primarily admonitions that Christian wives should be obedient to their husbands and modest in public (I Timothy 2:9-15; I Peter 3:1-7). At this point, the ideal family is beginning to look less like an ideal community of disciples and it is beginning to take on cultural characteristics of the Greco-Roman world.

Great Christian leaders and thinkers of the second through the fifth centuries are sometimes referred to as the Fathers of the Church, and if we survey their writings we find more or less the same situation that we found in the Christian scriptures. In their sermons and treatises they speak primarily about theological matters (the Christian doctrine of God, of Christ, of human destiny, etc.) and ethical matters in general (honesty, forgiveness, chastity, etc.) rather than about marriage and the family in particular. Indeed, during this period of church history there is a pervasive cultural denigration, not of family, but of marriage. Virginity for both men and women is esteemed

as morally superior to sexuality even in marriage, both because sexual behavior is regarded as arising from human beings' animal (as opposed to rational and spiritual) nature and because intellectual and emotional union with God is believed to require ascetic transcendence of all bodily desires and pleasures. Treatises such as Augustine's *On the Good of Marriage*, written in 401 C.E., argue on the one hand that marriage is good rather than sinful, as believed by some Gnostic groups, and on the other hand that it provides benefits (family, children, and sacramentality) not supplied by informal sexual relationships.

The Dark Ages in Europe were brought on by the fall of the Roman Empire, and with it fell much of the infrastructure which had supported pagan and Christian marriages for centuries. From the sixth to the eleventh centuries, the Catholic Church as an institution became increasingly involved with marriage and family life for two important reasons. First, various sects and religious movements both within and outside Christianity continued to denigrate marriage as carnal rather than spiritual and as contributing to the continuation of human corruption on earth. Church leaders felt a need to combat such heresies from the pulpit, with the pen, and, occasionally, with the sword. Second, the absence of civil magistrates to whom people could appeal when individuals were harmed by members of their family led them instead to appeal to Church officials and ecclesiastical courts. Through the accumulation of legal decisions, the Church thus developed a body of case law regarding marriage, spousal rights, parental responsibility, inheritance rights, and so on. In a period when marriage and family felt under attack, the Church responded to support these social institutions legally, theologically, and liturgically.

Take, for example, the development of the Christian wedding ritual. From ancient times and through the Roman Empire, marriage had been primarily a family affair, and weddings were presided over by parents (usually the fathers), who selected the spouses of their children and decided when they would begin living together as husband and wife. However, children who were of age could also wed without their parents' consent. To safeguard the rights of parents and also to protect women from men who would marry them in private and later

deny that they had ever sworn the vows of marriage, the Church insisted that all marriages be public and witnessed by a priest. Over the course of a few centuries, the presence of a priest at the wedding ceremony subtly but steadily grew until the parents' role was eclipsed by that of the clergy. By the twelfth century, there was an established Christian wedding ritual, and it was supported by a theology, based on the writings of Augustine, that marriage was a sacrament. The marital sacrament was understood to be an indissoluble union between Christ and the Church, as described in the Epistle to the Ephesians. We could therefore say that the ideal family in medieval Christendom was a permanent and faithful union, entered into for the spiritual containment of carnal impulses, which made possible the orderly continuation of the human race, and which on earth reflected the heavenly relationship between a self-sacrificing Lord and his obedient bride, the Church.

This theology and practice remained relatively stable until the Reformation in the sixteenth century, when those who broke with the medieval pattern of Christianity returned the legalities of marriage and the family to civil governments, and allowed for the possibility of divorce while at the same time insisting on its undesirability and rarity. In reaction to these Protestant developments, the Catholic Church insisted on its right to legislate marriage laws for all Christians, and it reaffirmed its teaching on the indissolubility and sacramentality of marriage.

As the modern era unfolded from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and beyond, European attitudes toward marriage and the family became increasingly secular and romantic, often putting the interests of couples ahead of the needs and desires of their extended families, not to mention society at large. For example, young people argued for the right to marry whom they chose, to marry for love rather than for family obligations, and to limit the number of their children. This perceived danger to the sacredness of marriage led Catholic thinkers and shepherds to insist even more strongly on the divine institution of marriage, on its God-given purpose in the creation of families, and on its divinely decreed indissolubility. Not until the twentieth century did Catholic thinkers begin to suggest that the marriage relationship should be mutually rewarding as well as being the fulfillment of religious, social,

ethical and familial responsibilities.

Before going on to discuss these twentieth-century developments, however, let us pause and ask what can be learned about marriage and the ideal family from this rapid historical review of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. First, as has been already noted, the question of the ideal does not seem to arise in times of social stability and cultural contentment. When family relationships are threatened by social disintegration and cultural collapse, however, there is a fundamental questioning of what is happening in society and there is an attempt both to formulate and to attain (or reattain) the ideal, now perceived as lost. This dynamic underlies the creation story in Genesis in which paradise is lost and the idyllic relationship between man and woman becomes both a memory and a measure of what could be. It appears again in the patristic insistence on the goodness of marriage against its detractors, in the medieval insistence on the permanence of marriage against its abusers, and in the modern insistence on the sacredness of marriage against its secularizers. Secondly, it may be noted that, at least in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of some four thousand years, the ideal has evolved and grown. From what we have seen we can say that the ideal has developed from that of a partnership for man provided by woman as described in Genesis to that of a relationship of mutual care and self-giving as described in Ephesians. Even so, it must thirdly be admitted that the ideal in the past was what feminists today would call a patriarchal ideal; that is, marriage even in the ideal was a partnership or relationship of unequals. And fourthly, if we were able to take a closer look at some of the details that we left out or only hinted at, we would have to admit that the ideal has evolved from one that tolerates polygamy to one that insists on monogamy, that the ideal has evolved from one that tolerates divorce to one that insists on permanence, and that the ideal has evolved from one in which parents have total control to one in which the married couple have total control over their choice of a spouse.

Joseph Martos has been an instructor of Theology and Religious Studies at several institutions and is author of *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. This essay is condensed from chapter 11 of *The Ideal in the World's Religions*, ed. Robert Carter and Sheldon Isenberg (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997).

# Ten Important Research Findings on Marriage and Finding a Partner

David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

## Helpful Facts for Young Adults

1. Marrying as a teenager is the highest known risk factor for divorce.

People who marry in their teens are two to three times more likely to divorce than people who marry in their twenties or older.

2. The most likely way to find a future marriage partner is through an introduction by family, friends, or acquaintances.

Despite the romantic notion that people meet and fall in love through chance or fate, the evidence suggests that social networks are important in bringing together individuals of similar interests and backgrounds, especially when it comes to selecting a marriage partner. According to a large-scale national survey of sexuality, almost sixty percent of married people were introduced by family, friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances.

3. The more similar people are in their values, backgrounds, and life goals, the more likely they are to have a successful marriage.

Opposites may attract, but they may not live together harmoniously as married couples. People who share common backgrounds and similar social networks are better suited as marriage partners than people who are very different in their backgrounds and networks.

4. Women have a significantly better chance of marrying if they do not become single parents before marrying.

Having a child out of wedlock reduces the chances of ever marrying. Despite the growing numbers of potential marriage partners with children, one study noted, "having children is still one of the least desirable characteristics a potential marriage partner can possess." The only partner characteristic men and women rank as even less desirable than having children is the inability to hold a steady job.

5. Both women and men who are college educated are more likely to marry, and less likely to divorce, than people with lower levels of education.

Despite occasional news stories pre-

dicting lifelong singlehood for college-educated women, these predictions have proven false. Though the first generation of college-educated women (those who earned baccalaureate degrees in the 1920s) married less frequently than their less well-educated peers, the reverse is true today. College-educated women's chances of marrying are better than less well-educated women. However, the growing gender gap in college education may make it more difficult for college women to find similarly well-educated men in the future. This is already a problem for African-American female college graduates, who greatly outnumber African-American male college graduates.

6. Living together before marriage has not proved useful as a "trial marriage."

People who have multiple cohabiting relationships before marriage are more likely to experience marital conflict, marital unhappiness and eventual divorce than people who do not cohabit before marriage. Researchers attribute some but not all of these differences to the differing characteristics of people who cohabit, the so-called "selection effect," rather than to the experience of cohabiting itself. It has been hypothesized that the negative effects of cohabitation on future marital success may diminish as living together becomes a common experience among today's young adults. However, according to one recent study of couples who were married between 1981 and 1997, the negative effects persist among younger cohorts, supporting the view that the cohabitation experience itself contributes to problems in marriage.

7. Marriage helps people to generate income and wealth.

Compared to those who merely live together, people who marry become economically better off. Men become more productive after marriage; they earn between ten and forty percent more than do single men with similar education and job histories. Marital social norms that encourage healthy, productive behavior and wealth accumulation play a role. Some of the greater wealth of married couples results from their more

efficient specialization and pooling of resources, and because they save more. Married people also receive more money from family members than the unmarried (including cohabiting couples), probably because families consider marriage more permanent and more binding than a living-together union.

8. People who are married are more likely to have emotionally and physically satisfying sex lives than single people or those who just live together.

Contrary to the popular belief that married sex is boring and infrequent, married people report higher levels of sexual satisfaction than both sexually active singles and cohabiting couples, according to the most comprehensive and recent survey of sexuality. Forty-two percent of wives said that they found sex extremely emotionally and physically satisfying, compared to just 31 percent of single women who had a sex partner. And 48 percent of husbands said sex was extremely satisfying emotionally, compared to just 37 percent of cohabiting men. The higher level of commitment in marriage is probably the reason for the high level of reported sexual satisfaction; marital commitment contributes to a greater sense of trust and security, less drug- and alcohol-infused sex, and more mutual communication between the couple.

9. People who grow up in a family broken by divorce are slightly less likely to marry, and much more likely to divorce when they do marry.

According to one study, the divorce risk nearly triples if one marries someone who also comes from a broken home. The increased risk is much lower, however, if the marital partner is someone who grew up in a happy, intact family.

10. For large segments of the population, the risk of divorce is far below fifty percent.

Although the overall divorce rate in America remains close to fifty percent of all marriages, it has been dropping gradually over the past two decades. Also, the risk of divorce is far below fifty percent for educated people going into their first mar-

riage, and lower still for people who wait to marry at least until their mid-twenties, haven't lived with many different partners prior to marriage, or are strongly religious and marry someone of the same faith.

Reprinted with permission of the National Marriage Project (November, 2004).

## FRANK SHEED, FROM SOCIETY AND SANITY (1953)

But the giving of a self and the receiving of a self, the union of personalities—all these can only in their completeness be of one to one; they belong in marriage, and precisely in marriage that is indissoluble. They are not always found in marriage... but they are not easily to be had outside it. Where they are found, there is sexual union in its perfection, so that, in falling in with the plan Nature has for the carrying on of the race, sex is enriched. The bodily union merely as such—and indeed the whole sexual experience of which it is the normal culmination—can bring a new value into ordinary life; a heightened awareness, an intensification of all vital processes. The thing called glamour is real and valuable. But in marriage as Nature would have it, all this is increased and given a new hope of permanence. The sexual union has more to utter; and there is not the certainty of ultimate boredom which goes with all purely bodily pleasures. For while one soon comes to an end of what the body has to give, there is no end to the exploration of a personality. So that an act which must become stale when repeated for its own sake need never become stale when it is regarded as the expression of a profounder reality that is always growing.

# Why Marriage Matters

The Institute for American Values

## Five New Themes

In addition to reviewing research on family topics covered in the first edition of the report, *Why Marriage Matters*, The Second Edition highlights five new themes in marriage-related research.

1. Even though marriage has lost ground in minority communities in recent years, marriage has not lost its value in these communities.
2. An emerging line of research indicates that marriage benefits poor Americans, and Americans from disadvantaged backgrounds, even though these Americans are now less likely to get and stay married.
3. Marriage seems to be particularly important in civilizing men, turning their attention away from dangerous, antisocial, or self-centered activities and toward the needs of a family.
4. Beyond its well-known contributions to adult health, marriage influences the biological functioning of adults and children in ways that can have important social consequences.
5. The relationship quality of intimate partners is related to both their marital status and, for married adults, to the degree to which these partners are committed to marriage.

## Updated Research Findings

Among the research findings summarized by the report are:

### About Children

- Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college, and achieve high-status jobs.
- Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than children in other family forms. The health advantages of married homes remain even after taking into account socioeconomic status.
- Parental divorce approximately doubles the odds that adult children will end up divorced.

