

COLLEGE TEXTS IN THEOLOGY

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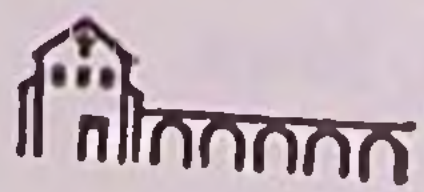


A COLLEGE TEXT IN THEOLOGY

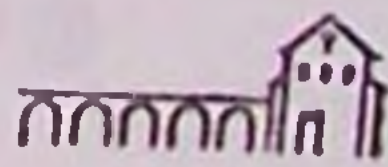
# Toward Marriage in Christ

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*all of the Order of Preachers*

*Third Edition Revised and Edited*  
*by*  
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Toward Marriage in Christ



## Foreword

This new and revised edition of *Toward Marriage in Christ* differs in no essential from the first edition. Nevertheless, five years of use in actual teaching have suggested certain significant changes, generally for pedagogical reasons, which appear to enhance the usefulness of the text, to clarify statements subject to misinterpretation, to augment or supplement or (as in the case of the Bibliography) bring up to date other elements, in an effort to render them all more immediately practical.

For this reason—anticipated and planned by the original authors and editor—the publishers have agreed to produce a new and revised third edition of a work of demonstrated quality and practicality. Basically, however, this is the same book first published in 1957. It is a textbook on marriage designed specifically with college students and college requirements in mind which utilizes a *theological* approach to its subject matter. Sociological and psychological considerations are not excluded, of course; but the scientific method which is used is that proper to theology, and the judgments and conclusions reached are drawn from the principles of that science. At the same time, however, this remains a *college* book, one whose subject-matter, content (both extensive and intensive), approach, pedagogical methods and expository style are deliberately scaled to the abilities, training and interests of the undergraduate and to the requirements of the undergraduate curriculum. And it is a *textbook*, a scientific tool to assist the teacher in imparting the pertinent information and in developing the scientific habits of thought which constitute the learning process for college students.

The substantial revision for this third revised edition were made by one of the original authors, Father Augustine Rock, O.P., of De Paul University, Chicago.



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# Introduction



All reasonable people accept the fact that marriage is important. Most people could give reasons to substantiate the fact. These reasons could be drawn from several areas of human activity. Politics, law, economics, sociology, all afford reasons for the importance accorded to marriage. Yet we may well inquire whether those who agree upon the importance of marriage are able to assign ultimate reasons for its eminence. The reasons drawn from natural sources alone are indeed valid, but they are not ultimate. Marriage is above all a spiritual reality; the radical reasons for its importance must be sought in the revelation made by Almighty God and by Jesus Christ. These most basic reasons are ultimately the province of sacred theology.

Not even the minute regulations governing marriage in canon law will explain the fundamental realities concerning matrimony. As St. Thomas points out, law is an extrinsic principle of human action: it is a guide for acting, not a principle of being. Christian



marriage is a sacrament, a channel of divine grace, and grace is an intrinsic principle of divine life in man. The law must be studied against a background of the theology of marriage if its full meaning is to be grasped. From the law of the Church we receive divine direction; from grace we receive divine assistance which works interiorly to conform men to the image of God, not only in what they do, but also in what they are.

### 1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

It is the purpose of this book to set forth briefly a synthesis of theological and canonical knowledge of marriage, together with certain indications of the psychological, physical and social aspects which are of great importance. These latter aspects will not be treated exhaustively, for such treatment is not within the scope of a work which is basically theological. Many of them are of first moment and usefulness, and their study is of corresponding value. But such knowledge is not indispensable for the college student; a theological knowledge of marriage is.

This synthesis is presented within the framework of the doctrine developed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Since the time he wrote his profound treatise on marriage, there has been a certain amount of theological development and a great deal of canonical change. However, the basic principles remain unchanged, and the framework within which he developed his doctrine is based upon principles so universal that it remains today an ideal reference for the necessary synthesis.

Most professional treatises on marriage are written for the use of the clergy who have the duty of safeguarding the sanctity of this sacrament. Such treatises necessarily contain technical data which is of little value to the laity under ordinary circumstances. The matter presented here will emphasize the lay person's role in marriage. Consequently, many canonical technicalities will be omitted, and others will be abbreviated. On the other hand, the theological consideration of the nature and function of the sacramental grace of marriage will be developed in some detail.



## 2. DIVISION OF THE MATTER

This book is divided into three major parts. The first deals with the theological and canonical aspects of marriage. The second treats of the psychological, intellectual and religious aspects of marriage preparation. The third part makes a full investigation and application of the principles established in the first part, and contains a treatment of marriage that is specifically and distinctively Christian.

The beginning of this entire study is found in the word "marriage." This English word is derived from the Latin *maritare*, which means to marry or to give someone in marriage. Closely related to this is the substantive *maritus*, which is the Latin for husband or married man. Several different words are used to describe the fundamental idea of marriage: matrimony, conjugal union, marriage, marital contract, nuptial union, etc. St. Thomas cites several authors to show that the various terms used express different aspects of the reality itself:

- 1) Referring to its *essence*, it is called conjugal union, because marriage is essentially a uniting of two.
- 2) Referring to its *cause*, it is called the nuptial union, because marriage is caused by the wedding. Our English word "nuptial" comes from the Latin *nubere*, which means "to veil"; the bride is "veiled off" from others than the groom, and thus the wedding is called a "nuptial union."
- 3) Referring to its *effect*, it is called matrimony from the Latin *matris munus*, which means "the duty of motherhood."

The numerous implications contained in these different nominal definitions will be explained throughout this book, the contents of which will be divided according to the outline on the following page.

## 3. WHAT THIS BOOK PROVIDES

What you learned about marriage at home is important. If you were fortunate enough to grow up in a happy, well-run family, you learned a lot about how to build a happy family for yourself. A little



reflection will help you to understand, even better than you now do, the factors that were especially important in making your home life a happy one. Even those factors which made for unhappiness (there are some in every family—this is a vale of tears) can teach you valuable lessons.

Yet you must be careful not to over-emphasize. Often a young person imagines that rectification of what caused trouble in his parents' home is the big thing necessary to achieve an ideal marriage. For example, if money was the cause of quarrels between mother and father, a child sometimes magnifies beyond all reason the importance of the family income. It is important, too, to remember that children often misunderstand the real causes of their parents' disputes. A reasonable approach to the experiences of growing up in a normally happy home is a very valuable beginning to the intellectual preparation necessary to make a success of marriage.

The purpose of this book is to provide the kind of intellectual preparation for marriage that is best obtained by means of a special course in college. Most of it is an orderly presentation of the nature of marriage and the laws of God and the Church which regulate marriage. Part Two, however, is quite different in content and method from the other parts of this book. It is not the purpose of this part to prepare the college student for marriage. Presumably you are preparing to take an active adult role in society and will have something to do with the ideas, laws and customs which will influence society in the years to come, and the purpose of Part Two is to draw attention to the many social factors involved in good marriage preparation. Healthy marriages are the concern of society; you, as a responsible member of society, should understand something of the effects of society, of its ideas, laws and customs, in forming the young to take their place as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers. The material in this section may well be helpful to the solution of your personal problems, but it is primarily intended to contribute to your intellectual development—the first purpose of a college course and a college text. In accomplishing this, it makes no attempt to be an exhaustive treatment of the matters raised. It seeks to suggest and to stimulate your own thinking. Many things mentioned in this section are more



thoroughly considered in other courses; many could be the subject of wide reading and extensive discussion. If their mention here stimulates your research and discussion, Part Two will have served its purpose well.

#### 4. WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

This book is not a "Summa" of happy marriage, nor is it a manual of budget-making, nor a guide to the care and feeding of children. It is not thumb-indexed, ready-answer book to all the problems that can arise in marriage. In it you will not find all you could know, or all that is worth while knowing about the theology and canon law which concerns marriage, but rather all that in normal circumstances you need to know. You will not, however, find out in this book all you need to know about when to tell baby that daddy wears a toupee, what to do about bed-wetting, what discs to play during the evening meal, and how to decorate the Christmas tree. This book counts heavily on the fact that you have enough intelligence to figure some things out for yourself.

A number of things, however, are pointed out about which you can still learn a great deal. Marriage is so intimately involved in the profound mystery of human life that the more wise one becomes the more he understands how little he knows about it. It is a serious disservice to a college student to give the impression that everything one needs to know about marriage can be found within the covers of a book or can be taught in a college course. Many very important and very teachable things are better learned under other circumstances than the college classroom; many other things are best learned by experience. This book seeks to indicate some of the inexhaustible riches of matrimony and some of the numerous facts, ideas, circumstances, skills and insights that can be developed before and during marriage, and that are useful or even necessary to achieve happiness therein.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For an extended discussion of the purpose of a college marriage course see "Theology and the Marriage Course" by Augustine Rock, O.P., in R. R. Masterson, O.P. (Editor), *Theology in the Catholic College* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1961), 289-314.



The Essence of Marriage (Chapter One)  
 The Cause of Marriage, and Its Ends (Chapter Two)  
 The Properties of Marriage (Chapter Three)  
 The Impediments to Marriage (Chapter Four)

Courtship and Its Problems (Chapter Five)  
 Psychological Preparation for Marriage (Chapter Six)  
 Intellectual Preparation for Marriage (Chapter Seven)  
 Personal Considerations (Chapter Eight)  
 Religious Preparation for Marriage (Chapter Nine)

The Obligations of Marriage (Chapter Ten)  
 The Significance of Christian Marriage (Chapter Eleven)  
 Conclusion

PART ONE:  
 Theological and Canonical  
 Aspects of Marriage

PART TWO:  
 Preparation for Marriage

PART THREE:  
 Marriage in Christ

TOWARD  
 MARRIAGE IN CHRIST



PART ONE

Theological and Canonical  
Aspects of Marriage



## Introduction to Part One

What is marriage? This question may seem impertinent to the man in the street—after all, marriage is one of the most familiar, as it is also one of the most ancient, of our social institutions. Doubtless there are innumerable questions about the married state which urgently demand asking and answering, especially in these days of social crisis. But why ask so simple a question, when the answer is as ready to hand for the farmer in the dell as it is for the scholar in his cell?

The reason is this: the most simple question is precisely the very one which strikes at the heart of the matter, and hence the answer to that question will be as full and significant as one's understanding of the reality in question. It is obvious that the man in the street can give some sort of answer to our question; a fuller appreciation might be expected from the married couple who have thought seriously and intelligently about their life together. At a more scientific level these "common sense" replies may be refined and made more precise by the social and behavioral sciences—sociology, anthropology,



history and the like. It is clear, at any rate, that the knowledge and understanding of so fundamental and essential a reality, one of such vast consequence and significance for the individual and for society, must be of a higher order (because it is deeper and more penetrating and more complete) than that acquired by casual acquaintance or incidental reflection. And it is further clear that higher education must endeavor to provide this deeper and fuller knowledge.

### 1. THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

That is why this book, and in particular this part of the book, is of such great importance. For there is an attempt to give a theological answer to the most basic question of all about marriage: what is it? And theology, you will recall, is, of all the sciences, the one which deals with ultimate answers—not just the surface appearance of things, not their peripheral and phenomenological aspects, but the innermost essences of reality are the concern and the ground of this science. Like philosophy it deals not only with effects but with the causes, and the ultimate causes, of those effects; it seeks to know not only that a thing exists, but *why* it exists, and *what* makes it the kind of thing it is, and *how* it is brought into being. But theology can offer even more satisfactory answers than those given by philosophy, for it is not dependent on human reason alone (although it will utilize all the resources of human reason and all the scientific information human reason can furnish), but bases its findings and answers on revelation, on what God himself has told us about reality. And from these ultimate discoveries and determinations it then proceeds to give us practical conclusions concerning the way we should live our lives, and the part the realities it investigates should play in those lives, in order that we may attain our eternal destiny.

What is marriage? The answer must take cognizance of the fact that marriage is far more than a natural social phenomenon, like civil governments or fraternal organizations; marriage is a supernatural reality as well, a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ as a remedy for sin and a source of grace, a sanctifying sign which is sacred and holy. And the ultimate answer with respect to this double-visaged reality



will result from a full investigation of ultimate facts concerning it—that is to say, of the causes which make it what it is, which bring it into existence, and which show where it is headed and why.

## 2. THE DIVISION OF THIS PART

From what has been said, the subjects which will be treated in this part of our consideration of marriage, as well as the order in which they will be taken up, can be deduced. In Chapter One the *essence* of marriage will be investigated through an analysis of the inner intrinsic causes which make it the unique (and wonderful) thing it is. Chapter Two will discuss extrinsic causes—that is, what bring it into existence (*efficient* cause), and the purpose for which it exists (*final* cause). Having thus determined in the fullest and deepest sense just what sort of thing marriage is, we shall next investigate (in Chapter Three) the typical characteristics which it manifests, the accidental but necessary notes which are its hallmark: its *properties*. Finally, this part of our theological consideration of marriage will conclude with a study of the impediments to marriage (which prevent marriage from taking place, either validly or legitimately) and of the necessary form to be followed in the celebration of marriage (Chapter Four).

Thus Part One, *The Theological and Canonical Aspects of Marriage*, will be developed according to the following outline:

Marriage	Its essence	Its intrinsic causes—Chapter One: The Essence of Marriage
		Its extrinsic causes—Chapter Two: The Cause of Marriage, and Its Ends
	Its properties—Chapter Three: The Properties of Marriage	
	Its impediments—Chapter Four: The Impediments to Marriage	



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Essence of Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

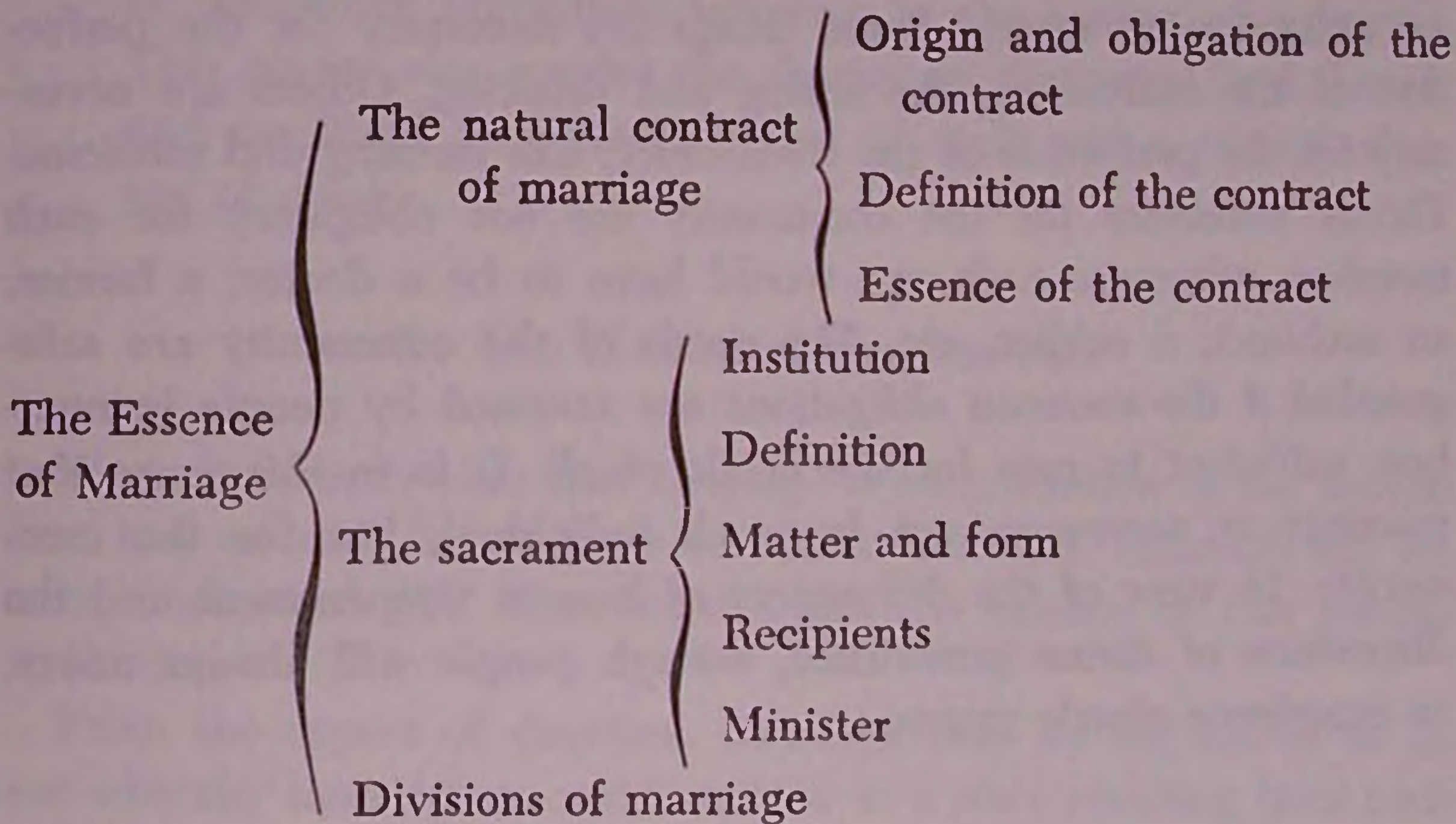
Essence is the root both of identity and of difference. To know the essence of anything is to know both what it is, and what it is not; to know how to identify what is known and how to distinguish it from everything else. It is vitally important for Christians to know the essence of marriage, because marriage plays a uniquely decisive role in the lives of most of them. Yet the task is not easy, for marriage is an extremely complex matter involving not only a host of natural elements, but also the operations of divine grace.

The ability to know marriage, to know it for what it is and to be able to distinguish it from counterfeits, is essential equipment for those who hope to find their happiness in this way of life and for all who share responsibility for the preservation and welfare of society. It is true that knowledge alone cannot guarantee happiness; it is equally true that without knowledge happiness results only from a very lucky blunder. All the good intentions in the world cannot substitute for knowledge.



It is the purpose of this initial chapter to unfold the essential doctrine on the essence of marriage. This is not done by collecting the opinions of men, but chiefly by attending to the unmistakable authority of Christ's Church speaking authoritatively. The basic teachings of the Church are interpreted by her theologians, and with particular clarity by St. Thomas Aquinas, whose teachings are here presented in summary fashion.

To understand the essence of matrimony, it is necessary first to investigate the natural contract of marriage, for it is from this natural contract that the sacrament was instituted by Christ. Then it is necessary to learn of the sacrament itself, the channel of grace which Christ made out of the natural institution of marriage. Finally, it is useful to learn the precise meaning of certain terms which are used to express accurately the notions of marriage which will be discussed throughout this book. To accomplish these ends, the material of this first chapter will be developed according to the following outline:



## 2. THE NATURAL CONTRACT OF MARRIAGE

### A. The Origin and Obligation of the Contract

The natural contract of marriage is an institution of the natural law, not in the sense that it is natural for heavy objects to fall to



the ground, but rather in the sense that nature inclines men to marry, in the same way that they are inclined to be virtuous. This inclination is subject to the dominion of man's free will. Man receives existence, nourishment and education from his parents. Now more than any other, requires long years of care and training. Nature inclines humans not only to beget children, but also to care for them until they are self-sufficient. The fulfillment of this inclination and of these needs demands that the child have definite parents who remain together in order to care for him.

Furthermore, the care of a family requires a wide diversity of work. Some of this is suitable to men and some to women. Thus again nature inclines men and women to marriage in virtue of their separate capacities and their mutual needs.

The natural inclination to marry must indeed be fulfilled, for nature does nothing in vain. Does that mean that each human has an obligation to marry? Some things are necessary for the perfection of the individual, like eating and drinking. Others are necessary for the perfection of the community, like farming and medicine. Things necessary for the community are not obligatory for each member; otherwise each one would have to be a doctor, a farmer, an architect, a soldier, etc. The needs of the community are safeguarded if the common obligations are assumed by people in numbers sufficient to care for the needs of all. It is in this sense that marriage is necessary; not for each individual, but for the community. In view of the differences of human temperament and the disposition of divine providence, enough people will always marry, as experience clearly proves.

#### B. The Definition of the Contract

Two distinguishable realities are connoted by the term "marriage," for it is both a contract in the natural order and a sacrament of divine institution. It is with the first of these that we are concerned here.