### About Men

- Married men earn between 10 and 40 percent more than single men with similar education and job histories.
- Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than otherwise similar singles.
- Marriage increases the likelihood fathers will have good relationships with children. Sixty-five percent of young adults whose parents divorced had poor relationships with their fathers (compared to 29% from non-divorced families).

### About Women

- Divorce and unmarried childbearing significantly increases poverty rates of both mothers and children. Between one-fifth and one-third of divorcing women end up in poverty following their divorce.
- Married mothers have lower rates of depression than single or cohabiting mothers.
- Married women appear to have a lower risk of domestic violence than cohabiting or dating women. Even after controlling for race, age, and education, people who live together are still three times more likely to report violent arguments than married people.

### About Society

- Adults who live together but do not marry—cohabitators—are more similar to singles than to married couples in terms of physical health emotional well-being, and mental health, as well as assets and earnings. Their children more closely resemble the children of single people than the children of married people.
- Marriage appears to reduce the risk that children and adults will be either perpetrators or victims of crime. Single and divorced women are four to five times more likely to be victims of violent crime in any given year than married women. Boys raised in single-parent homes are about twice as likely (and boys raised in stepfamilies more than two and a half times as likely) to

have committed a crime that leads to incarceration by the time they reach their early thirties, even after controlling for factors such as race, mother's education, neighborhood quality and cognitive ability.

### Fundamental Conclusions

The authors come to three fundamental conclusions:

1. Marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike.

2. Marriage is an important public good, associated with a range of economic, health, educational, and safety benefits that help local, state, and federal governments serve the common good.

3. The benefits of marriage extend to poor and minority communities, despite the fact that marriage is particularly fragile in these communities.

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# For Love & Money

BY BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD

While media attention has focused on marriage equality for same-sex couples, almost no attention has been paid to a historic transformation in marriage that has far-reaching consequences for economic equality in the society as a whole. Without much fanfare, the nature of marriage has undergone a profound change. It used to be a democratic institution, open to the many. It is evolving into an elite institution, open chiefly to the well-educated few. In short, marriage is becoming yet another form of privilege.

Rich or poor, most Americans prize marriage above all other intimate unions. Most want to marry and to stay married for a lifetime. But increasingly, those who seek a long-lasting marriage are divided in their ability to actually achieve this goal. The marriage "haves" are those with four-year college degrees. The marriage "have-nots" are those who lack this credential. The college-educated are the most likely to marry and to stay married. And happily so. Women with college degrees report higher levels of marital satisfaction than other married women. Those who do not have the college credential are more likely to forgo marriage altogether or to have marriages that end in divorce.

Clearly, the restructuring of the economy, notably the dramatic decline in blue-collar union jobs, has played a part in the growing "marriage divide." The upheaval in the job market has led to an upheaval in the marriage market. Men without a college degree are less able to earn a family wage and thus are less desirable as marriage prospects. Moreover, at the same time that non-

college men have been falling down the economic ladder, leaving non-college women with fewer suitable marriage partners, the college-educated have been rising to the top. More women are getting college degrees, entering the professions, and earning high salaries. These women tend to find and marry similarly well-educated and well-employed men.

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## *Marriage is becoming yet another form of privilege.*

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But as scholars who study marriage argue in a recent issue of *The Future of Children*, a journal published by the Brookings Institution and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, there has also been a cultural shift in marriage. Marriage used to be the gateway to adulthood. It ushered people into the work of adult and family life—establishing a household, rearing children, providing for a family, caring for a spouse. The barriers to entry were low. Nearly everyone who wanted to marry—including the poor and propertyless—could and did marry. At the same time, young couples could be hopeful about their long-term prospects. They saw marriage as a partnership that would help them build a nest and a nest egg over time.

Today, though, marriage stands closer to the end than the beginning of the early adult life course. Young Americans are postponing marriage until they have achieved other goals, such as finishing their education, pay-

ing off credit card or school debts, and gaining job security. "Readiness" for marriage is no longer determined by simply reaching the threshold age for marriage; it means that each individual must accomplish a demanding set of tasks on his or her own before marriage. Marriage now represents a capstone of early life success rather than the stepping-stone toward it.

The wedding is a revealing sign of this shift. In the not so distant past, nuptials were priced to everyman and everywoman's pocketbook. Few couples expected a lavish wedding, much less the services of a professional wedding consultant or a floral designer. Indeed, many were happy with a modest church wedding and parish-hall-reception affair. Today, though, with the average cost of an American wedding approaching \$30,000, everyman and everywoman's dream of a "nice" wedding is more Buckingham Palace than parish hall.

Then too, young newlyweds used to start out with little more than their wedding gifts, their first month's rent, and the clothes on their backs. Today, many young couples expect to have a house, a nice car or two, a 401(K), and some extra money for vacations before they marry. Thus, the hurdles that precede entry into marriage are dramatically higher.

This cleavage is making an ever larger contribution to the growing economic polarization in this country. Young adults with four-year college degrees are barely a third of their generation, but they are the most likely to surmount the hurdles. And once married, two college graduates are likely to bring home two paychecks and—if their marriage lasts—to estab-

lish substantial wealth over time. On the other hand, young adults without college—the two-thirds majority—are having a much harder time overcoming the hurdles. Instead, given their uncertainty of ever being able to gain the advantages and assets required for marriage, many couples postpone marriage—but not children. This has contributed to the highest-ever level of unwed childbearing among women in their twenties—the prime years for marriage. And unwed childbearing drives a cycle of poverty, troubled relationships, and nonmarriage, thus contributing to the growing marriage divide.

One way to narrow the divide would be to increase opportunities for young people—and especially lower-income young men—to get four-year college degrees. If we want to encourage greater economic equality, perhaps we should be talking about a new GI Bill to increase the percentage of college-educated men in the marriage market.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead is co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University and the author of *Why There Are No Good Men* (Broadway Books).

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# Learning from Marriage

## *The Sacrament That Just Won't Quit*

BY RICHARD R. GAILLARDETZ

When I started to think about getting married some eleven years ago, it hardly felt like a natural step. I was thirty years old, and I had been in a steady, reasonably contented relationship for nearly two years. Diana, I don't hesitate to add, was (and still is!) an intelligent, athletic, and attractive woman. Clearly it was time to make some decisions about our future together. I sensed that if I was ever going to marry, this was the time and this was the woman. Still, I was somewhat hesitant to make a commitment. To help me sort things out, I sought out a good friend who had been married for several years. Having exhausted our sports-related "guy talk" over a Wendy's hamburger, I awkwardly broached the subject.

"Tim, was there any one particular thing that was significant in helping you decide to marry Ellen?"

I immediately felt embarrassed for posing such a personal question in such an abstract way. Yet before I could backtrack, Tim shot back his answer with a confidence that made me wonder whether he had been waiting for me to ask. "She was my salvation," he said simply and emphatically.

At the time, Tim's response made me even more uncomfortable and I dismissed it. Now, after more than a decade of marriage, I understand what he was trying to say in a way I couldn't have imagined as a young single man.

I am a theologian, so I will not hesitate to put an explicitly theological spin on what marriage has taught me. In short, I am increasingly convinced that my relationship with my wife, and with our children, is the spiritual "place" where I will work out my salvation. Authentic married life, I think, has a salvific character that is not merely psychological or emotional. As a Christian, I believe marriage is a place where I am invited into the dying and rising of Christ. Let me try to explain.

I can recall a period early in our marriage when the salvific nature of marriage impressed itself on me. At the time our twins were only two months old and I was just completing my doctoral studies. Foolishly, I agreed to teach in a summer program at a university some four hundred miles away. We packed up all of the baby paraphernalia, clothes, books, and my computer, piled into our little Toyota, and headed off to live in a dingy building that appeared to have once been an army barrack. Concrete floors, few windows, and broken-down furniture greeted us as we walked into our apartment. I was teaching all day, and preparing for my dissertation defense in the evening. Diana was stuck in the apartment with twin infants and no friends or extended family to support her. I would leave at 7:30 in the morning as Diana sat on the couch with two screaming babies in her arms. I would

engagement. There, little more than two years into our marriage, we found ourselves staring into the abyss.

We survived that summer, though to this day I am not sure how. There was no great epiphany or profound experience that constituted the clear turning point. Call it the grace of the sacrament if you like, all I know is that we began working harder to voice our resentments and frustrations. The image that comes to my mind for what began to happen is drawn from a childhood memory of being at the stern of a large river boat, mesmerized by the soothing movement of the paddlewheel churning up the murky river water and propelling the boat upstream. As the vessel approached the dock, the pilot shifted the engine into reverse. The paddlewheel's steady rhythm diminished, slowly coming to a stop, and then, after a discernible

the "salvation" that Tim had in mind? Salvation is always the work of God and yet Catholicism insists that there is a kind of cooperation in our free response to God's grace. Put simply, while salvation is always God's work in us, it often feels like our work as we struggle to dispose ourselves to God's saving action. In any event, I have become convinced that my "salvation," the spiritual transformation that God wishes to effect in me, transpires within the crucible of my relationship with my wife and children. This interlocking set of commitments that constitutes our family is both burden and blessing, cross and resurrection; it is an invitation to a truly ascetical vocation. But it is an asceticism that a good deal of Church teaching has yet to fully understand.

In the adolescent fantasies of many (at least for us testosterone-charged males), the benefits of marriage began and ended with the prospects of sex without guilt. It is surprising how much theological reflection on marriage (usually by celibates) still focuses on marital sex. For example, in his younger years, Pope John Paul II once wrote some rather provocative things about conjugal relations, offering perspectives that would have made his papal predecessors blush. Unafraid to discuss the sacramental significance of sexual union, the young Karol Wojtyła even wrote of the value of married couples learning to achieve simultaneous orgasm!

This is pretty racy stuff from a future pope, and knowing something of our church's dubious history where valorizing sexual pleasure is concerned, I gratefully accept his view as a welcome corrective. I do worry, however, about a latent romanticism in the Catholic tradition regarding marital sex, perhaps in response to more austere views drawn from our past. In this regard, I recall during my doctoral studies participating in a seminar on contemporary issues in moral theology. At the time, we were reviewing church teaching on artificial contraception and recourse to reproductive technologies. One

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*I am increasingly convinced that my relationship with my wife, and with our children, is the spiritual "place" where I will work out my salvation*

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return at 4:30 p.m., to find Diana in the same predicament, if not in the same spot. I had best not describe the glare she would give me. The evenings were spent in petty bickering as Diana pleaded for some well-deserved "time off," while I complained about needing to prepare for my dissertation defense. The nights were an endless succession of interruptions as each baby needed to be fed at three-hour intervals. Neither of us slept more than four hours a night. Both of us resented the other if only because we dared not resent the children. Marital "intimacy" was the last thing on our minds as each of us fought off exhaustion. Somewhere during those four weeks the thought began to creep into each of our minds that this whole marriage project might have been a horrible mistake. This is not what we bargained for, or what we stayed up until the wee hours fantasizing about in the heady days of our

pause, the wheel only gradually and with the utmost effort began to turn in the opposite direction. That summer saw a gradual but real reversal in the cycle of our own relations. The pattern of caustic complaints and sarcastic responses slowly gave way to a new pattern of care toward one another. The difficulties did not disappear, but each of us seemed to recognize, beyond our own pain and frustration, the effort the other spouse was putting forth, and that mutual recognition triggered a reversal.

The biblical word for conversion, *metanoia*, means not just a shift in one's views or opinions but a fundamental change in direction. My marriage, I am convinced, was calling me to such an interior change. I was being called to a life of care and concern for another that seemed beyond my own powers and resources. Was this

# Learning from Marriage

Continued from Page 9

of the women in the seminar was an ordained Methodist minister and at one point in our discussion she exclaimed in exasperation: "I don't get it with you Catholics! All of this talk of marital sex as the 'sublime expression of the marriage covenant' seems so much nonsense. When I think of those events in my marriage that symbolically evoke its spiritual meaning, I think of my family at worship together receiving Communion. For my husband and me, sex is more about joyful play than about making some symbolic gesture."