Peter Lombard's definition of the marriage contract is classical:  
*Marriage is the marital union of a legally competent man and woman involving the undivided sharing of a common life.*

The various elements contained in this definition of the marriage contract are explained as follows:

- 1) It is a union of man and woman, indicating the essence of marriage, which is the uniting of one man with one woman.
- 2) It is a marital union, indicating that it is not a simple friendship, nor a business partnership, nor a state of concubinage, but rather a noble state for raising a family. The term "marital" derives from the Latin *maritus*, which means "husband."
- 3) It is the union of a legally competent man and woman, indicating that there are certain qualifications required by the natural and positive laws.
- 4) It is a union involving the undivided sharing of a common life, indicating the exchange of mutual rights and the acceptance of correlative obligations referring to the raising of a family. This phrase also implies the sharing of the same "bed, board, and dwelling" in a loving union of souls and a mutual sharing of goods.

### C. The Essence of the Contract

We have already seen that marriage is an institution of the natural law, and as such is necessary for the community, although not for every individual. We must inquire into the essence of this natural institution.

From the aspect of duration, marriage may be considered as an *act* whereby marriage is contracted, or as a *state* resulting from such an act.

#### (1) *The Act of Contracting Marriage*

The essence of the act of contracting matrimony consists *in the mutual consent, exteriorly manifested, whereby a man and a woman mutually give and accept the exclusive and perpetual right over*



*each other in regard to acts which are of themselves suitable for the generation of children.*

The mutual consent, then, is the essence of the act whereby marriage is contracted. This consent is the adequate efficient cause of the marriage. The natural law does not compel John Doe to take Mary Smith as his wife, but if these two should marry, they are united precisely because they have mutually consented to the union (Can. 1081 § 1). Now if the aforementioned right is not exchanged, then there is no marriage, because it is this right to the acts apt for the procreation of children which is precisely the natural object of matrimonial consent.

### *(2) The State of Matrimony*

The essence of the state of matrimony consists in the perpetual obligation of the spouses to perform mutually those duties which follow from the legitimate matrimonial contract.

This state is the natural result of the contract. It is a *bond* which establishes permanent rights and obligations regarding the undivided sharing of a common life for the procreation and education of children.

Does the actual exercise of marital rights pertain to the essence of marriage? Or, to put it another way, can there be a true and essential marriage before the spouses have marital relations? It is clear that marital relations pertain to the perfection of marriage (not necessarily, however, to the perfection of the married persons, which is not the issue here), because marriage is naturally ordered to the generation and education of children, and this requires that the marital rights be exercised. But this pertains to the perfection of marriage, not to its essence.

It is the opinion of theologians generally that a true marriage was instituted between Adam and Eve in paradise before the fall. Now if they had exercised the marital rights in the state of perfection in which they then lived, there would have been a child conceived free of original sin. In their case, then, they enjoyed the essence of marriage before any use of marital rights.

Another example may be seen in the case of the marriage of Joseph to Our Lady. Theirs was a true marriage, and yet the Church teaches



that the Blessed Mother remained a virgin always. Here again we find the essence of marriage without the exercise of its rights.

As St. John Chrysostom says, it is not coition but volition that creates a marriage. The exercise of marital rights presupposes the essential existence of the marriage state in which alone these rights may lawfully be used.

To sum up: the consent creates the bond. The use of the rights which are exchanged pertains to the integrity or perfection of the state of matrimony. The same thing is true of the common life regarding "bed, board and dwelling." The sharing of these things pertains to the perfection of marriage, but they presuppose its essence already constituted by the consent and the bond.

It should be noted here that the good of society demands that the common life be lived, but it does not necessarily require that sexual union be practiced. The *right* to sexual union is the direct concern of society, and this is ensured by the contract. The *use of the right*, however, is directly a private affair and only indirectly a concern of society.

### 3. THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

There are so many aspects to this matter that a short explanation is entirely insufficient for a true understanding. We will consider this problem under five sub-titles: the institution, the definition, the matter and form, the subject and the minister of the sacrament.

#### A. How Was This Sacrament Instituted?

We have seen that marriage is an institution of the natural law. But every natural inclination tends to accomplish some specific good. This good may vary according to the varying circumstances of life. The needs of mankind regarding matrimony have varied with changes in the state of human nature, and the institution of marriage has developed in accord with these needs.



It is clear that marriage is radically a divine institution, and that God has exercised a special providence throughout all ages to conform it to the divine plan and to human needs as well. In view of this doctrine, man has the freedom to marry or not according to his own judgments, but he has absolutely no freedom to tamper with the essence of matrimony, for this is fixed by God.<sup>1</sup>

Marriage was instituted

*before the fall* to raise children who would adore the one true God, because this was necessary even before sin (Gen., Chap. 1, 2; cf. Eph. 5:41).

*after the fall and before the Old Law* as a remedy for the newly inflicted wounds of sin.

*at the time of Moses* regarding certain limitations and conditions to prevent abuses which had arisen (cf. Lev. 18:6 ff.).

*at the time of Christ* the natural contract was raised to the dignity of a sacrament and became an instrument for causing grace in the soul.<sup>2</sup>

Three things are required for a sacrament of the New Law, and all of them are found in Christian marriage:

- 1) *An external sign*—Christian marriage is a sign perceivable by the senses, for it requires an expression of consent. This sign signifies something sacred, namely, the union between Christ and his Church (cf. Eph. 5:23).
- 2) *A sign which causes grace*—St. Paul says that marriage “. . . is a great mystery—I mean in reference to Christ and to the Church” (Eph. 5:32). In other words, Christian marriage is mysterious precisely because it signifies the union of Christ with the Church. But Christ is united to the Church by supernatural

<sup>1</sup>Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930; Denz. 2225.

<sup>2</sup>Council of Trent, Sess. XXIV, *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony*; Denz. 969.



grace which he, as Head of the Church, causes and infuses in his members. Thus, too, Christian marriage is instituted to cause supernatural grace in the partners.

Sacramental signs "effect what they signify." The sacrament of marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and his Church. In the mysterious sense indicated by St. Paul it effects this union. You are the Church, the people of God, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. The natural matrimonial union is the means by which the human race is continued, and, among Christians, it is made by God the supernatural means by which the Church is continued, by which members are provided to continue the wonderful union of Christ to the human race in the Church.

- 3) A *sign divinely instituted*—while the divine institution is not expressed in the Pauline text, it can be deduced from it, because only God can make purely natural things the causes of supernatural grace.

St. Thomas offers a simple reason to show why matrimony causes grace: whenever God bestows the ability to do anything, he also gives the help necessary to do it well. For instance, he supplies physical faculties which enable man to make good use of his intellectual powers. Now in matrimony, God bestows a share in his creative power whereby men and women can raise a family. It is fitting, therefore, that he also gives the divine grace which will enable them to discharge this important office suitably.

When did Christ institute this sacrament? There are various times when Christ spoke of marriage, and it seems that it was instituted as a sacrament gradually, just as the natural contract evolved under divine providence.

- 1) Christ sanctified and consecrated matrimony by his presence at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn. 2:1-11).
- 2) Christ sanctioned the essential properties of marriage, unity and indissolubility, and restored it to its original perfection (Mt. 19:3-9).
- 3) After the resurrection Christ definitively instituted marriage as a sacrament together with the other sacraments (cf. Mt. 28:20; Mk. 16:15 f.).



### B. The Definition of the Sacrament

It is a teaching of faith that marriage is a true sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ (Denz. 971). It may be defined: *A sacrament of the New Law in which, through the lawfully exchanged consent of the contracting parties, grace is given to them for the proper and Christian fulfillment of the duties of matrimony.*

The various elements contained in the definition are explained as follows:

- 1) A sacrament of the New Law means one of the seven sacraments which Jesus Christ instituted as instruments for communicating his grace to men.
- 2) The lawfully exchanged consent of the contracting parties expresses the matter and form of the sacrament, which, as we shall see, are included in the contract; this phrase also indicates the ministers, who are the marriage partners themselves.
- 3) In which grace is given, etc., indicates the special bond established between the partners and also the special sacramental graces bestowed to enable them to fulfill their duties as Christians.

It is easy to infer from the foregoing that the sacrament of matrimony is nothing other than the matrimonial contract itself which Jesus Christ has made a special channel of divine grace by his infinite power (Can. 1012).

### C. The Matter and Form of Matrimony

Each of the sacraments is composed of two elements called *matter* and *form*. But in order to understand just what these elements are in matrimony, certain teachings of the Church must be considered.

The Church teaches that mutual consent expressed by words of the present tense is the efficient cause of matrimony.<sup>3</sup> Further, it is taught that, for the faithful, the contract cannot be separated from the sacrament, and that they are one and the same thing.<sup>4</sup> Again,

<sup>3</sup>Council of Florence, *Decree for the Armenians*; Denz. 702.

<sup>4</sup>Pius IX, *Acerbissimum Vobiscum* Sept. 27, 1852; Denz. 1640.



every marriage between Christians is a sacrament. The sacrament is not some kind of extrinsic addition to the contract, nor can men separate the sacrament from the contract.<sup>5</sup>

Christ elevated the contract of marriage to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. Can. 1021). Consequently, whatever is the matter and form of the contract will be the matter and form of the sacrament. Now in contracts the externally expressed exchange, or the consent to exchange, is the material element. The externally expressed acceptance, or consent to acceptance, is the formal element. For example, a man may begin a simple contract of sale by offering something to a buyer; the contract is perfected when the buyer accepts the offering.

In matrimony, the groom *offers* dominion over himself with regard to raising a family to the bride; that offering is the matter of the sacramental contract. The bride *expresses her acceptance* of his offering; that expression is the form of sacramental contract. Because the contract must be mutual, the offering is made next by the bride, and then accepted by the groom. The sacramental contract is then completed, because its essential elements are present.

From this doctrine, several practical conclusions follow:

- 1) Whenever two baptized parties, including heretics and apostates, marry validly, they receive the sacrament of matrimony, even if they are ignorant of the sacrament or deny it. For Christians, the contract and sacrament are inseparable.
- 2) Whatever pertains to the nature of contracts is also proper to matrimony. For example, it is possible to contract marriage by proxy (Can. 1088).
- 3) Because the contract is the sacrament for Christians, the Church alone has power to judge and determine everything pertaining to the essence of Christian marriage. The state may provide only for civil effects (Can. 1016).
- 4) The marriage of infidels *ipso facto* becomes a sacrament when *both* parties receive baptism. The matrimonial contract and consent continues to exist in the partners and in the bond of their marriage; with the reception of baptism, their marriage becomes

<sup>5</sup>Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, Feb. 10, 1880; Denz. 1854.



a sacred sign. Thus married converts from paganism are not required to renew marital consent after baptism.