It was a telling remark. I am not prepared to abandon altogether the spiritual significance of conjugal relations but, as time goes on, I am inclined to believe that the distinctive blessing of sexual intimacy is more a gentle seal ratifying precious moments encountered outside the bedroom than the symbolic summit of marital love. There is no doubt that a moment of conjugal intimacy and a moment Diana and I spend together with our children in our weekly family meeting or by ourselves late at night discussing the events of the day are related. That the moment of conjugal union is intrinsically more significant than the others is not as evident.

It is bedrock biblical wisdom that the human person was not created for isolation; the way of the hermit has always been the cautious exception rather than the rule in the Christian tradition. We are made for communion, not because we are each half-selves looking for a mate as our completion, but because we find ourselves in giving ourselves to another. The dynamism of giving and graciously receiving, I am now inclined to believe, lies at the heart of the salvific character of marriage. I can receive so many of the graces of my marriage only as pure gift. I am blessed when a night ending in argument is followed by a day begun anew with a kiss. I am blessed when I return home from work venting frustrations and petty grudges yet still find myself loved and accepted by Diana. There is a joy found in the moments of celebration in one another's personal achievements. I remember the unadulterated pride I

felt when my wife finally received her graduate degree as I recalled all of the late nights I would go to bed while she stayed up studying. Surely these moments, when we find ourselves drawn out of our own world to delight in our beloved's accomplishments, shape us in unseen ways.

Shared plans and dreams, dashed or fulfilled, and the confidence that we can recognize one another's idiosyncratic "tells"—those slight facial expressions and characteristic postures that reveal much about the emotional state of our partner—contribute to the spiritual cement that binds us together. I am awash with gratitude for this one person who knows my deepest fears and stands ready as a "balm for my wounds." I remember early in my teaching career when the annual ritual of reading students' course evaluations would be met with dread. I might receive twenty positive evaluations only to be devastated by the two negative critiques. My colleagues would often laugh at my consternation. Then I would call my wife and read them to her, sensing with relief that at least she knew of the hidden wounds I carried that inclined me to give a disproportionate weight to the few negative comments.

It is a blessed comfort to know that this other person, whose own story began long before I appeared in her life, has chosen to weave her story inextricably into mine. Certainly, chief among marriage's blessings are children. We are parents of four young boys, and in part because of them our married life has taken on a mood and a texture that we could not have anticipated. In Catholic teaching, there are three ministries within the one sacrament of holy orders (deacon, priest-presbyter, and bishop) and there are times when I think the Church would have done well to create two degrees of marriage: one with children and one without! Theoretically, the children are distinct from our marital relationship yet they are often the most visible sign of what our union has come to be. Many of us could secretly confess a dark and desperate time when it was the faces of our children that made us try harder

to heal whatever rift threatened to become an unbridgeable chasm.

Our children's faces are canvases upon which a wondrous world of emotions and discoveries is painted as if solely for our enjoyment. They laugh, and something long dormant stirs within us; they cry, and our hearts break. They grow, and we discover, as we nurture that growth, the most sublime of vocations. We are blessed in acknowledging their dependence upon us, and blessed again when they grow out of that dependence from children to adolescents and, thanks in no small part to our parental ministrations, become mature, capable, caring adults.

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*It is bedrock  
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Our twins, David and Andrew, are nine and I have already begun to recognize some subtle changes in our relationship. We are an affectionate family, but the older boys are no longer as much at ease as they once were with my displaying affection in front of their peers. I recently visited them at their school, and though they were visibly excited to have me at the lunchroom table with them, they were less so when I gave them a parting hug. I knew well that what was happening was simply a healthy developmental process. Still, I felt a sadness that I could not dispel. Yet two weeks later, the three of us were going to an Astros baseball game when both of them spontaneously grasped my hands on each side as we walked through the parking lot. I acted nonchalantly, holding their hands firmly, while uttering a silent prayer of gratitude.

Such seemingly mundane moments

are but a few of the blessings of marriage and family. Seen in the right light, they are also profound intimations of resurrection; the new life that is promised us. And yet, as with that first Easter event, this resurrected life comes only out of loss and death. There is a kind of "dying" that also happens in marriage and family life. Consider the relatively common experience in marriage of being misunderstood. If the sexual intimacy of marriage is a tender grace, the experience of sharing a marriage bed with one who at this particular moment may not understand me can be terrifying in its loneliness. There are ways in which, in spite of our closeness, my wife and I view our shared world in notably different ways. It is not that our values are different, but rather that we construe events differently and give a different priority to the tasks we face. Let me offer an example. My own penchant for order leads me to take on systematically the least pleasant projects first. I have to complete all outstanding tasks before I can allow myself the pleasure of relaxation. I must unpack all of my bags after coming home from a long trip before I can flop on the bed and rest. This attitude runs headlong into my wife's unique capacity to enjoy the present moment, putting aside all but the most necessary of tasks for another time (she'll unpack her bag when she actually needs those clothes!). It would be easy to speak of this as the wonderful "complementarity" that our differences bring to our marriage (one tends to hear this kind of thing in annoying marriage preparation/enrichment talks!), but in point of fact, we usually experience it as an irritating difference, pure and simple.

Another example emerges out of our different families of origin. I was raised in a family governed by the principles of reward and punishment with very little unconditional affirmation. The classic "first-born" child, I was raised to be responsible and to perform in order to obtain my parents' approval. Yet I was first attracted to Diana because she did not seem much interested in my accomplishments. I was intrigued by the possibility that she saw something deeper within me. Since we have been married, however,

I have often found myself looking for her approval and affection as if she were my parent. When she refuses to respond in that way, I become wounded and can be reduced to adolescent pouting. Yet it is precisely in Diana's refusal to conform to the emotional expectations I brought into our marriage that our marriage becomes salvific for me.

The vocation of marriage is an invitation to be stretched, drawn out to an emotional and relational "far country." There is a biblical term for what can happen here; kenosis. Saint Paul used the term to describe what it was for Christ to abandon all divine prerogatives in order to enter fully into the experience of being human. For those of us who fulfill our baptismal call to follow Jesus in and through the sacrament of matrimony, kenosis is the call to a self-emptying or dying to our needs, hopes, and expectations. This is one of the great secrets of marriage—a relationship shamelessly marketed for the hope of intimacy it offers, in fact, confronts us with the shocking otherness of our spouse. One's marriage partner is not a cipher to be decoded but an inscrutable person to be embraced as mystery. The alternative to this acceptance of each other's individuality—and God knows I have made occasional forays down this road—is a venomous bitterness and resentment that ultimately dooms the marriage. Marriage, like all sacra-

ments, is paschal to the core and consequently it is as much about dying as it is about new life. We do not get much of this reality on television. There is plenty of marital dying, to be sure, but it is usually a foreshadowing of some quick marital exit. Paschal "dying" is an altogether different matter.

Similarly, the children also call me to a "dying." I derive an almost inexhaustible delight from our children, yet I am easily overwhelmed by the emotional demands of parenting. I keep trying to "manage" the relationship with my kids the way I do with my students. Why can't I establish parenting office hours? Yet it is not just the chaos of a noisy household and the emotional demands placed upon me by four growing boys that call me to a relinquishment of self, it is the children themselves. Whatever Jesus meant when he suggested we must imitate the children, it had nothing to do with angelic innocence! I love my children in ways that can never be put into words, but there is no hiding the fact that they are imperfect creatures, capable of the same pettiness, resentment, and mean-spiritedness that sets us adults to warring. I am learning, haltingly, to seek out in snatches of prayer and solitude an inner equilibrium to ground me amidst a hurricane of youth and emotion and chaos beyond my control. Kenosis, again.

Like most parents, I find myself

projecting onto my children a lifetime of my own insecurities. I become frightened that I am passing on some quasi-genetic personality flaw that (please God, if I could just have a bit more time!) I have not yet purged. Yet the vocations of spouse and parent simply do not wait while I "work things out." Here the kenotic movement is mostly one of letting them be. If I am honest with myself, there is a hubris in overestimating my impact on their still young lives. For they too are sturdily, resiliently other, a mystery unfolding that I may feel compelled to nudge along but can never wholly direct.

Indeed, the children shape me as much as I shape them. Exuberant in play, fierce in anger, yet paradoxically quick to forgive, I see in my children an emotional clarity that has long since become jumbled and even duplicitous in me. My son Brian has a temper that I keep trying to attribute to his mother's side of the family! When I deny him a request, I am often startled by the emotional force of his anger. Yet ten minutes later he will be sitting on my lap telling me about a school project undertaken with his favorite preschool teacher. From a distance, I gaze upon my children and long to know the "cleanness" and purity of their emotions. I lack the confidence in my own emotional life to dare to give it such open and honest expression. And yet, there are

moments when I shed my status as an emotional bystander—wrestling with the boys or singing a song with them in the car—that I think I may indeed be recapturing some great lost thing.

After eleven years of marriage I now realize that our household is indeed, as my friend Tim so aptly named it, my salvation. Here in this home that we Catholics rightly call an *ecclesia domestica*, the church of the household, I am being drawn to a different place. Here the hammer strikes hot iron often and I flinch as by God's grace I am being forged into something new.

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# Spirituality and Lifestyle

BY EVELYN EATON WHITEHEAD  
AND JAMES D. WHITEHEAD

The choices that influence our lifestyle are part of the spirituality of our marriage. It is in these choices that we express the values that shape our life together. And we sense that Christianity's most significant contribution to our marriage is in the values to which it calls us. That unselfish love is possible, that sacrifice can have value beyond itself, that pleasure is to be celebrated but not idolized, that I am not for myself alone—these profound truths of human life are not always apparent. There is much in contemporary society, perhaps even much in our own experience, to suggest that these convictions are illusory or naive. Alone, we may feel how fragile is their hold on us. In community with other believers, we can face our doubts with less fear because we do not face them alone. We can nourish the religious vision of life that sustains us in our journey of marriage for a lifetime.

Christianity does not give married love its value; rather it celebrates the deeper meaning of married love that can sometimes be lost or obscured in the hectic pace of life. Christianity gives us insight, or vision into what is ordinarily invisible—the power and presence of God's redeeming love all around us and especially in certain privileged, sacramental experiences. And for most Christians, married love and the life commitments that flow from and surround this love are instances of this privileged experience of the power and presence of God. We will explore below several of the values which help to shape the lifestyle of Christian marriage.

The lifestyle of our marriage is influenced by many forces. Some of these seem beyond our immediate control—economic factors that bring inflation, political factors that shape national policy on child care, cultural factors that affect what is "expected" of women and men. In some marriages, the influence of these external factors is so strong that there seems little room for choice. If I am poor, under-

educated, or chronically unemployed, it will be difficult for me to feel that I am in control of my own life. These burdens of social inequity weigh heavily on many Americans, adding stress in their marriages. A high incidence of divorce and desertion results.

But for most Americans, the lifestyle of marriage is not simply a product of external forces. We are conscious of ourselves as agents. Within certain limits, we choose how we shall live. Some of our "choices" may be illusory, more influenced than we would like to admit by factors outside our awareness, but we are nevertheless conscious of ourselves as making decisions that influence the shape of our marriage.

The choices that are most important for our lifestyle are those that touch on the use of our resources. Our resources of concern, of time, and of money are the "stuff" of our life together. The choices we make about these resources are not incidental; they are close to the substance of what our marriage is.

What do we care about together? What is our money for? How do we spend the time of our life? It is in our response to these questions that we discover the values of our marriage and express them in our lifestyle.

## Prayer and Justice

Prayer is part of the lifestyle of Christian marriage. This will include the ways that we as a couple, as a family, participate in the prayer of the Church, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. But it will involve as well our developing suitable ways for us to pray together, to share—sometimes as a couple, sometimes with the children as well—the intimate experience of coming into the presence of God in prayer. In recent decades, the devotional life of many Catholic homes included the family rosary or prayers honoring the Sacred Heart. Family prayer today is more likely to focus on the reading of Scripture, reflecting together on its meaning for our lives and our actions in the world. Prayer has been urged in marriage

as one of the ways for the family to deepen its own unity: "The family that prays together, stays together." To pray together as a couple and as a family can reinforce, sometimes powerfully, our experience of being together in the ways that matter most. But the prayer of Christians is not simply about unity among us; it is about our community with humankind in the presence of God. Liturgical prayer especially celebrates this larger awareness. It is as the people of God that, in the name of Jesus and through the power of his abiding Spirit, we pray. But family prayer, too, should open us beyond "just us." The needs of the world, concretely the ways in which pain and loss and injustice are part of the world that we can influence, are part of our prayer.