- 5) It is commonly taught that a valid marriage between a Christian and an unbaptized person, even when contracted with a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of worship, is never a sacrament. The same holds true of a legitimate marriage when only one party receives baptism. As a bilateral contract, marriage cannot be more strict, more firm, or more sacred on one side than on the other. The consent causes the bond, which is the essence of the state of matrimony. In Christian marriage, the bond is sacred because it represents the union of Christ with the Church, and is thus an efficacious cause of grace. But the marriage bond is a bilateral relationship which, as the saying goes, "cannot limp." Therefore, the bond is an efficacious sign of grace in both partners, or in neither.

#### D. The Subjects or Recipients of Matrimony

There are several conditions which the subject or recipient of matrimony must fulfill. Some of these conditions are necessary for valid reception of the sacrament; in addition, others are required for lawful and fruitful reception.

(1) For valid reception of the sacrament of matrimony, the subject must:

- a) be *baptized*. Baptism is the gateway to all the other sacraments. If one or both parties is unbaptized, the marriage will be at most a natural contract, not a sacrament.
- b) have the *intention* of receiving and administering the sacrament. This intention may be implicit. It suffices to intend what the Church intends to be done.
- c) be free from all *diriment* impediments. This includes all impediments which would invalidate the contract, whether they arise from the natural, divine or ecclesiastical laws. (see below, 68 f.)
- d) be *present*, either personally or by proxy (Can. 1088 § 1).



- e) if either party is a baptized Catholic, be married according to the *juridical* form prescribed by the Church. (See below, 75 f.)
- (2) For lawful and fruitful reception of matrimony, in addition to the above, the recipients must:
- a) be free from all *prohibiting impediments*, which, although they do not invalidate the contract, gravely oblige all Christians in conscience to desist from marrying until the impediments cease to exist or are dispensed by lawful authority. (See below, 65 f.)
  - b) receive *confirmation*, if they have not done so and are able to do so without grave inconvenience (Can. 1021 § 2).
  - c) be in *the state of grace*. Matrimony is a sacrament of the living and thus requires all who would receive it worthily to be friends of God, to be in the state of grace. Knowingly to receive matrimony in the state of mortal sin is a sacrilege. The recipients of matrimony are not commanded to receive the sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist before their wedding, but the Church strongly recommends that they do (Can. 1033), a practice which should include all members of the wedding party when there is a nuptial Mass. Indeed, in many places it is becoming customary to include on the wedding announcements an invitation to receive Holy Communion at the nuptial Mass.
  - d) observe *the rites and ceremonies of the Church* (Can. 733 § 1).
  - e) listen reverently to the *counsel of their parents*, especially if they are minors. Both respect for parents and prudence require that parents be consulted about a step as serious as marriage. It is true that no one is obliged to choose a state of life at the behest of his parents, or to accept his parents' choice of a marriage partner. But at least the parents should be given opportunity to express themselves, and their advice deserves careful consideration, even if reasons should appear against ultimately accepting it. The Church commands



pastors to try to deter minors from marrying without parental consent, and forbids them to assist at such marriages without previous consultation of the local Ordinary (Can. 1034).

(NOTE: because the technical term is frequently used with reference to marriage, it is important to know what an Ordinary is. According to canon law, he is one who exercises, in virtue of his office and as determined by law, ecclesiastical jurisdiction—the power to govern the faithful. Besides the Pope, the following are local Ordinaries, each in his own territory: the reigning Bishop of a diocese; an Abbot *nullius* or Prelate *nullius*; a Vicar General; an Apostolic Administrator; a Vicar Apostolic; a Prefect Apostolic. Neither a titular Bishop nor an Auxiliary Bishop is an Ordinary in virtue of his office. Unless otherwise noted, the word “Ordinary” as used in this book always refers to the local Ordinary.)

#### E. The Minister of Matrimony

Because for the baptized the contract of matrimony is a sacrament, it is the common teaching of theologians that the very parties who enter the contract are also the ministers of the sacrament. This teaching is corroborated by the practice of the Church, which recognizes as valid and licit those marriages which are celebrated under certain conditions without the presence of a priest (Can. 1098).

Even when the pastor officiates, he does not function as a minister of the sacrament. The documents he signs refer to the pastor as the *witness*, not the minister of the sacrament.

The bride and groom minister the sacrament to each other and receive it from one another. Since matrimony is a sacrament of the living, to receive it fruitfully one must be in the state of grace. It is clear, then, that anyone who knowingly receives this sacrament of the living in a state of mortal sin is guilty of a sacrilege.

But the marriage partners are not only recipients, they are also ministers of the sacrament. Would they not also commit an additional sacrilege by administering the sacrament unworthily? The answer is negative, because the marriage partners are not officially consecrated for divine worship, and hence do not sin against any consecrated state. They may commit sacrilege as unworthy recipients,



but not as unworthy ministers. The same is true of a lay person in the state of mortal sin who baptizes a dying infant. He commits no sacrilege because he is not consecrated as minister of the sacrament.

#### 4. THE VARIOUS DIVISIONS OF MARRIAGE

The foregoing examination of marriage under the aspect of a natural contract and under the aspect of a sacrament of Christ may well be summarized in a multiple division of marriage. Considering it under different aspects, marriage may be divided as follows:

1) From the aspect of duration:

A. The *act* of contracting matrimony is a transitory act consisting of an exchange of consent whereby the marital union is effected.

B. The *state* of matrimony is the perpetual bond of the conjugal state which arises from the exchange of consent.

2) From the aspect of dignity:

A. *Legitimate* marriage is a valid contract between unbaptized persons (Can. 1015 § 3).

B. *Ratified* marriage is a valid contract between baptized persons which has not yet been perfected by consummation (Can. 1015 § 1).

C. *Ratified and consummated* marriage is a valid contract between baptized persons which has been perfected by the relations envisaged by the contract and by which the partners become two in one flesh (*ibid.*).

3) From the aspect of celebration:

A. *Public* marriage is celebrated openly in the Church and in the form prescribed by the Church, either for ordinary or extraordinary cases.

B. *Secret* marriage is celebrated in the form prescribed by the Church, but secretly for the sake of conscience and without publication of the banns or registration in the parish records.



## 4) From the aspect of validity:

- A. *Valid* marriage is one in which all the conditions for a true marital contract are found.
- B. *Invalid* marriage is lacking in one or more of the conditions requisite for a true marital contract. It is, therefore, not a marriage.
- C. *Putative* marriage is an invalid marriage which is contracted in good faith by at least one partner. Such marriages remain putative until both parties become aware of its certain invalidity (Can. 1015 § 4).

(NOTE: Much confusion can arise unless the student is clearly aware of the distinction between an *invalid* and an *illicit* marriage. What is called an *invalid marriage* is not a true marriage; it only appears to be a marriage. It is, of course, always unlawful to deliberately co-operate in creating such an apparent marriage. An *illicit marriage* is a valid marriage which was contracted in violation of a law, either natural or positive. It would, for example, be against the natural law to contract marriage under a condition not revealed to the partner, but such a condition would not necessarily invalidate the marriage. It would be against the positive law for a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic without a dispensation, but such a marriage would not be invalid on that account.)

The foregoing are the principal divisions of matrimony. These various terms, and the concepts they denote, will be used in clarifying the different theological and legal problems that will be considered.

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Each time that Christ instituted a sacrament, he chose some quite ordinary thing from among the goods of this world and made it both a cause and a sign of divine grace by his divine power. Thus did he extend the cleansing power of water into the domain of the spirit in baptism, and the strengthening effect of oil in confirmation.

In the case of marriage, Christ took a contract of the natural order, the result of the workings of the natural law, and extended both its significance and its causality into the realm of the spirit. The



expression of consent which signified the union of man and wife was extended by Christ to signify in a certain way the union of Christ with his Church. That same expression of consent which caused a conjugal union in the material order, now was extended by Christ to effect a truly supernatural and sacramental union in the realm of the spirit. To understand the essence of marriage, then, one must start with a knowledge of the natural contract and proceed to the nature of the sacrament.

It is possible for men to understand the natural contract of marriage by the investigation of reason alone. But, especially when reasoning about matters so subject to emotion as marriage, men are capable of many errors. This is evident from the various perverted notions concerning marriage proposed not only in our own day but throughout history. No amount of rational investigation will unfold the essence of the sacrament of marriage. This requires the light of divine revelation expressed through the living voice of Christ's Church. From this divinely authoritative source, we may learn of the true nature of marriage without any possibility of error. And because of the intimate connection between the natural contract and the sacrament, the teaching of the Church offers infallible guidance about the essence of the natural contract as well.

The light of divine revelation, proclaimed by Christ's Church and explained by her theologians, brings into clear focus the vitally important matter of the essence of matrimony. It is vitally important at two distinguishable but intimately related levels: the level of human happiness and the level of endless joy in heaven, which is the ultimate reward of fidelity to the "vocation" to marriage.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The Cause of Marriage, and Its Ends

### 1. INTRODUCTION

We must now consider the various factors that enter into the making of a valid marriage. An apparent marriage is presumed valid unless it can be shown to be deficient in one of these three respects:

- 1) Matrimonial *consent* was not given (Chapters Two and Three).
- 2) An invalidating *impediment* made a marriage between these two persons impossible (Chapter Four).
- 3) The necessary *form* for the making of the contract was not observed (Section Five of Chapter Four).

All human activity begins with an end. Man's desire to achieve some goal, to attain some end, is the cause of the varied and complex steps which so often enter into human undertakings. Some of the things men do are subject to their free choice; others are fixed and determined in one way or another. For example, a man is free to travel or to remain at home, he is free to travel to one place rather than to another; but if he chooses to travel to some particular place,



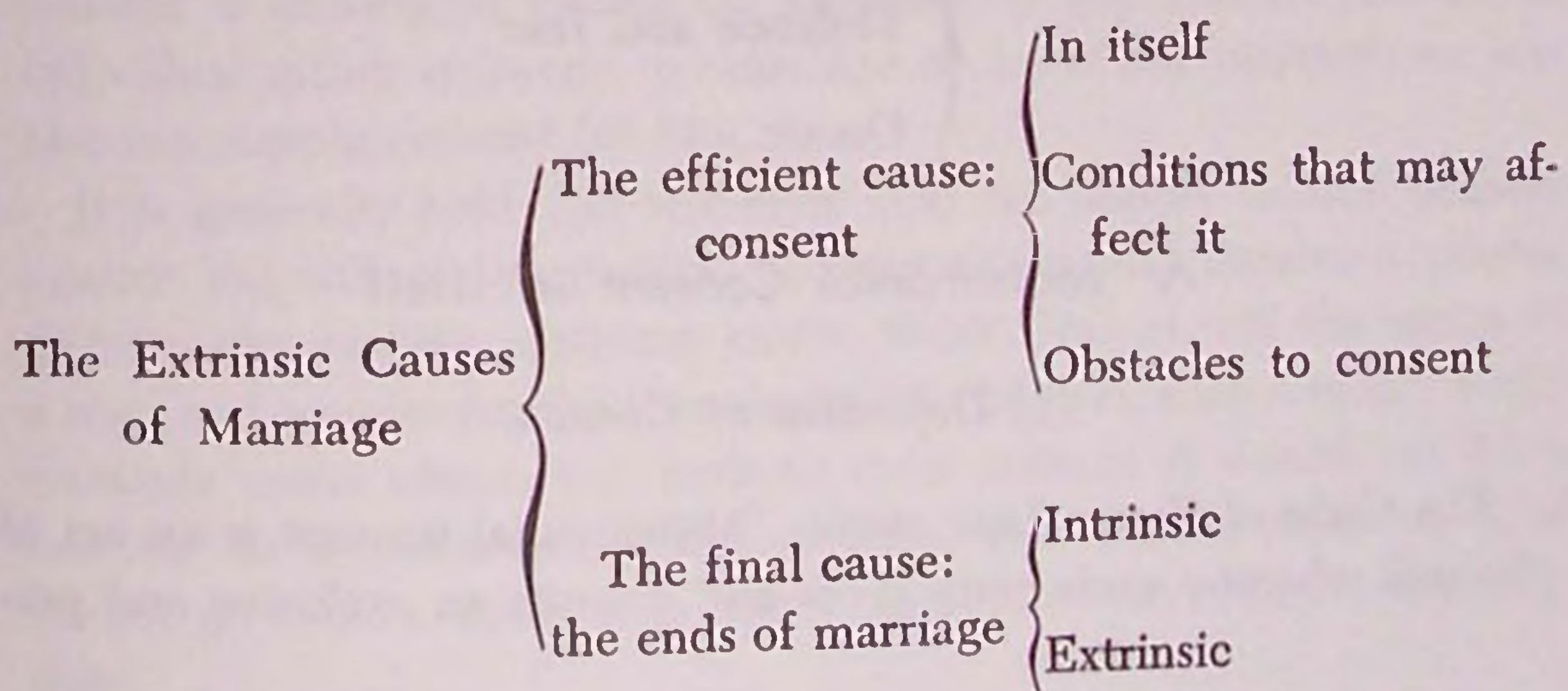
he must follow the road that leads to that place. He is no longer free to go in any direction at all. Likewise, if a man decides to marry he is not free to arrange any kind of a contract at all, to go about it any way he might wish. A man is not bound to marry, but if he chooses to marry he must make a very precise kind of a contract and he must make it in a very specific manner. Otherwise he will not be married, just as the traveller will not reach his destination if he takes the wrong road.

We have seen that marriage consists essentially in a union; we must now investigate what causes that union. Because marriage is properly a human contract, its basic cause is the consent of the contracting parties. Hence, the first section of this chapter deals with matrimonial consent in its many phases.

Further, it is necessary to learn something of the motives which impel men to consent to the marriage contract, and something of the benefits attained by those who give such consent.

This chapter will cover what are technically called the efficient and final causes of marriage. Some of these causes are fixed either by natural or divine law; others are subject to human choice. The distinction between these two kinds of cause is of greatest importance for a realistic appraisal of marriage.

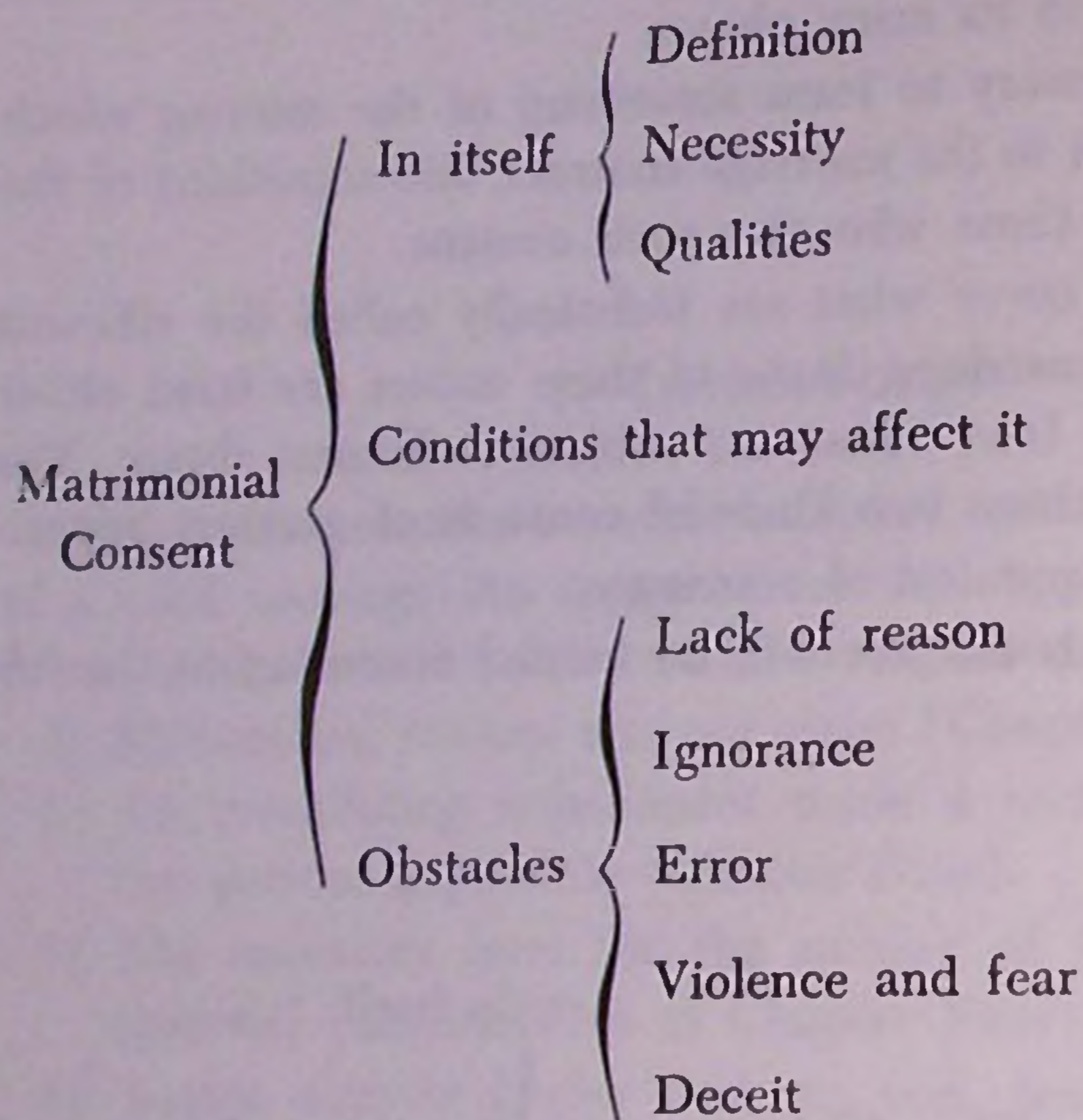
The material of this chapter will be treated according to the following outline:





## 2. THE EFFICIENT CAUSE OF MARRIAGE: CONSENT

Matrimonial consent requires special attention because it is the essence of the act of contracting marriage. The quality of consent is the first thing to be judged in assessing the validity of a marriage. The judgment concerning the validity of matrimonial consent requires that both the noun and the adjective be tested. Was true consent actually given? Was it truly *matrimonial* consent, that is, did each party consent to give and receive the indispensable matter of the matrimonial contract? Our consideration of matrimonial consent will be according to the following outline:



### A. Matrimonial Consent in Itself

#### (1) Definition of Consent

The Code of Canon Law states: "Matrimonial consent is an act of the will whereby each party gives and accepts an exclusive and per-



petual right over the body for acts which are, of themselves, suitable for the generation of children" (Can. 1081 § 2).

- (1) *An act of the will*, indicates that consent must be free.
- (2) *Each party*, indicates that it is a bilateral contract.
- (3) *Gives and accepts a . . . right over the body*, indicates the essential object of the contract, which is the mutual exchange of marital rights.
- (4) *For acts which are, of themselves, suitable for the generation of children*, indicates that the contract is limited and does not grant absolute and unqualified rights over each other.
- (5) *An exclusive and perpetual right*, indicates unity and indissolubility, which are the essential properties of matrimony.

### (2) *The Necessity of Consent*

The Code of Canon Law states: "The consent of the parties, lawfully expressed between persons who are capable according to law, makes the marriage; and no human power can supply this consent" (Can. 1081 § 1). The reasoning underlying this idea is that the sacrament is the contract, and every contract depends for its existence on the consent of the contracting parties.

Because consent is essential to the contract, and hence to the sacrament, neither contract nor sacrament can exist without it. The existence of anything without its essential elements involves a contradiction, you cannot have a man without a rational soul. Hence, if consent is lacking, it cannot be supplied by any human power. An individual either consents to marriage or he is not married; no one else can supply consent for him.

It is generally held that not even God can supply marital consent against the will of the parties, because this would involve a contradiction, like making a square circle. Were God to will the union of a man and woman for the procreation of children, such a union would certainly come about, but without their consent it would not be a contract or a sacrament, but something else. Rather than say God cannot do such a thing, it is more accurate to say that it cannot be done.



*(3) Qualities of Consent*

*True and internal*, i.e., the parties must sincerely intend to accept the matrimonial obligations.

*Free*, i.e., the consent must be given with sufficient knowledge and deliberation, and without error, violence or grave fear.

*Mutual and simultaneous*, i.e., it must be the consent of *both* parties, and it must be expressed *at the same time*.

*Present*, i.e., here and now, because consent regarding the future establishes engagement, not marriage.

*Externally manifested*, i.e., unless it is impossible, consent should be expressed in words; there cannot be a bilateral contract which is purely internal.