In fall 1978, Archbishop Jean Jadot delivered an address on the implementation of the pastoral plan for family ministry that had been developed by the bishops of the United States. In his talk, he spoke of prayer, faith and justice. "The prayer I am talking about is not so much the recitation of prayers as a shared experience of prayer. This finds its origins in a common reading of the Holy Scriptures and in a concern for those who are in need—for justice and peace in the world, for the coming of the Kingdom of God... such prayer quite naturally evokes an awareness of the family's mission to service. It also raises the family's social consciousness."

The conviction that we are for more than ourselves is basic to the Christian world view. This value must find its expression not only in our prayer but in our lifestyle. Most of us know... that our marriage is about more than "just us." We need more than "just us" if our family is to thrive. We are aware of how much, as a couple and as a family, we depend on contact with certain relatives and support from special friends. But as Christians, we go beyond ourselves not just in what we need but also in what we contribute. Our life as a family and especially our children carry us into the larger world. As our children grow, we sense how much more they belong to the

world and its future than they do to us. Thus, our care for them cannot end at our doorstep. Our first movements to contribute to the world beyond may well be for their sake—to make the world a better place for them, a place worthy of their hopes and conducive to their growth. But it is possible for this initial impulse of generative care, our concern for our children and their future, to stagnate. Our preoccupation with what is good for our family can become a new form of selfishness. The boundaries may be broadened slightly, but it is still "us" against "them." But for many of us, the movement of concern for our children invites us into a concern for the children of the world, for the future of humankind. I become more deeply aware that, by emotion and by action, I am involved in the lives of others. As parent, as worker, as citizen, I am in my own way somehow responsible for the future. The world—its hopes and problems—has a claim on me.

As Christians we hear this invitation to generativity reinforced in the call of Jesus. I am not only my brother's keeper; the category of brother and sister has expanded to include whoever is in need. "I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me" (Matthew 25:35-36). Christianity expands the boundaries of our concern. We find we belong to a larger community. We hold our resources as stewards: these are not simply our "possessions," but the means of our contribution to a more just world.

Most of us sense, increasingly, that the issues of social value and justice that we face in our own lives are complex. There are not many questions where the "one right answer" emerges quickly and clearly. In any particular case, persons of good will and intelligence may come to different conclusions about what should be done. When the issues at stake touch directly on our own lives or our family's welfare—as in questions of job security or property values or tax reform—it can be even more difficult to determine the just response.

In these situations Christian, awareness does not give easy answers but it does give us a starting point. We are not for ourselves alone. Action for justice and the transformation of the world is, as Pope Paul VI proclaimed, constitutive of our response to the gospel. We stand under the gospel challenge that we share the burdens of humankind and participate in its liberation. The way in which we, as a couple and as a family, participate in this mission of Christ may well have to be worked out on our own. But it can be expected that our maturing as Christian adults will involve our developing a lifestyle which expresses our understanding of the mission to which Jesus calls us and supports us in our response.

### The Meaning of Money

Money is a central issue in marriage. What money means to us influences our relationship; how we use money shapes our lifestyle. And in many marriages, decisions about money are among the most complex the couple face. Disagreements about money (how to manage it; how to spend it; who should make these decisions) and distress over money (living beyond our means; bills coming due; not having enough money to meet an unexpected expense) are significant sources of marital strain.

Money issues in marriage are troublesome in part because money carries so many different meanings. What is money for? My response here influences the way I answer the other questions. How much money does our family need? Can we ever have enough? How would we even go about determining what would be "enough" money for us?

For some of us, money is mainly for the practical necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter. For others, it is for enjoyment—for leisure or luxury or fun. Sometimes money is for our children's future, their education, or financial security. Sometimes it is for self-esteem: "Surely I am worthwhile, just look at how much money I make." Sometimes money is for power: "I can buy anything and anyone I need." And sometimes it is a resource we have to be used for the good of the world.

Most practical decisions about

money carry some larger emotional significance. These decisions say something important to us about who we are in the world. If, as a couple, we see money differently, if we each act out of a different sense of "what our money is for," we can anticipate that money issues will be troublesome to bring up between us and difficult to resolve.

The emotional significance of money is not the only source of strain. Inflation and the threat of economic recession are very real factors in the lifestyle of most families. Young couples find they can no longer afford to buy a house and so delay their decision to have a child. Couples with children realize that they both must bring in a paycheck if they wish to send their children to college. Couples who had resolved to retire early now plan to continue to work, unsure that their retirement benefits will remain adequate to living costs. Faced with rising prices, high interest rates, and, for some, even unemployment, many families must make difficult decisions about money that significantly influence the lifestyle of their marriage.

But admitting the reality of these financially uncertain times, the money strain in many marriages is as much influenced by consumerism as by inflation. Even in this inflationary period, American families enjoy one of the highest levels of affluence in

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the world. We want and expect "the best that money can buy" for ourselves and our families. Advertising expands our sense of what we need, assuring us that "we owe it to ourselves" because "we're worth it." Perhaps especially as Americans, we find ourselves susceptible to the temptation to judge our value by what we have—our material possessions, our standard of living, our buying power. This preoccupation with "the things of this world" has always been in tension with deeper

religious intuitions: being is more than having; our worth is not grounded in our wealth; we are not "saved" by what we accumulate. The Christian vision has always called us to a certain detachment from wealth. As believers, we know we hold the goods of this world as stewards. Our responsibility is to care for the person in need, even out of our own substance. Today we see that this challenge has even broader scope. We are more aware of the connections between the prosperity of the United States and the poverty that exists elsewhere. It is often at the expense of other peoples that we have enjoyed, as a nation, the abundant resources of food and energy and technology that constitute "the good life." The patterns of this structural injustice are complicated, to be sure. It is not easy to trace our personal responsibility in this or to determine what we, as a family, can do to right the balance in world economics. But the complexity of the problem does not relieve us of responsibility. As Christians, we need to examine our family's standard of living not only in view of the shrinking dollar but in view of our accountability in the world. How we spend our money and where we invest our savings—for the Christian today these are more than practical financial questions to be resolved in terms of prices and interest rates alone. They are issues of religious significance that give shape to a Christian lifestyle.

### Marriage and Ministry

For us as Christians, the question of lifestyle ultimately brings us to a discussion of ministry. Ministry is the action of believers undertaken in pursuit of the mission which Jesus entrusted to the Church—the coming of the Kingdom. Formal ministry is activity that is recognized or commissioned by the community of faith. Alongside this formal ministry is that ministry expected of all believers—

the daily efforts to shape the world according to Christian values of love and mercy. Some Catholics who are married are part of the Church's formal ministry. The expanding involvement of lay persons in roles of official ministry is a fruit of the new vitality in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. Lay women and men serve in liturgical ministries in parishes as lectors and musicians and ministers of communion. Increasingly, the teaching ministry of parishes and dioceses is carried out by lay persons, some through full-time careers in religious education programs or Catholic school systems, others serving in a volunteer capacity as catechists, leaders of adult discussion groups, or members of the parish school board. There has been a comparable increase in the number of lay persons staffing the service agencies and social policy programs that operate under Church auspices or support.

This expansion of "approved" or "recognized" ministries over the past two decades has blurred many of the earlier distinctions among religious clergy and lay persons in our church. Married men ordained to the permanent diaconate, women religious serving as pastoral associates in parishes, women and married men studying in Catholic seminaries in preparation for careers of full-time ministry—these persons do not fit easily into former categories. In some cases, the openness to lay persons in roles of service and leadership has been more a response to personnel shortages ("There just aren't enough brothers, sisters and priests to go around anymore!") than a sign of deeper appreciation of the scope of the Christian call to ministry. But in any case, a significant number of Catholic lay persons—both married and single—understand their life vocation to be in the formal ministry of the Church.

The involvement of married Catholics as formal ministers in the Church's ministry to marriage—as planners and leaders in programs of marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, marriage counseling, and as part of the liturgical celebration of marriage—is on the increase and is good. In our discussion here, however, we wish to look at the relationship of marriage and the general Christian call to ministry.

# Spirituality and Lifestyle

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For some Christians, both those ordained and others who are not, the immediate focus of their own religious action is within the community of faith, a ministry to and through the formal Church. But for most believers the call to live and act in response to the Christian vision will find expression in their family and their work and their other involvements in society. How is the religious experience of marriage related to the religious action or ministry of an adult Christian life? We have discussed this ministry of the mature Christian in terms of religious generativity. Psychological maturity leads me beyond myself and my intimates toward genuine care for the world. So, too, religious generativity leads me beyond the celebration of the "Good News" for myself, toward religious action—ministry—for a world beyond myself, and my religious "intimates." We have seen that intimacy can either contribute to generativity (when the experience of our love releases in each of us the psychological resources we need for generosity and self-transcendence) or detract from it (when our love seems so fragile that we must spend energy and other resources on ourselves, with none to spare for the world beyond). So marriage can have an ambiguous effect on Christian maturity and ministry. There are Christians for whom their own marriage and family occupy their full concern, not only in moments of crisis such as serious illness or the loss of a job, not just during periods of predictable stress like the birth of a child or, for some, the event of retirement—but characteristically. "We are for ourselves—alone." They may take quite seriously their responsibilities as spouses and parents. Their marriage is stable, their children have as many educational opportunities and social advantages as the couple can afford. They may participate actively in the parish. They are regular churchgoers who contribute financially and see to it that their children take part in the religious education program. But through it all, they are "for themselves." They may see the parish in terms of what it has to give them—a satisfying experience of worship, a program of moral education for their children, perhaps even a sense of

security and some status in the community. But to be an adult Christian has not brought with it for them the motivating conviction: I am, our family is, for more than ourselves.

Among many other Christians marriage is just such an opening to God and to the world. The lessons of our marriage teach us to care beyond ourselves. Our concern for our children links us to the concerns of the world. We sense that our life together as a family not only "uses up" our strengths, but also generates new resources that we can share and spend beyond ourselves. Our home, our love, our joy together, our time, our insights, our concerns, even our money—these resources of our life together do not exist for ourselves alone. At any one point in our marriage, we may be overwhelmed with a sense that there is not enough of us to go around, that our resources are deficient, not just in the face of the needs of the world, but even for the needs of our own family. But over its life course, if not at every moment, our marriage as maturing Christians will be marked by openness to needs beyond the family and by an active sense of our own contribution to the coming of the Kingdom, the presence of God in justice and love.

There are, of course, many different ways in which this ministry of maturing Christians will be expressed, and so many ways in which the relationship between marriage and ministry will be seen. For some couples, their ministry is through their family life. They open their home to foster children or adopt a handicapped child. In another family, the kitchen is always open to the teenagers in the neighborhood and the couple have time to listen to the concerns of their neighbors and friends. A third couple decide in retirement to devote two days a week together to visiting shut-ins or to welcome a recently widowed neighbor to live with them until she can make other plans. Other couples will sense that their involvement in issues of social concern is crucial to the religious education of their children. To take an unpopular stand on a question of racial justice, to become

involved in a political campaign, to use part of their family's vacation money to assist those who have suffered in a disaster—these couples see such actions as of religious significance and encourage their children to share this practical understanding of faith. For many lay Christians, the arena of their ministry is the world of their employment. In my professional responsibilities, in my union activities, in a business decision I can influence, in the way I deal with my company subordinates and superiors, I try to bring to bear the convictions of my religious faith. On the job, I take a stand that I know is right, even at the risk there may be repercussions. Or as a couple, we decide to change jobs and move across country, so that we can participate in a project for economic justice. For many of us then, our efforts to contribute to the world and to justice among people happen here, in the work that we do in the world. It is here that a sense of personal vocation takes shape. It is here that we work to hasten the coming of The Kingdom.

## A Playful Marriage

The lifestyle of our marriage has much to do with how we are involved beyond ourselves. But our lifestyle also influences and expresses how we are together. Many of the values of Christianity contribute to the way we live our life together by urging us to take marriage seriously. Marriage is for grown-ups; its responsibilities are significant; the honeymoon does not last forever. These sober truths are important for us to hear and the Church serves us well in giving voice to this wisdom. But Christian wisdom also speaks to another side of marriage—the intimate connections between love and play. As our marriage matures, it becomes more playful. Here we will consider several elements that are part of the lifestyle of a playful marriage.