Valid matrimonial consent must be

## B. Conditions Affecting Consent

Whenever there is a just cause, a sacrament may be administered under some condition. When, for example, a priest arrives shortly after a fatal accident, he may administer extreme unction after expressing the condition: "If you are still alive." If the condition is lawful and consonant with the nature of matrimony, there is no reason why such a condition cannot be placed. Marriage is a contract, however, and, as such, may be limited by some condition relating to the future, and this offers special difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

A condition is a *circumstance upon which one or both of the contracting parties wishes the validity of his consent to depend*. The fol-

<sup>1</sup>Cf. T. L. Bouscaren, S.J., *Canon Law Digest* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1934-57), I, 531-39, II, 302-20, 325-31, for Church decisions in cases of conditional consent.



lowing points summarize the general teaching of theologians and canonists with respect to conditions which would affect matrimonial consent:

1. It is generally taught that marriage may not be celebrated lawfully under a condition unless there is (1) a serious reason and (2) permission of the Ordinary. The Roman Ritual provides no form for conditional marriage, and this indicates a negative view on the part of the Church. Moreover, conditions tend to create difficulties and to weaken the firmness of consent.
2. Because marriage is a bilateral contract, it is not permissible to contract marriage under some condition which is kept from the knowledge of one of the parties. Because matrimony is a legal contract, it is not permissible to contract marriage under some condition which could not be proved in a court of law. These first two points concern the lawfulness of marriage, not its validity. (See Chapter One, Section Four.)
3. Any condition which is contrary to the essence of matrimony clearly invalidates the marriage. No one can will to give something, and, at the same time, withhold an essential element of that thing. Thus if two parties contract marriage with the condition that the obligation of exchanging marital rights, or of living together permanently, or of being faithful to each other, would not bind them in any way, such a condition would invalidate the marriage. It is well to remember that conditions often indicate the will *not to fulfill* an obligation rather than the will *not to accept* the obligation. The latter invalidates the marriage, the former does not.
4. If any condition is contemplated in marriage, it is imperative that the matter be discussed in advance with ecclesiastical authorities.

### C. Obstacles Opposed to Consent

There are six "vices" opposed to matrimonial consent, that is, obstacles of one kind or another to the necessary qualities which a truly human act of the will giving consent must possess; the six defects are



lack of reason, ignorance, error, violence, fear and deceit. Each of these offers fertile and varied grounds for invalidating marital consent, and a host of canonical problems follows in their wake. In ecclesiastical courts, many of the suits brought to have marriages declared null are based upon one or more of these vices. The treatment of these vices here presented is, of course, by no means exhaustive of the topic; rather it is a summary of the more common aspects of the problems.

### *(1) Lack of Reasoning Power*

Lack of reasoning power is *the intellectual inability to perform a human act*. Those who are actually deprived of reason cannot contract marriage because they cannot perform a human act. Persons who are completely intoxicated, drugged, hypnotized or insane fall into this category. Certain people suffer from mental illness which deprives them of rationality only regarding some matters. They may be able to consent to marriage, but such consent is regarded as doubtful in practice.

### *(2) Ignorance*

Ignorance is *lack of required knowledge*. A certain minimum of knowledge is required for consent. Canon Law states that the parties must at least know that marriage is the permanent union of man and woman for the procreation of children (Can. 1082 § 1).<sup>2</sup>

A precise and detailed knowledge of marital relations is not necessary, provided that the parties realize that children are begotten through their mutual physical co-operation. If this degree of knowledge were lacking, they would be ignorant of the formal object of the contract, and hence unable to give consent thereto. In ecclesiastical courts, this ignorance is not presumed in those who have reached the age of puberty (Can. 1082 § 2). However, this is a legal presumption which gives way before proof of the contrary.

Ignorance of anything else about matrimony other than its essence does not invalidate the contract.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Bouscaren, *op. cit.*, II, 296-99, for cases decided by the Church in questions of ignorance.



(3) *Error*

*Error is a false judgment which affects marital consent.* There are many kinds of error having different effects on consent. The more common are:

Error { *of fact* is a false judgment about a fact relevant to the marriage  
 { *of law* is a false judgment about the nature, properties or essential goods of marriage itself.

1. Error of fact about the identity of the person renders a marriage invalid. In this case the consent is directed toward a person entirely different from the one with whom the contract is made. By natural law, such a substantial error invalidates the consent (Can. 1083 § 1).<sup>3</sup>

Error of fact about some personal quality of the party, even if it was the reason the marriage was made, does not ordinarily invalidate the marriage. Errors about a person's age, nationality, birthplace, race, etc., are accidental and do not affect the substance of the contract (Can. 1083 § 2).<sup>4</sup>

However, if an error of fact about a personal quality amounts to a substantial error about the identity of the person, it will invalidate the marriage. For example, if a woman intended to marry the eldest son who would be the principal heir to a vast fortune and discovered she had married a younger son who would receive a pittance, that would amount to a substantial error.

2. Error of law about the essential object of matrimony invalidates the consent, because it amounts to the same thing as ignorance already described.

An error of law about the unity, indissolubility or sacramental character of marriage, to which error is joined an express and positive intention of excluding any of these essential properties or goods, will invalidate the marriage.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, I, 520.

<sup>4</sup>For examples of consent vitiated by error, cf. *ibid.*, 537 f.



An error of law about the aforementioned essential properties and goods which does not include the will to exclude them will not invalidate the marriage, because such an error remains in the intellect and does not affect the will to contract a true marriage (Can. 1084).<sup>5</sup>

#### (4) Violence

Violence is movement from an external source that is completely repugnant to the person on whom it is exerted. Physical violence which destroys freedom excludes the consent needed to contract marriage. Marriages resulting from such violence are invalid by reason of the natural law.<sup>6</sup>

#### (5) Fear

Fear is mental anxiety caused by an imminent or future danger. Canon law states that a marriage is invalid if entered into because of grave fear unjustly caused by an external agent, to escape which a party is compelled to choose marriage (Can. 1087 § 1). Several conditions must be verified before fear can invalidate a marriage.

Fear must be *grave*, either in itself or in relation to him who suffers it. It must be *caused by another person*, and not by something like a bolt of lightning. The fear must be inflicted *unjustly*, i.e., either by one who has no right to do so, or by a means he has no right to use. The situation must be such, at least in the mind of the victim, that there is *no alternative except marriage*. No lesser fear will invalidate marriage, even if it should be the cause of the contract (Can. 1087 § 2).

In many cases in which marriage has been declared null because of grave fear, the fear was of parents or guardians. Generally this kind of fear is not in itself grave, but it could well be grave as far as the person who suffers it is concerned.

#### (6) Deceit

Deceit is a simulation of true and internal consent to marriage. It can occur in three ways:

<sup>5</sup>Cf. *op. cit.*, I, 535 f.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 523-30.



1. Not intending to contract marriage invalidates the contract and the sacrament because it excludes consent (Can. 1086 § 2).
2. Intending to contract marriage but *not to assume* its obligations also invalidates the contract and the sacrament. It is impossible to separate the contract from its essential obligations.
3. Intending to contract marriage but *not to fulfill* its obligations is a grave sin and an unjust deception of the other party, but it does not invalidate the contract. Such deceit is not contrary to matrimonial consent in itself, but to its fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. THE FINAL CAUSE OF MATRIMONY: ITS GOALS AND GOODS

#### A. Introduction

The goods of matrimony are those benefits which accrue to the partners of valid and lawful marriage. The three principal goods of marriage are children, fidelity and the 'sacrament.' Besides these three essential goods which are intrinsic to matrimony, there are others which are called accidental and extrinsic goods. Among these are the preservation of the family name, the increase of the family fortune, peace and friendship among families, etc.

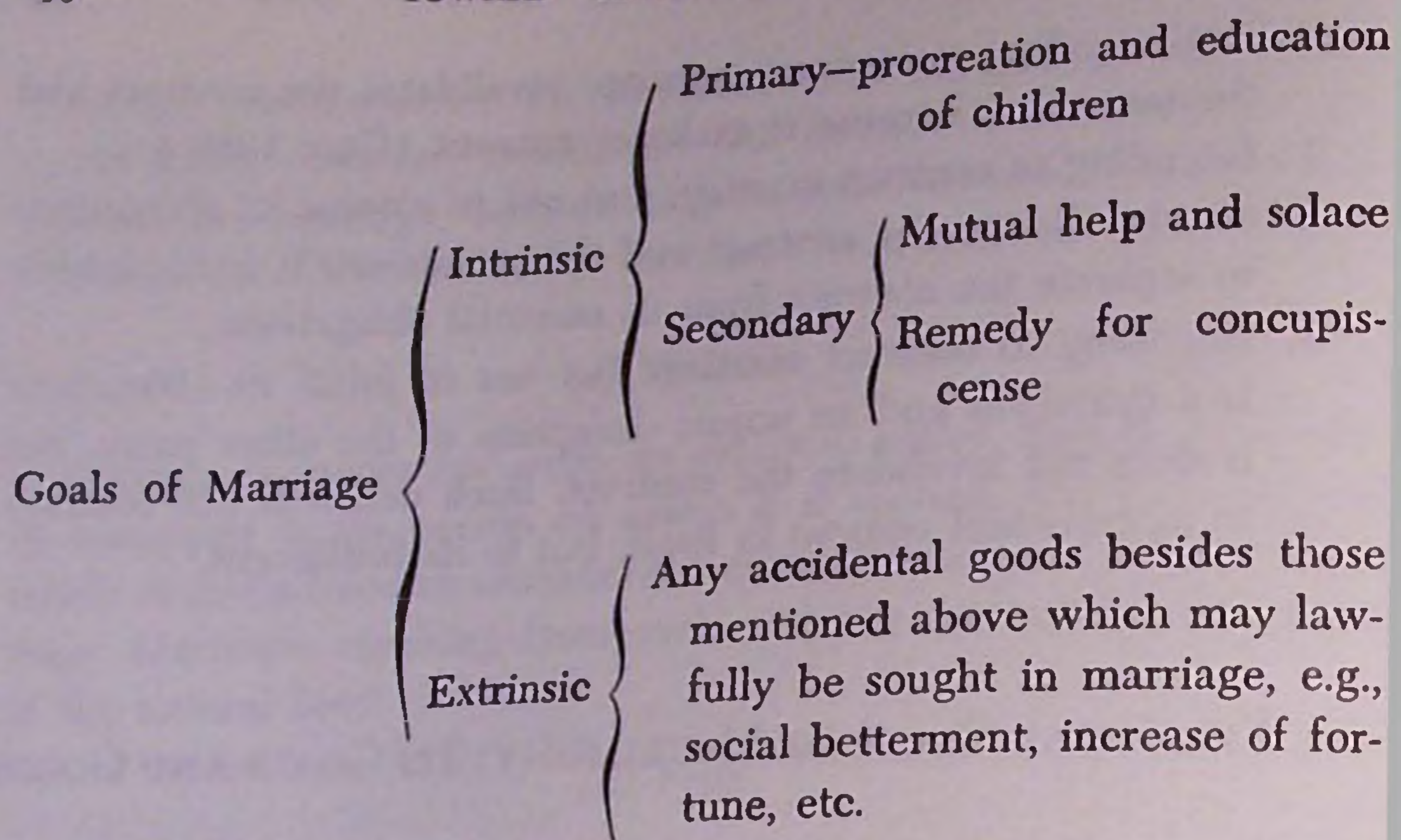
These same goods, viewed as benefits which the unmarried hope to attain through matrimony, are called the end or goals of matrimony. The goods of matrimony are *benefits already enjoyed or immediately expected*; the goals of matrimony are *benefits anticipated in the future which draw people to the married state*.

#### B. The Goals or Ends of Matrimony

The goals or ends of marriage may be seen clearly in the following outline (Can. 1013 § 1):

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *op. cit.*, II, 302-20; III, 437-40.





The *intrinsic* goals of marriage are those which matrimony attains of its very nature in the present state of mankind. These are not subject to human control; they may not be changed by the will of the married parties. Nevertheless, none of these purposes need be positively intended by the parties themselves, as long as the primary end is not positively excluded. Sterile people (who are capable of the act which is the matter of the marriage contract) may validly and licitly marry, although they cannot positively intend the procreation of children.

### *(1) The Procreation and Education of Children*

The procreation and education of children is established by Almighty God as the natural, intrinsic, essential end of matrimony (cf. Gen. 1:28). This same truth is contained in the official teaching of the Church.<sup>8</sup> A decree of the Holy Office of April 1, 1944, condemned recent opinions which denied that the procreation and education of children is the primary essential end of marriage or which held that the secondary ends are equally principal and independent; thus

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical on Christian Marriage, Denz. 2229; Can. 1013 § 1.



it rejected the opinion that the secondary intrinsic ends of marriage are not essentially subordinated to the primary end.<sup>9</sup>

### (2) *Mutual Help and Solace*

It is clear from the Book of Genesis that God intended marriage as a source of mutual help and solace to the partners. Eve was created similar to Adam as a help to him (Gen. 2:18). Both God and nature intend that man and wife be of assistance to each other, not only in household affairs, but also by the assistance of their mutual love, and by their co-operation in training the children.

### (3) *A Remedy for Concupiscence*

If we consider that marriage was instituted before the fall, we can see that it was not instituted primarily as a remedy for concupiscence. After the fall, however, the condition of mankind was changed because of the wounds of original sin, and marriage became a remedy for concupiscence. St. Paul clearly teaches that the sacrament does allay concupiscence (I Cor. 7:2, 9). This important effect, however, is subordinated to the primary essential end. In the state of innocence, for example, where no such unruly sense movements held sway, marriage would achieve the primary end without being necessary for this subordinate goal.

St. Thomas explains the effect of marriage on concupiscence in these words:

A remedy against concupiscence may be applied in two ways. In one way, it may be applied to the very root of concupiscence itself. Marriage affords this kind of remedy by the grace that is given therein. In another way, a remedy may be applied to the act [of concupiscence]. And this occurs in two ways. First, so that the external manifestation which concupiscence tends to produce may be deprived of its shameful-ness, and this is done by the goods of matrimony which ennoble carnal desire. Secondly, by restraining the act, to which a certain shameful-ness is attached. And this comes about from the very nature of the act itself; because, while it satisfies desire by conjugal relations, it does not thus incite to other things which are evil. That is why the Apostle

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XXXVI (1944), 103, Denz. 2295; Pius XII "Apostolate of the Midwife," Oct. 29, 1951, *The Catholic Mind*, L (1952), 49 ff.



says, "It is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:9). For although deeds that are congenial to concupiscence are designed to increase desire, nonetheless they repress it, insofar as they are controlled by reason, because similar acts beget similar dispositions and habits.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it is plain that this goal of matrimony is not to be understood in the superficial sense that marriage makes the expression of physical passion legitimate. The manner in which marriage relieves concupiscence is more profound and far more noble. The more a marriage is what it should be, the more is the sexual relationship between the spouses a symbol of their deep love for and need for one another. As this meaning becomes more and more apparent it renders mere sexual union apart from the rich and unselfish love which is publicly and permanently affirmed before the world by their marriage more and more meaningless and undesirable. The "relief of concupiscence" means that sexual union becomes desirable only when it is far more than mere sexual union, only when it is the natural expression and sign of a union that death alone can break.

#### (4) *Extrinsic Goals*

Besides the ends which are intrinsic to matrimony itself, marriage partners are influenced by a wide variety of goals which they hope to attain by marrying. As long as these may lawfully be desired they may be sought in matrimony, provided always that the intrinsic ends are not excluded.

#### C. The Goods or Benefits of Matrimony

There is a very great risk in being human, for in every act man gambles, so to speak, with his human integrity and with his eternal salvation. Unlike animals, he has no natural instinct to guide him

<sup>10</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, question 42, article 3, reply to objection 4. (The student who is not familiar with the *Summa* of St. Thomas will find the tract on marriage in the Supplement, which was added after St. Thomas' death by others, who drew on his earlier works, a mine of valuable teaching. Yet it lacks the precision and maturity of thought which characterizes the bulk of the *Summa*, written by St. Thomas himself. An English translation of this monumental work is to be found in any good library.)



surely along a course of action that will preserve him. Yet the risk is surely worth-while, because the gain can be great. The very factors that make it possible for man to sink beneath the level of the brute enter into his ability to soar immeasurably beyond the farthest reach of the loftiest limits of instinctual behavior. Where there is no cross, there can be no crown.

Man's risks must be human, but they must be guided by prudence. Marriage has its distinctive risks, for in that state man makes himself spiritually dependent upon the will of another human, he assumes responsibilities for the well-being and the salvation of free human beings, he gives rein to his sexual desires which can destroy him. If these great risks are to be prudent, there must be a magnificent compensation for taking them. And so there is. In the *Instruction before Marriage*, the Roman Ritual promises that, ". . . if true love and the unselfish spirit of perfect sacrifice guide your every action, you can expect the greatest measure of earthly happiness that may be allotted to man in this vale of tears." The compensations by which this happiness may be attained are known as the goods or benefits of matrimony.

Marriage is both a natural contract and a sacrament. Under the aspect of a natural contract, marriage must be regulated in the same way as every other virtuous undertaking. The first requirement is the intention of the right end, and thus *children* are accounted as the first good or benefit of marriage. The second requirement is that the means to the end be used well, and thus *fidelity*, by which the spouses are true to each other, is the second good or benefit of matrimony. Under the aspect of a spiritual reality, matrimony has a special goodness, a firmness and permanence which guarantees this sacred union and symbolizes, even at the natural level, the indissoluble bond between Christ and his Church; thus the '*sacrament*' (i.e., its sacred symbolism) is the third good or benefit of marriage. Each of these three goods will be considered in detail.

### (1) *The Child*

We have seen that the primary essential end or purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of children. St. Thomas teaches



that all the common works which husband and wife share are directed in some way to the education of their children. Many great sacrifices are demanded of parents in raising a family. Yet the joys of parenthood are unique, and none but parents can experience them. They are called to a special share in the work of creation and of providence, and this brings a satisfaction, a wholeness and completeness to a mother and father, that the childless and the unmarried can never know.

Our Lord remarks that when the mother "... has brought forth the child, she no longer remembers the anguish for her joy that a man is born into the world" (Jn. 16:22). There is a joy also to compensate for the difficulties of raising a child. St. John Chrysostom hints at it when he asks: "What is equal to that art which has the task of directing a soul and forming the mind and character of a child? One who is endowed with this power should exercise more diligence than any painter or sculptor."<sup>11</sup>

### (2) *The Faith of Chastity*

Fidelity means the keeping of the marriage promise to be faithful to one's partner. It is the root of marital security and trust.

As a contract, marriage has a special relation to the virtue of justice, by which man renders to each one what is his due. Since marriage is primarily directed to the procreation and education of children, it has special reference to human generation. Justice, however, lends a certain nobility to whatever it touches, and, in the case of marriage, it clothes human generation with a special dignity.

The relations between husband and wife and the fornication of two unmarried people are both of the same natural species. But they are of a different moral species because of the marriage contract. From this it follows that marital infidelity is not only a sin against chastity, but also one against justice, because it violates the rights belonging to another. Fidelity excludes adultery.

There is also the positive side to marital obligations. Marriage is a contract which establishes rights and duties regarding acts of

<sup>11</sup>*Homily 60 on St. Matthew, Chap. 18.*



themselves suitable for the generation of children. Fidelity guarantees that these rights will be respected and these duties fulfilled.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the aspects of justice are simply the foundation of Christian marriage. The union must be perfected by charity and fostered in love. The union of husband and wife must be a profound spiritual reality, and the sexual aspects of marriage must be endowed with a kind of "sacramentality," that is, they must be an outward expression of an inward reality. The idea of Christian fidelity was beautifully expressed in the rite of marriage used in ancient times: "With this ring I thee marry; with my body I thee worship."

### (3) *The 'Sacrament'*

The word 'sacrament' means a sign of something sacred. In this general sense all the great mysteries of religion can be called 'sacraments.' In more recent centuries, however, the word is rarely used by theologians except in the restricted sense in which it designates one of the seven sacraments. An exception is its use here to indicate the third good of matrimony. It has acquired a technical sense here from the Vulgate translation of a word of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians 5:32. Paul's word could have been translated as 'mystery' or 'hidden truth'; indeed the Confraternity New Testament translates it as 'mystery.' The Rheims New Testament, until recently universally used by English speaking Catholics, takes the Vulgate word 'sacramentum' and translates it 'sacrament,' legitimately using the word in the wide sense which is no longer common. Traditionally this expression of St. Paul was never used to prove that marriage is one of the seven sacraments. In fact, it seems quite clear that St. Paul is not specifically referring here to Christian marriage (which alone is sacramental in the strict sense) but to all marriage.