A playful marriage depends on how we spend time together. The demands of careers, children, and other involvements can easily overwhelm a marriage relationship. The fatigue and distraction that result can seriously

erode our presence to each other. We learn that the playfulness that marked our carefree relationship at the start of our marriage does not endure easily or automatically. We learn, paradoxically, that if we would have a playful marriage we must work at it. Playfulness between us, like our other experiences of intimacy, will have to be cultivated. It will require a discipline in our lifestyles; especially a discipline of our time.

If marriage is a vocation that begins in a resounding "yes," it matures into many "no's." To have quality time for my partner and our family, I find I have to say "no" to many outside demands and requests. This discipline helps structure time for these central commitments of our life. Such disciplined planning and foresight can be experienced as cold calculation or as a canny response to life's multiple demands. Without such an asceticism, we become subject to the endless demands (all of them "worthwhile") of contemporary married life. Gradually exhaustion takes the play out of our marriage, both its flexibility and its fun. Our playfulness can be fostered by planning special times for just the two of us. We set aside times and places with protective boundaries. On our vacation, in days of rest or retreat, we give ourselves permission to play again. Apart from the seriousness of the rest of our life, these occasions invite us to play together and enliven our love.

## Competition and Play

A playful marriage also recognizes the connection between competition and play. Our competitiveness can be acknowledged. We can accept the fact that marriage is a contact sport, one in which injury, anger and even loss are sometimes to be expected. But our competitiveness can also enliven us. As we identify together how and when we feel competitive toward one another, these feelings lose some of their force over us. We can share more concretely some of our fears about conflict between us and even feel some of the exhilaration of our struggles.

Competition is often an act of inti-

macy. It brings us "up close" and engages us with one another, however ambiguously. In competition, as in wrestling, we can come in touch with each other in ways that both excite and threaten us. In our competitive encounters, we can learn much about ourselves and each other. We can find unsuspected strengths; we can also come upon unacknowledged weaknesses. To compete does not mean that we must use these strengths to dominate or must exploit these weaknesses. My awareness of your weakness can help me love better, help me to protect or at least not take advantage of your vulnerability. Awareness of a strength can help me love better as well, enabling me to use it to foster rather than control our marriage.

The thought of competition in marriage may still disturb us. It may conjure up images of the professional athlete, concerned only with performance and rating, and with coming out ahead in this encounter. But this is only one narrow interpretation of competition. We may also see competition in our marriage as not necessarily setting us against one another but as bringing us closer together. This "closer together" is, of course, threatening. It may well, on occasion, produce hurt and injury. In love and in competition, we take the risk of a very close encounter, trusting that we will both play fair. But when we do—overcoming our fear of being crushed and our need to dominate—we are exhilarated together; the winner is our marriage and our intimate lifestyle.

#### Playful Sex

Our sexual life together will be part of a playful marriage. Here the Christian tradition has not always been helpful. A central characteristic of play is its uselessness; it is "just for fun." Christians have learned, on the other hand, that sex is very serious business. It has a specific and (even) exclusive purpose: the begetting of children. Only when this goal is dutifully pursued is our sexual activity to be enjoyed. Thus the seriousness and sacredness of sexuality has, for many Christians, overpowered its playfulness. Is not "playful sex" for playmates and libertines? The ambiguity here parallels that of competition. As competition is neither simply destructive nor simply creative, human sexual activity is neither simply purposeful nor simply playful. As Christians, we know that sex is sacred: in our sexual sharing we create more life; through it we confirm and increase our

love for one another. But this sacredness does not exclude its playfulness. Sex for Christians is very responsible play. The sexual embrace, sometimes generative of new life and much more often generative of our own love, is also fun. Christianity has, to be sure, been cautious in recognizing the value of playfulness in sex. Only recently and even then reluctantly have many of the official voices within the

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Church been willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of a sexual love whose every act is not intended to bring children into the world. But these developments are happening in our time, in part through the testimony of married Christians. And as they do, it becomes easier for us to celebrate in the lifestyles of Christian marriage the variety and playfulness of sexual love. Sex is not the only place for play in a maturing marriage. But if there is little or no play in our sexual sharing, we are likely to find it more difficult to play in the other areas of our common life.

#### Learning to Play Fair

Another element of a playful marriage is learning to play fair. This means learning the rules that can help our competitiveness and our other intimacies contribute to our marriage, not destroy it. A first rule is that we need to contest with one another. To regularly repress our anger, our confusion, or disagreement will not reduce these feelings but only store them for later use. Being "a good sport" in our marriage does not mean choosing not to compete with or confront my partner. It means actively engaging in this relationship. "Poor sports" are those who choose not to contest anything with their partners. They may stand on the sidelines and complain, but they do not compete. A marriage in which the partners no longer contest, no longer struggle with each other in any significant way, can be called a stalemate. The partners in such a marriage are likely to

experience each other as "stale mates." If the first rule is simply to play—to compete, to get engaged—the second rule is to play fair. This means playing skillfully, knowing when and how to confront my partner. In marriage, as in every other kind of play, timing is important. And our experience of each other in marriage, the years we have been playing together, should help us to determine the timing of our confrontations. I bring up a sensitive issue when I sense the time is right: when we can handle it, not just when I want to take it on. Playing fair is likely to be a part of our lifestyle in marriage the more we are each able to display the skillful behaviors of communication and conflict resolution.

Learning to play fair is a complex virtue, one that most of us acquire only gradually as we mature. Its growth is likely to include the discipline of identifying and cutting away habits of ours that are destructive in our marriage belittling the other person, striking back indirectly rather than confronting a troublesome issue, using the children as weapons in an effort to win or be right. Finally, play can teach us the importance of compromise and the value of being a good loser. Compromise means finding our way around questions and concerns that threaten a standoff or seem insoluble. The strategies of barter and negotiation will, at times, help us sustain our love and commitment. Learning how to be a good loser is also a sign of maturity. Each

of us can expect to fail, even repeatedly, in our efforts at love and mutuality. Play reminds us that we need not be ashamed. Love does not mean never having to say I'm sorry; it means becoming good at it.

In all these ways, we mature in love. We learn that play is not just for kids, that being able to trust one another is more important than always being right. In his study of adult maturity, *Adaptation to Life*, George Vaillant summarizes these connections among love, trust and play:

"It is hard to separate capacity to trust from capacity to play, for play is dangerous until we can trust both ourselves and our opponents to harness rage. In play, we must trust enough and love enough to risk losing without despair, to bear winning without guilt, and to laugh at error without mockery." (p. 309)

In our own marriage, we can expect to know winning and losing, risk and error, laughter and love. These are the stuff of a playful marriage, the building blocks of a lifestyle of marriage for a lifetime.

Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead are the authors of *Marrying Well: Possibilities in Christian Marriage Today* (Doubleday, 1981), from which this essay is excerpted.

## THE MASTER SPEED

No speed of wind or water rushing by  
But you have speed far greater. You can climb  
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,  
And back through history up the stream of time  
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,  
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,  
But in the rush of everything to waste,  
That you may have the power of standing still—  
Off any still or moving thing you say.  
Two such as you with master speed  
Cannot be parted nor be swept away  
From one another once you are agreed  
That life is only life forevermore  
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.

—Robert Frost

# Cultivating a Spirituality of Marriage Across the Life Cycle

BY WILLIAM P. ROBERTS

A real appreciation of marriage as a response to God's call in one's life serves as a significant basis for a spirituality of marriage. We here probe some of the elements of marriage as a vocation. But it is not a vocation that stands alone. It is rooted in two more basic callings: the one written into creation, and the one we receive through baptism.

In God's creation, the will of God for humans is manifested in God's creating them female and male in His image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Human gender and sexuality, therefore, are not only gifts of God, but in a finite way reflect something that is part of who God is. To grow as mature sexual beings who integrate their sexuality in personal commitment and love, whether single, celibate, or married, is to grow in the image of our Maker.

God's will for us is also expressed in the creation account in Genesis 2, where woman and man are created equal as humans, bone of the same bone, flesh of the same flesh (v. 23), and in such a way that the two may become one (v. 24).

In the call to be married, one looks into oneself and in light of one's unique gifts, virtues, temperament, and the physical and psychological structure of one's being, and in light of the possibilities available one chooses marriage as the way in which one believes s/he can best become all s/he is called to be as the unique giving and loving human being the creating God wishes.

In baptism, we are empowered by the Spirit to live in Christ, and through him to be daughters and sons of the God whom he calls Abba, Father. All the baptized are called to holiness, to the fullness of Christian life, and to the perfection of charity.<sup>1</sup> "The forms and tasks of life are many but there is one holiness, which is cultivated by all who are led by God's Spirit and, obeying the Father's voice and adoring God

the Father in spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor and humble in carrying his cross, that they may deserve to be sharers in his glory."<sup>2</sup>

## The Paschal Mystery and the Lifelong Marital Cycle

One of the most fundamental beliefs that we hold in common with Christians of all denominations is that Jesus was crucified and died on Good Friday and rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. We also believe that we are called to share in Christ's death and resurrection. While this sharing culminates at the final moment of our earthly life, it begins with our baptism. As Paul tells us, we were baptized into Christ's death and buried with him, so that as he "was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life" (Romans 6:4). And further he states, "we believe that, if we died with Christ, then we shall live with him too.... For by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life he lives is life with God. In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:8, 10-11).

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*Paradoxical though it be, life grows through dying. The life of the marital journey is no exception.*

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All baptismal life, then, is meant to be an ongoing process in which we daily die further to that which is sin and darkness in us in order to live more fully in the grace-filled life and light of Christ. Since, as we have seen earlier in this paper, the call to sacramental marriage is rooted in our baptism, we probe here some of the unique ways in which we are challenged to participate in the

dying and rising of Christ precisely in terms of the commitment to create together an intimate partnership of life and love that sacramentalizes Christ's self-giving presence and love of us.

The decision a couple make to get married involves dying to living as a single, independent individual, dying to all other possible marriages, and placing the spousal relationship before all others. This frees them to give of themselves to each other without reservation, and to make their marriage their highest priority.

In the immediate preparation for marriage, the couple must face themselves and their relationship and dispel any misconceptions they might have about marriage and what they are each bringing to the wedding ceremony. This process can be painful but serves as an essential foundation for a truthful lasting relationship. In her book, *Lies at the Altar*, Dr. Robin Smith describes at length what she considers "ten top lies" that couples often bring into a marriage, and "ten top truths" that give the death to those lies.<sup>3</sup>

As those early months of marriage are experienced, we are challenged to put aside any illusions we may still have that we can be the "perfect couple," and that all should be "marital bliss," free of any hurts and flaws. We must grow up to accept what is good in each other, improve in one another what we can, and accommodate to the imperfections that can never completely go away. We also need to correct the misconception that one person's efforts can make up for the other's lack of resolve. It takes two, putting their best foot forward, to make this dance go.

Another step in the process of dying to self in order to live for others takes place when children, by birth or adoption, enter the family scene. The two must grow from being just a married couple to also becoming co-parents. Patterns of living that they had gotten accustomed to when it was just the two of them must give way to a significant

loss of privacy, free time, and control over one's schedule. Chores must be realigned to make for a fair distribution of responsibilities.

In these early years of marriage and in the many years of parenting, one of the major inclinations we need to die to is trying to make our spouse and our children into our own image and likeness and into what we think they ought to become. Rather, we ought to help them discover who it is God is calling them to be, and affirm and support that vision and dream.<sup>4</sup> It's a death, in other words, to a possessive, controlling kind of "love," and a conversion to an authentic life-giving love.

This dying and rising is illustrated quite poignantly in a story told by the late Indian Jesuit Anthony De Mello. After the birth of his first child, the Master was asked, "What do you want him to be when he grows up?" "Outrageously happy," the Master replied. This attitude involves a real "letting go," but underscores what true love really desires for others; namely, that, in the words of Jesus, their "joy be complete" (John 15:11; see also 16:24).

As the years of marriage continue to pass by, the couple must resist falling into the temptation of settling into a monotonous routine that takes each other for granted, and that puts their relationship on hold while they become increasingly involved with making a living and providing for their children. They must die to such inertia, and continue to become more personally, emotionally, and romantically present to each other. Marital intimacy either grows or fades!

The paschal mystery is embraced further as the couple face the empty nest, and confront the adjustments required in the post-retirement stage and in the ongoing process of aging. If their marital union has deepened throughout the years, they will be able to discover new ways of expressing their love for one another, and their



service to the broader community.

Paradoxical though it be, life grows through dying. The life of the marital journey is no exception. It is by embracing the many dyings along the way that our marriage becomes more filled with life and more life-giving to others. And the seeming end of the earthly marital journey finally gives way to that toward which it was ever intended to lead, the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb where all love in this life is brought to new fulfillment forever (see Revelation 19:7-9; also Matthew 22:1, ff.).

### Endnotes

1 *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), #s 39, 40.

2 *Lumen Gentium*, # 41. All translations of Vatican II texts are taken from Austin Flannery, O.P., General Editor, Vatican Council II (Northport, N.Y., Costello Publishing Co., 1996).

3 Robin L. Smith, *Lies at the Altar: The Truth About Great Marriages* (New York: Hyperion, 2006). Smith makes another significant contribution in this book by taking four of the phrases in one of the popular marriage formulas (for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part) and explaining at some length how little most people understand all that is truly implied in these words (chapters 5, 6, 7, 8). I highly recommend a serious study of this book for all who are contemplating marriage, as well as for those who are involved in preparing them.

4 This can prove to be a particularly difficult challenge as children wend their way through the complexity and ambivalence of early and late adolescence, and as they later grow into early adulthood. There can be a thin line between parental guidance and encouragement on the one hand, and, on the other hand, taking control of their lives and making decisions for them.

5 Anthony De Mello, *More One Minute Nonsense* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), p. 14.

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# Living the Dream

DAVID MATZKO MCCARTHY

There are many challenges for Catholics in celebrating and sustaining marriage in our time. I would like to focus on one: the widening gap between celebrating marriage and sustaining it, or in less positive terms, between idealizing and practicing it. Marriage continues to be celebrated as an ideal in American culture, but it is not sustained as a practical necessity for attaining the goods of life that are traditionally connected to marriage. Sexual relations, interpersonal intimacy, sharing and maintaining a household (interpersonally and financially), and having children are now not only independent of marriage, but also independent of each other. Marriage has shifted, from a context through which these goods develop as a whole way of life, to an ideal—a sign of achievement—when these independent goods of sex, personal intimacy, household maintenance, and parenting are attained separately and then brought together as a whole for about seven years (the national average). According to the predominant view in our culture, marriage is an ideal that marks an endpoint of personal achievement rather than a social form through which a couple begin a course of life.

This contrast between “endpoint of achievement” and “starting point for a course of life” is not controversial (as far as I can tell) among sociologists of marriage and family, and it fits with various contemporary phenomena like the fact that the majority of couples that decide to be married are already living together, that cohabiting couples—when they marry—are more likely to divorce, and that marriage is less likely the lower one’s income and job security.<sup>1</sup> For example, a team of sociologists studied the decline of marriage among poor unmarried parents, and it found that marriage continues to be an ideal.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the researchers claim that the ideal of marriage and the standards for *thinking* about getting married are higher than decades ago, precisely because marriage is disconnected from having children and living together.<sup>3</sup> A higher quality of relationship and more stable financial assets (including a modest home and the ability to pay for a

“decent” wedding) are not things that are thought to be attained during the course of a marriage, but prerequisites for marriage.<sup>4</sup>

A recent study of the relationship between cohabitation and marriage puts this practical shift in terms of how a relationship is supposed to change once a couple is married.<sup>5</sup> Not long ago, conventional wisdom held that cohabitating couples were likely to marry because they thought marriage would “change their lives.” Through vows and a public ceremony, it was assumed that the couple would hope to move the relationship to a “higher level” of trust and commitment. The latest studies, in contrast, “suggest that cohabitators believe marriage should occur once something has already changed” in terms of financial assets and relationship quality.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Cherlin (a sociologist at Johns Hopkins) argues that this decline of the practical necessity of marriage can be called its “de-institutionalization.”<sup>7</sup> Marriage is no longer a social context that defines one’s social contributions and personal life course; instead, in broad cultural terms, it is a symbolic marker of prestige. “Marriage is a status one builds up to, often by living with a partner beforehand, by attaining steady employment or starting a career, by putting away some savings, and even by having children.”<sup>8</sup>

### Meeting the Challenge

Given the failure of the modern “relationship” to sustain marriage, meeting the challenge of deinstitutionalization requires that we find a way to draw back from idealizing the interpersonal union and to enhance the institutional and social roles of the household. The task will be difficult if, indeed, modern marriage is being eroded by the contemporary understand of marriage as an ideal and achievement. An image used by Willard Quine (a different matter) comes to mind: “If we are to rebuild it, we must rebuild plank by plank while staying afloat in it.”<sup>9</sup> The Catholic tradition is well suited to attending to the institutional nature of the home, insofar as family plays a fundamental role in Catholic social teaching. Drawing back from the interpersonal ideal may be a

bit more difficult to imagine. This difficulty can be attributed, in large part, to the de-institutionalization of home (following the analysis above). However, the idealization of the interpersonal relationship is connected also, ironically, to the social role of family.

*Gaudium et spes*, for example, repeatedly appeals to love to counterbalance materialist and individualist trends.<sup>10</sup> In the face of modern technology and social change, proper “socialization” is defined as “personalization” (no. 6). Love is a central idea. The human intellect is marked by “a quest and love for what is true and good” (no. 15); conscience is a “summoning...to love good and avoid evil” (no. 16), and the social order, when directed to the common good, is “animated by love” (no. 26). This first part of the document begins with an assertion that the human being is social by nature, and the basis for this claim is Genesis 1:27. “But God did not create man as a solitary. For from the beginning, ‘male and female he created them’” (no. 12).

Could it be that we will do our best work to restore marriage by drawing back from a focus of companionate love and its role in “socializing” society? I do not mean that we should minimize either the goods of nuptial union or family as a “social body.” Rather, these goods may have to be de-centered, removed from the center point of marriage, not for the sake of some other center point, but for the sake of a web of social institutions and reciprocal relationships of which marriage and family can be a vital part. In short, the best way to re-institutionalize marriage may be to focus on other subsidiary institutions and social networks which provide a rich environment for families to flourish. When networks of families flourish, marriage may follow. We have to find a way to free marriage from the burden of starting “family” from scratch. To return to the plank and boat analogy from the beginning of this section, the problem may be that we are conceiving of marriage as its own interpersonal boat. Once moored to rich neighborhood and parish networks, we may be able to rebuild it plank by plank because it will be interdependent and given a

# Living the Dream

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good bit of support in staying afloat.

Too often, we think about the household as simply a unit of consumption. But even in our post-industrial age, the household has a natural economy. Food acquisition, storage, and preparation, cleaning clothes, house and yard cleaning and maintenance, childcare and education, the basics of health care (well care), leisure pursuits (as forms of culture), and the need for social embeddedness and common endeavors are all basic practices of family.<sup>11</sup> On one hand, these practices are often considered the purview of isolated, autonomous families; on the other hand, every one of these activities can be purchased on the market and not developed within family. Apart from these two poles, we might begin to think of the practical matters of marriage and family in terms of neighborhood and parish networks. We should think of our local networks, not in terms of volunteer work and charity, but as common activities directed to common goods. Catholic Charities at the diocesan level, with its array of social networks and attention to the needs of households, might be the place to start. With meal services to the elderly, food banks, and assistance and development programs for at-risk children and families, we are not far from food and childcare cooperatives. We just need to get beyond the idea that healthy families do not need social and economic cooperation. Parish and neighborhood "social services" should be considered part of what makes all marriages and families work. The point is to think about marriage in terms of intermediate (subsidiary) institutions that enrich marriage and family life—in a social and economic setting that otherwise leaves marriages "isolated and defenseless."<sup>12</sup>

In short, the divisions of space and time in contemporary life are working against marriage and family, and to sustain and enrich the household, we are undertaking the work, in general, of creating social time and space. The "re-institutionalization" of marriage corresponds to developing a greater sense of social participation in our lives as a whole. In our culture, speaking broadly, marriage no longer is

seen as the setting where the traditional goods of marriage are achieved. Rather, it is considered an end point, subsequent to developing a passionate and intimate relationship, maintaining a home, and, often enough, raising children. The idealization of marriage as a version of the "pure relationship" seems to parallel its de-institutionalization, and typically, the pure relationship cannot sustain the steadfast love and mutual care that we associate with marriage.

As we Catholics tell the story of marriage, we are fully aware that sex and sentimental companionship will not sustain a marriage. We tell the story of the movement from romance to disillusionment to mature love, and from practical negotiations of the newly mar-

ried, to the middle years of active parenting, to the later years of the empty nest.<sup>13</sup> We know that the challenges of every stage of marriage are practical. Note the description of the disillusionment stage from the USCCB's Web Site [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org).

your spouse. You wonder where the romantic feelings of earlier days went. Life might be OK. Nothing tragic or earth-shattering has happened, but it all just seems dull or boring. Is this all that marriage is supposed to be?<sup>14</sup>

To meet this challenge (as well as challenges of other stages), the couple is advised (in ways appropriate to the severity of the problem) to join together in common work on their interpersonal relationship. Unquestionably, the advice is sound. However, it is not the whole story. The most life-giving marriages may be among couples who are able to live outside of themselves, who shift the enormous interpersonal weight of marriage on to the social side of their shared life. They might even shift interpersonal

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*The most life giving marriages may be among couples who are able to live outside of themselves, who shift the enormous interpersonal weight of marriage on to the social side of their shared life.*

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burdens on to other friends. In doing so, they may be able to see the relative insignificance of annoying habits, feel less pressure to live a romantic home life, or require less of their very ordinary sexual relationship. By investing in neighborhood and parish, they may not only enrich the common good and other families, but their own marriages as well. In short, we might close the gap between the ideal of marriage and its practical insignificance by understanding marriage not as a "pure relationship," but as a social space for working out a practical ideal.

## Endnotes

1 Galena Kline Rhoades, Scott M. Stanley, Howard J. Markman, "Pre-engagement Cohabitation and Gender Asymmetry in Marital Commitment," *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 20, no. 4 (December 2006), 553-560.

2 Kathryn Edin, Maria J. Kefalas, Joanna M. Reed, "A Peek Inside the Black Box: What Marriage Means for Poor Unmarried Parents," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 66, no. 4 (November 2004), 1007-14.

3 Edin et al., 1011.

4 Edin et al., 1012.

5 Pamela J. Smock, Wendy D. Manning, Meredith Porter, "Everything's There Except Money": How Money Shapes Decisions to Marry Among Cohabitors," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 67, no. 3 (August 2005), 680-96.

6 Smock et al., 680.

7 Andrew J. Cherlin, "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 66, no. 4 (November 2004), 848-61.

8 Cherlin, 855.

9 Willard van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* (MIT, Press 1960), 3.

10 *Gaudium et spes* in O'Brien and Shannon, 164-237.

11 I drew up this list by looking at John XXIII's section on human rights and duties, *Pacem in terris*, nos. 8-38.

12 To keep the analogy of subsidiarity going, I am echoing Leo XIII on the plight of the worker in *Rerum novarum*, no. 2 (O'Brien and Shannon, 14-39).

13 "Stages of Marriage," <[http://www.foryourmarriage.org/interior\\_template.asp?id=20398766](http://www.foryourmarriage.org/interior_template.asp?id=20398766)>.

14 "Bumps in the Road: Disillusionment," <[http://www.foryourmarriage.org/interior\\_template.asp?id=20398773](http://www.foryourmarriage.org/interior_template.asp?id=20398773)>.

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# Strengthening the Marriages of Interchurch Couples

BY LEE WILLIAMS

A key developmental task that interchurch couples face is to transition from having two independent religious/spiritual lives to creating a shared religious/spiritual bond. This is a task that all couples must proceed through, but this task can be more difficult for interchurch couples because they generally have greater religious differences. The couple's marriage will hopefully become a catalyst for the couple to form a joint religious/spiritual bond. This bond, in turn, can help sustain and strengthen the couple's marriage. The couple's religious/spiritual bond can become a conduit for God's grace and love. For a couple to create this shared reli-

gious/spiritual bond, the couple must engage in several processes, which have been labeled as the 4 Ds.

The first two Ds are discovery and dialogue. Discovery, in part, refers to each individual learning more about his or her partner's religious and spiritual faith. Discovery means examining not only ways in which both partners have religious differences, but also examining what they share in common. With regards to learning more about one's partner, discovery is not possible without dialogue. Yet, that dialogue can also bring into focus an individual's own beliefs through comparison and contrast. Thus, it is important to emphasize that learning about one's own faith or religious

tradition may be part of the discovery process. Dialogue (rather than debate) can create intimacy for couples as they learn more about each other.

The second two Ds are discernment and decision-making. Interchurch couples face many important decisions as a couple. For example, should the couple remain interchurch, each faithful to their own religious affiliation? Or, should one or both change religious affiliation so the couple can worship within the same church or denomination? How will they build a joint religious/spiritual bond? How will the couple manage the religious upbringing of children? Individuals must discern what their needs, beliefs, and desires are on these issues. Col-

lectively, the couple must also discern what is best for their marriage and family. Finally, the couple must ultimately decide how to put into action what they believe to be the best possible course. If successful in all 4 Ds, the couple will have formed a strong religious and spiritual bond that can strengthen and nurture the individuals and their marriage.

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## Marriage and Family Ministry Among Hispanic and Latino Catholics

BY ALEJANDRO AGUILERA-TITUS

The strength of Hispanic marriages and families is rooted in a profoundly Catholic culture that can thrive even in the most difficult of situations. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that out of the 9.9 million Hispanic families residing in the United States, 67% consist of a married couple and 44% of a married couple with children under age 18. On the same note, 66% of Hispanic children live with two married parents (2007). These percentages are significantly higher than the median average for families as a whole in this country. However, this relative "success rate" should not be taken for granted. Hispanic couples and families are not immune to the many societal factors that erode marriage and family life today. Moreover, many Hispanic families have to face the direct impact of forced emigration from their native countries that leaves spouses and entire families divided by borders. They suffer further division

under a broken immigration system that not only hinders their efforts for reunification but also separates spouses, and children from their parents due to deportations oftentimes done without regard for family life or human dignity. Newspapers are filled with stories of children getting home from school to find out that one or both of their parents have been taken into custody for alleged lack of documentation to reside or work in the United States.

The social sciences tell us that the main responsibility of parents is to protect and provide for their children, and to empower them into a positive relationship with the institutions of the society in which they live. But what happens when parents don't know how to relate to these institutions or even worse are afraid of them?

Being a new immigrant couple and parents can be extremely difficult and even painful. Stories abound of Hispanic parents agonizing as they see their children slip away from their arms into a

world that they don't understand, a culture that more often than not tells new immigrants that they don't belong, that they just aren't good enough. One can only imagine how frustrating it is for new immigrant parents, regardless of where they come from, not to be able to advocate for their children at schools, at a doctor's visit, or in the local sports league. Even more dramatic is for parents to depend on their children as translators at stores, government agencies, and schools. Such disadvantages keep Hispanic parents from being perceived by their children as role models on how to be a spouse or a parent. This frustration can also exist between spouses as one of them may be more bilingual and better acculturated in U.S. society, thus adding a layer of dependency on the other.

New immigrants wanting to get married also face major challenges. Depending on their immigration status, their knowledge of English, and their degree of mistrust in the government, these couples

may look at the road leading to marriage as an endless obstacle course, filled with signs warning: deportation, harassment, and waste of time and money. New immigrant couples wanting to get married in the Church face even more challenges. Getting a copy of their baptismal certificate from the parish in their small town somewhere in Southern Guatemala or Ecuador is not an easy task. Dealing with issues of previous marriages and annulments are even harder to resolve, particularly in parishes without a Spanish-speaking priest.

### The Church Making a Difference in Healthy Hispanic Marriages

The support Hispanic couples find in their parishes and other faith-based communities can be the key to a solid marriage, and a healthy family. Studies show that Hispanic families with strong ties to their faith community are more likely to achieve a higher level of education, as well as economic and social success.

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How can the Church provide a healthy environment and a sense of community for Hispanic couples and families growing up in culturally diverse parishes today and in the future?

The answer to this question is not only found in what we do, but in who we are, and how we interact with one another. In the document *Encuentro & Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* (2002), the U.S. Bishops articulate a pastoral response calling for Hispanics and all ministers to be bridges for people, to be faithful to the message of Christ and to the people they are called to serve on his behalf, and to be mindful that how we do things is as important as what we do.

First, priests and lay ecclesial ministers need to become more aware and committed to the call to welcome Hispanics, embrace them, and journey with them, leaving behind the “we-they” language and moving into the “all-of-us-together” language. We must make the Church the home and the school of communion (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 43).

Second, what we do as Catholic ministers should be rooted in the double commitment we have to the message of Christ and to the people with whom we live and minister. This requires solid knowledge of Christ and his message, as well as interpersonal knowledge of Hispanics in our parish and the cultural, religious, social, and economic context in which they live. Such knowledge is born from our efforts to be good listeners, sensitive and authentically interested in people’s lives, needs, aspirations and ideas.

Third, ordained and lay ministers need to be effective communicators of the message of Christ among people who speak Spanish and have a particular culture and way of doing things. This includes understanding how Hispanics make decisions, how they learn, how they organize and come together with other groups. Such awareness and commitment help us welcome and empower them to develop and exercise their leadership.

Alejandro Aguilera-Titus is the Interim Executive Director of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

# Catholic Marriage Ministry with African Americans

BY ANDREW LYKE

## My Personal Journey

I am currently the Coordinator of Marriage Ministry in the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. My employment began in 1999 but my service to the Church through the Family Ministries Office extends back to 1981, when Terri, my wife of then six years, and I, with a team of couples and clergy, initiated PreCana for the African-American community. This program was the first diocesan marriage preparation program by and for African Americans.

Ancillary to this work was our ongoing effort to promote Marriage Encounter in the African-American community. We had attended a Marriage Encounter weekend retreat in 1978 and found it to be transformative to our marriage and our faith life. That initial experience and the subsequent ongoing formation in the form of monthly sharing groups were socially and culturally challenging. And we grew significantly from it. Facing those challenges were part of an enculturation and assimilation process that had begun for us individually through school and work experiences. Our collective enculturation and assimilation into the “mainstream” had picked up momentum with our moving from Chicago’s Southside to suburbia in 1977 in our second year of marriage. The subsequent experiences with Marriage Encounter were part of our “suburbanization” in the early years of our marriage. Our efforts to proliferate the profundity of our Marriage Encounter experience among African Americans were done with naiveté and a surety that other African Americans would find the same magic we had found. Such surety came from other African-American married couples who joined us in that effort, few though they were, who acted from a similar naiveté.

In the 1980s, Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) experimented with the short-lived African-American Expression weekend under the leadership of Ken and Gretchen Lovingood of Santa Barbara, California. Terri and I were privileged to be a part of its maiden voyage in

Los Angeles. We also assisted in bringing the program to Chicago.

Despite the rubrics as designed by WWME to ensure a qualitative marriage enrichment experience, we observed dynamics among the African-American couples that were beyond what we had experienced with the “standard” Marriage Encounter. The prescription against couple-to-couple interactions and the stressing of intra couple dialogue seemed naturally violated by the African-American couples. And rather than it diminishing the marriage enrichment experience, our breaking of the rules enhanced it. Loyal to a fault, our assessment of this phenomenon was to imagine how even more powerful the experience could have been if we had stayed within the rubrics.

It was after getting consistent feedback from African-American couples who were persuaded by us and others to attend standard weekends (Worldwide, National, and Joliet Marriage Encounters) that we began to rethink our roles as promoters of Marriage Encounter in the African-American community. Feedback suggested that the experience was stifling, that it was “too white,” and that they didn’t relate to middle-class, white, suburban mindset upon which the teams’ heartfelt testimonies were based.

However, it was our participation in a monthly “community” group of “encountered” African-American couples that gave clarity to the couple-to-couple dynamics we experienced with other African-American couples. The prayerfulness and playfulness within the group, the importance of music and inter-couple dialogue, and the facilitation that flows with the energy of the group rather than the structure of an outline all had us consider what Marriage Encounter would be like if it were designed with African-American proclivities in mind.

In the mid-1980s, Terri and I were invited to address the governing board of WWME to report our experiences as promoters of Marriage Encounter among African Americans and make recommendations for future actions. We shared with them our frustrations and suggested that

they “tear up the outline” and create a process with African Americans in mind. We discovered quickly that our suggestions were tantamount to blasphemy and we were abruptly asked to leave. This was a moment of liberation for us. We no longer felt obliged to work within the Marriage Encounter structure. With the encouragement of the priests with whom we had collaborated, i.e., Father Larry Duris, Father Wilton Gregory, Father Tom McQuaid, and my uncle, Bishop Jim Lyke, and with the assistance of our marriage ministry team, John and Pam Ashford, Martin and Pat Redd, Leonard and Beverly Richardson, Martin and Helen Dumas, and Maurice and Dorothy Carter, we designed marriage enrichment programs for the African-American Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The earliest programs were titled “The Best Is Yet To Come” and included elements borrowed from Marriage Encounter, but stressed intercouple sharing and included well-prepared prayer services and rich, prayerful music.

In 1993 we inaugurated Arusi, a marriage-enrichment retreat that incorporates African-American cultural elements, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a group of African-American married couples. We had refined the design of the program to include principles for facilitating, which include the principle of process over content. The process was the gathering of the couples, the respectful listening and sharing, table discussions during meals, and our openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst. The content was the program outline, timeframes, and the structured aspects of group sharing. The principle demands that when there is a clash between the two, we should always let the process win. An important element of the program was reconciliation as an ongoing process in marriage as a means of restoring the relationship—restoration from major breaches, certainly, but also forgiveness for our not meeting the original promise of the earlier marriage and expanding ourselves to make room for our flaws and to live well with them. Fifteen years later we are still conducting Arusi, which means “marriage celebration” in Kiswahili, in dioceses around the country.

While the Arusi model has proven to be effective with African Americans, we have found it very effective with other cultures. In January 2007, we presented it for several white couples for a parish in Libertyville, Illinois. Most recently, on September 14-16 in Beaumont, Texas, six white couples were among a group of nineteen couples who attended an Arusi. For whites, Arusi is not only effective marriage enrichment, it is also culturally enriching.

Despite our being convinced that our approach to marriage enrichment with African Americans is better than Marriage Encounter's, we don't claim to have a formula to absolute knowledge on the matter. I am reminded of what Jacob Bronowski said in *The Ascent of Man*: "There is no absolute knowledge, and those who claim it, whether they are scientists or dogmatists, open the door to tragedy."<sup>2</sup>

### Our Spirituality and Its Gifts

Below is an excerpt from the 1984

pastoral letter on Evangelization by the then ten African-American Catholic bishops, *What We Have Seen and Heard*:

The heart of the human community is the family and the black family has been assailed. In the African tradition, family has always meant "the extended family"—grandparents, uncles, aunts, godparents, all related kin and close friends. Circumstances often required childcare to be the responsibility of many. Despite the erosion of our family life, we as a people still have a strong sense of family bonds. This carries over to our Church, where we see ourselves as brothers and sisters to one another.<sup>3</sup>

The bishops express well the gifts from the African-American community available to the Catholic Church. The mutual gifts of Church and community make for "good church" and a wealth of opportunities to strengthen families.

Part of the richness in being Catholic is universal membership that gives "ownership" beyond our local experience. For me, this as an invitation to reach beyond myself, beyond my culture, and even beyond my own traditions to at the very least acknowledge my brothers and sisters who are strangers, and perhaps be enriched by their culture and traditions. It invites me to be a gracious host in reaching out to others. It encourages me to risk being the stranger and be open to learning from others.

It is from this stance that Catholic marriage ministry will find its place with African Americans. From this stance, the systemic impediments for such ministry will organically crumble. The frightening downward spiral of marriage among African Americans indicates a state of crisis that demands Catholic Family Life ministers and Offices of Black Ministry to take action to transform those structures and collaborate for the sake of all of the People of God, for whom it is our privilege to serve.

Because we are an evangelizing church, we need to always reach out to the margins. Adapting our work to be effective on the margins will strengthen it and make us more authentic as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Amen!

### Endnotes

1 Process over content is a concept I learned in a class taught by John Roberto as part of a Certificate in Family Ministry program at Loyola University-Institute of Pastoral Studies in Chicago in the early 1990s.

2 Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1974.

3 Black Bishops of the United States. *What We Have Seen and Heard*. USCCB, 1984.

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## Marriage in Asian-American Families

BY JONATHAN Y. TAN

Across diverse Asian-American racial ethnic communities, marriage is often perceived as the cornerstone of families and communities, especially in the eyes of first-generation Asian Americans. In their eyes, marriage confers the sociocultural identity of adulthood on their children. To put it another way, one is not an adult until one is married. As a result, married persons are more highly regarded and respected than their unmarried counterparts. In particular, unmarried persons are not only viewed as children despite their age and personal accomplishments, they are often nagged by their families about when they are going to get married. Not surprisingly, many first-generation Asian-American parents often put an inordinate pressure on their children to get married. As a result, marriage often generates a great deal of intergenerational stress and conflict among Asian American families, especially when families intervene by demanding the right to arrange their children's marriages.

American parents often put inordinate pressure on their children to get married. As a result, marriage often generates a great deal of intergenerational stress and conflict among Asian-American families, especially when families intervene by demanding the right to arrange their children's marriages.

Asian-American families are multi-generational, and parents often expect to live with their children. What outsiders often do not realize is that this arrangement frequently adds an inordinate burden to a marriage, especially when the parents intervene in family matters. Indeed, tales of overbearing mothers-in-law, timid and cowering adult sons who find themselves powerless to define their own identity apart from their parents, as well as spouses who clash with their live-in-in-laws are common fodder in Asian and Asian-American popular literature, movies, soap operas, and television sitcoms.

More importantly, in the minds of first-generation Asian Americans across the board, marriage is more than an individual choice between two con-

senting adults in love with each other. Instead, first-generation Asian Americans often perceive marriage as a fundamental means of ensuring the survival and continuation of a kin, clan, group, or family name. To put it another way, when two Asian Americans get married, the reality is that their two families or clans are getting married too. Many Asian-American racial ethnic groups celebrate this marriage between two families, groups, or clans with elaborate engagement rituals that comprise formal betrothal announcements, presentation of dowry, and gift exchanges. Hence, the typical prevailing attitude among many first-generation Asian Americans is that one loves the person that one marries, and not marry the person one loves.

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# Sustaining Marriage in the Post-Vatican II Catholic Parish

BY JULIE HANLON RUBIO

I am aware of very few Catholic married folks who are slackers; everyone I know is busy. When they meet each other, it is on the sidelines of soccer games, dance classes, and baseball diamonds; working booths at parish festivals; bringing yet another side dish for a school party; on our way out of grocery stores late at night as we run in to buy birthday treats for a child's class; borrowing chairs for an extended family gathering in our home; volunteering at the book fair; chaperoning the field trip; running to parent-teacher conferences; slipping into Home Depot to pick up a forgotten item for a home repair project; gratefully sinking down in the pews at Mass, hoping this time we will not have to struggle with restless children who would rather be elsewhere. And yet most people I encounter acknowledge a yearning for a slower pace, deeper friendships, and more downtime to simply be with their spouses and their children. There is a certain emptiness that is evident amid the fullness of middle class American suburban life, a suspicion that busyness does not allow us to live below the surface, a sense that this life is less than it ought to be. The longer I am married, the more I have come to believe that this emptiness in busyness is paradoxically connected to low expectations for marriage.

Why are most middle class Catholic families unaware of and/or unready to embrace the high expectations of contemporary Catholic theology on marriage? An obvious place to turn is the parish, for if American middle-class culture is at odds with the Catholic vision for families, parishes should be places of refuge where an alternative way of life is nurtured. Two-thirds of all Catholics are registered parishioners and most attend their local parish.<sup>1</sup> Another 16% attend one parish more than any other but are not registered, while only 16% are not affiliated at all.<sup>2</sup> Parishes are the communities that most Catholics call home. They are ideally placed

to form families in Christian family values. However, as much as I want to believe that if the culture is working against marriage, the Church is building it up, I am concerned that this is only rarely the case. In fact, my research on Catholic parishes leads me to believe that most are not supportive of marriage, at least not supportive of the kind of marriage Catholics have been called to live in post-Vatican II context.

I want to argue that if parishes are to sustain marriages that are distinctively Catholic in their striving for communion, and help families overcome the problem of emptiness, they will have to question much that they have taken on as they have traveled from the margins to the center of middle-class American life.

First, parishes should actively encourage upwardly mobile Catholic spouses to critically reflect on the pace of their lives. All who work in home or outside it need space to think about the place of work in their lives. Parents in particular need to be in conversation with other parents about how much activity is too much. If marriages and families are to be sustained, time to be together without hurry is crucial. Communion between the spouses cannot come about when spouses are too busy, both outside the home and in it, to pay attention to the other. Parents and children need to be encouraged to spend time in conversation and play. When children are routinely playing on multiple sports teams each season, when so many suburban streets are empty in the afternoons because activities and homework consume all available free time, churches have a responsibility to help their members let go of certain middle-class assumptions about what makes a good life and remember the virtues of home.

Second, parishes and pastors should be encouraged to develop ties that bond parishioners more closely in community, whether it is local or not. Without strong community, Catholics lack a place to be nourished

and challenged in ways that will help them stand apart from the excesses of American middle-class life. Instead of offering activities that focus on entertainment, parishes might encourage parishioners to share skills, start baby-sitting co-ops, visit the sick or elderly in their own community, mentor young married couples, or start a community garden. My colleague David McCarthy writes that a wedding binds a couple closer together and binds the two more closely together in the Church.<sup>3</sup> How much more should the parish bind couples together and bind them to their friends in Christ? This is not going to happen if parishioners only see each other at St. Patrick's Day dances and parish carnivals. They need ways to serve each other and they need ways to come together around common interests more significant than their own good. Then their sense of communion will grow.

Third, when parishes do ask a lot of parishioners, it should be for worthwhile endeavors. Central to parish life should be the development of small faith-sharing groups where married couples and single parents can reflect on the struggles of marriage, divorce, intermarriage, and parenting. Without such explicit reflection in community, it is unlikely that Christian marriages will look much different from others. Perhaps in the subculture era, such groups were unnecessary because the whole of parish life communicated a distinctive message. Today, when commitments are most diffuse and the culture is in many ways more at odds with Christian life, intentional community building and reflection is more important than ever for sustaining Christian marriages.

Fourth, place opportunities for prayer and service at the center of parish life for families. Parish life before Vatican II included more shared prayer at weekly Masses, daily Mass, holy days, and ethnic celebrations. Groups such as Holy Name Societies, Sodality, Christian Family Movement, Marriage Encounter, and Christian Life Communities that combined spiri-

tual and social fellowship were much more widely supported. Outside of the liturgy, the contemporary context might call for different forms for shared spiritual experience, but it is crucial that they receive more attention than other sorts of activities. Service should share the center of parish life. If parishioners' energies are not tapped out from social activities and sports, they may be more available for service—not just a once or twice a year delivery of food baskets or presents, but ongoing commitments to people in need. The connection between spiritual life and social justice cannot be overestimated. True worship is impossible without a context of care for others, especially the poor, and without consciousness of a community's own poverty. It "emerges out of the conviction of one's own poverty and connectedness to that of others."<sup>4</sup> It is precisely the recognition of human vulnerability that comes to us in service to the marginalized that makes possible spiritual growth of true discipleship. This connection must be taught in parishes and hopefully, brought back into the home.

Finally, the intentional approach to Christian family life that is implicit in my other suggestions only makes sense in a culture in which Christian discipleship is imbued and absorbed. Today, Catholic parishes count on religious-education programs to pass on the faith. However, one hour a week of religious education is far from sufficient if parish culture is not a living embodiment of Christian faith. What a community does with its time, people, and money says who it is. When much of a community's life is lost, catechists bear the burden of passing on the faith without the life. The tradition must be embodied and practiced in a rich variety of ways if it is to shape the marriages of contemporary believers.

This is the most profound challenge parishes face: finding new ways to embody a tradition in which many, if not most, of its families have not been inculturated. If parishes strive to become places of serious trans-

formation, families that spring from Christian marriages will have a fighting chance of becoming what they are called to be.

#### Endnotes

1 Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Catholic Parishes: The Guide to the Best Places and Practices* (New York: Paulist, 2001), xii.

2 James D. Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2005), 15.

3 "Becoming One Flesh: Marriage, Remarriage, and Sex," in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 276.

4 Michael Warren, *Faith, Culture, and the Worshipping Community: Shaping the Practice of the Local Church*, Rev. Ed. (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1993), 66.

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## THE FATHERS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, THE PASTORAL COUNCIL ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD (*GAUDIUM ET SPES*, 1965)

48. The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society, too, is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole. By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Matt. 19:6), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union, they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the

spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.

49. The biblical Word of God several times urges the betrothed and the married to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection. (10) Many men of our own age also highly regard true love between husband and wife as it manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on the worthy customs of various peoples and times.

This love is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will; it involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love God has judged worthy of special gifts—*healing, perfecting, and exalting* gifts of grace and of charity. Such love, merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift providing itself by gentle affection and by deed. Such love pervades the whole of their lives; indeed, by its busy generosity, it grows better and grows greater. Therefore, it far excels mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away.

50. Marriage and conjugal love are

by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day.

Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation, rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple offspring are lacking.

# The Nuptial Meaning of the Body

BY POPE JOHN PAUL II

There is a deep connection between the mystery of creation, as a gift springing from love, and that beatifying "beginning" of the existence of man as male and female, in the whole truth of their body and their sex, which is the pure and simple truth of communion between persons. When the first man exclaimed, at the sight of the woman: "This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23), he merely

affirmed the human identity of both. Exclaiming in this way, he seems to say: here is a *body that expresses the person!*

Following a preceding passage of the Yahwist text, it can also be said that this "body" reveals the "living soul," such as man became when God-Yahweh breathed life into him (cf. Gn 2:7). This resulted in his solitude before all other living beings. By traversing the depth of that original solitude, man now emerged in the dimension of the mutual gift. The expression of that

gift—and for that reason the expression of his existence as a person—is the human body in all the original truth of its masculinity and femininity.

The body which expresses femininity manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons. It expresses it by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body, a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs. Masculinity and feminin-

ity—namely, sex—is the original sign of a creative donation and an awareness on the part of man, male-female, of a gift lived in an original way. Such is the meaning with which sex enters the theology of the body.

That beatifying "beginning" of man's being and existing, as male and female, is connected with the revelation and discovery of the meaning of the body, which can be called "nuptial." If we speak of revelation and at the same time of discovery, we do so in rela-

tion to the specificity of the Yahwist text. In it, the theological thread is also anthropological, appearing as a certain reality consciously lived by man.

We have already observed that the words which express the first joy of man's coming to existence as "male and female" (Gn 2:23) are followed by the verse which establishes their conjugal unity (cf. Gn 2:24). Then follows the verse which testifies to the nakedness of both, without mutual shame (Gn 2:25). This significant confrontation enables us to speak of the revelation and at the same time the discovery of the "nuptial" meaning of the body in the mystery of creation.

This meaning (inasmuch as it is revealed and also conscious, "lived" by man) confirms completely that the creative giving, which springs from Love, has reached the original consciousness of man. It becomes an experience of mutual giving, as can already be seen in the ancient text. That nakedness of both progenitors, free from shame, seems also to bear witness to that—perhaps even specifically.

Genesis 2:24 speaks of the finality of

man's masculinity and femininity, in the life of the spouses-parents. Uniting with each other so closely as to become "one flesh," they will subject their humanity to the blessing of fertility, namely, "procreation," which the first narrative speaks of (cf. Gn 1:28). Man comes "into being" with consciousness of this finality of his own masculinity-femininity, that is, of his own sexuality. At the same time, the words of Genesis 2:25: "They were both naked, and were not ashamed," seem to add to this fundamental truth of the meaning of the human body, of its masculinity and femininity, another no less essential and fundamental truth. Aware of the procreative capacity of his body and of his sexuality, man is at the same time "free from the constraint" of his own body and sex.

That original nakedness, mutual and at the same time not weighed down by shame, expresses this interior freedom of man. Is this what freedom from the "sexual instinct" is? The concept of "instinct" already implies an interior constraint, similar to the instinct that stimulates fertility and procreation in the whole world of living beings (*ani-*

*malia*). It seems, however, that both texts of Genesis, the first and the second narrative of the creation of man, connected sufficiently the perspective of procreation with the fundamental characteristic of human existence in the personal sense. Consequently the analogy of the human body and of sex in relation to the world of animals—which we can call an analogy of nature—is

also raised, in a way, in both narratives (though in a different way in each), to the level of "image of God," and to the level of the person and communion between persons.

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