The sacred character of all marriage, therefore, is evident from the fact that even the natural contract is a sacred sign—a 'sacrament' in the words of St. Paul—of the ineffable and indivisible union of Christ with his Church. For of its nature matrimony is indissoluble, divinely instituted in such a way that it creates a perpetual bond

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Rock, "Conjugal Rights," *Marriage* (St. Meinrad, Ind.), March, 1962, 51-55.



between husband and wife which cannot be dissolved by any civil law: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). Hence every true marriage possesses this inviolable stability (although not in the same measure of perfection in every case), and the only exceptions, and these very rare, in no way depend on the will of men nor on any merely human power, but on the divine law alone.

Christian marriage is a sacrament in another and more perfect sense: it is one of the sacred signs instituted by Christ as instruments of his grace, and specifically of that grace which "perfects natural love, confirms an indissoluble union, and sanctifies both man and wife."<sup>13</sup> Much more perfectly, then, does it represent the indissoluble bond of Christ and the Church, and it invests all the goods of marriage with a special and supernatural excellence.

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Men and women are free either to marry or not to marry. They are free to marry for any honorable and good reason, but no one is free to change the nature or effects of marriage to suit his own convenience.

The nature of marriage is fixed immutably, its essential effects follow inexorably. An attempt to change the nature of marriage or to obstruct its essential effects will result in tragedy just as surely as an attempt to change the value of numbers will result in arithmetical errors. Marriage is very close to the foundations of human nature, to the very essence of man, and essences cannot be changed without being destroyed.

A child's ability to enjoy dreams and fantasies as if they were realities is a healthy and engaging aspect of growing up, when it is kept within bounds. But childishness is abhorrent in the adult. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child" (I Cor. 13:11).

<sup>13</sup>Council of Trent, Sess. XXIV; Denz. 969.



Childish immaturity in marriage is most often manifested by an unwillingness to recognize the reality of its obligations and the need for self-discipline to achieve its rewards. The root error is to be found in an unwillingness to recognize that man is not free to tamper with the nature of marriage nor to impede its essential results.

The test of maturity is the ability to accept responsibility, and this ability is evidenced especially by the act of consent in weighty matters. The act of marital consent, then, acquires special significance for the Christian, for by it he manifests a willingness to assume responsibility not only for the temporal welfare of others, but more importantly, for their eternal destiny.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Helpful in understanding and expanding the material covered in this chapter are John C. Ford, S.J., "Marriage: Its Meaning and Purposes," *Theological Studies*, III (1942), 333 ff.; Bernard Lonergan, S.J., "Finality, Love, Marriage," *ibid.*, IV (1943), 477 ff.



## CHAPTER THREE

# The Properties of Christian Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

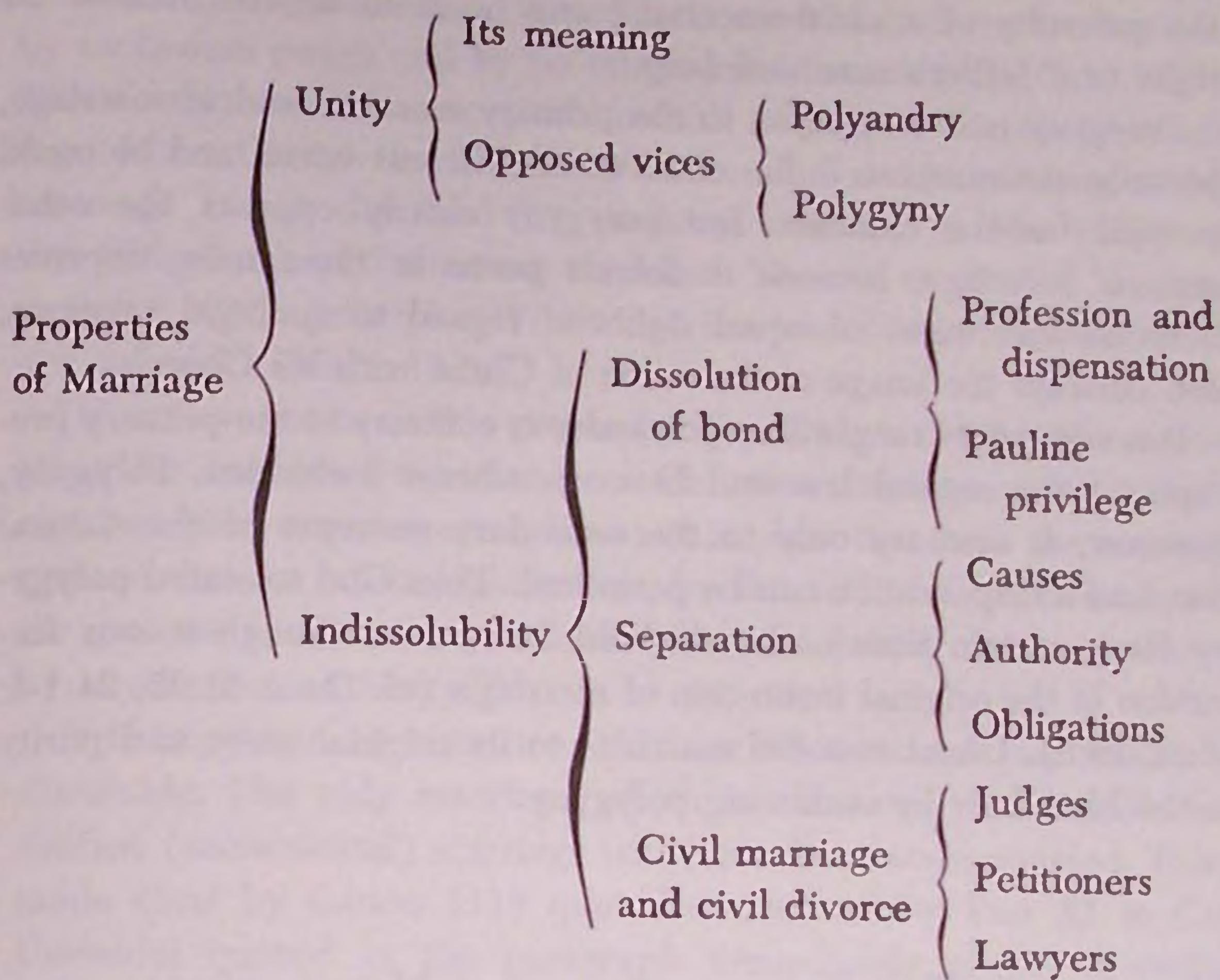
Properties are uniquely distinctive qualities which are always found in a particular subject. The ability to laugh is a property of human beings. The sound of laughter indicates the presence of humans, because only rational beings are capable of appreciating the incongruity which is the basis of true humor, and only rational animals can emit true laughter. A property is like a hallmark, a trademark that is distinctive.

Marriage enjoys certain distinctive qualities or properties which serve to identify it. "The essential properties of the marriage contract are unity and indissolubility, to which the sacrament gives a special firmness in Christian marriage" (Can. 1013 § 2).

These two properties are rather widely denied in the modern world; this is especially true of indissolubility, which is denied by the practice of divorce. Many very common and practical questions revolve around the matter of indissolubility, and they will be touched



upon here as the material is developed according to the following outline:



## 2. THE UNITY OF MARRIAGE

### A. The Meaning of the Unity of Marriage

The unity of marriage consists in this, that *one man is united to one woman*. Unity excludes both *polyandry*, which is a simultaneous plurality of husbands, and *polygyny*, which is a simultaneous plurality of wives. It does not exclude the taking of a second, third, fourth, etc., wife or husband after the death of one of the spouses.

### B. Vices Opposed to Marital Unity

Polyandry is absolutely condemned by the natural law. It is directly contrary to the primary essential end of marriage for two rea-



sons. First, experience shows that women who are promiscuous with many men tend not to conceive children. Secondly, polyandry makes the paternity of a child uncertain, and tends to deprive him of his right to a father's care and help.

Polygyny is less opposed to the primary essential end of marriage, because one man can father children of different wives, and he could provide for the children. But polygyny clearly opposes the other ends of marriage, because it defeats peace in the family, deprives husband and wives of equal rights in regard to conjugal relations, and destroys the image of the union of Christ with his Church.

It is commonly taught that polyandry is contrary to the primary precepts of the natural law and hence is always forbidden. Polygyny, however, is contrary only to the secondary precepts of the natural law, and a dispensation can be permitted. Thus God tolerated polygyny for a certain time under the Old Law, even though it was forbidden in the original institution of marriage (cf. Deut. 21:15, 24:1-4; Matt. 19:5). Christ restored marriage to its original unity and purity in the New Law by outlawing polygyny.

### 3. THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE

#### A. Introduction

Indissolubility of marriage consists in this, that *the marriage bond is not broken until the death of one of the parties*. It is a property of all marriages, both natural and Christian. The Mosaic Law tolerated the "written notice of dismissal" which dissolved the marriage bond and allowed the repudiated wife to contract a new marriage. This practice was abolished by Christ (cf. Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 5:31 f., 19:5).

In precisely what sense is marriage indissoluble? The answer to this important question is best had from an examination of the pertinent teachings of the Church.



## B. Dissolution of the Bond of Matrimony

“Valid marriage which is ratified and consummated can be dissolved by no human power and by no other cause than death” (Can. 1118). This doctrine must be accepted on faith as part of the official teaching of the Church itself.<sup>1</sup> Christ’s Church has always taught that marriage is not dissolved by adultery, contrary to the claims of the Orthodox and Protestant churches. Thus is vindicated the true meaning of the principle: “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6).

“However, not even this power [of the Church of Christ] can ever affect for any cause whatsoever a Christian marriage which is valid and has been consummated, for as it is plain that here the marriage contract has its full completion, so, by the will of God, there is also the greatest firmness and indissolubility which may not be destroyed by any human authority.”<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note here that not all marriages are totally indissoluble. The only marriage which is absolutely indissoluble is a ratified (sacramental) marriage which has been consummated. This is made clear by Canon 1118 quoted above and by Pius XI in *Casti Connubii* quoted in the paragraph immediately above. A ratified (sacramental) marriage which has not been consummated is a true contract and hence a true marriage; the marriage rights have been given and accepted but have not yet been used. Society (the Church) has accepted this contract. It cannot be dissolved, therefore, without the consent of the Church, which can be given only by the Holy See itself. The manner in which this is done is explained in (1) below.

A true and valid marriage which is not ratified (because one or both of the parties is unbaptized), even though it be consummated, can be dissolved by the Pauline privilege or by the Holy See under circumstances which it has determined or will in the future determine. This is explained in (2) below. This in no sense implies that the

<sup>1</sup>Cf. the Council of Trent, Sess. XXIV, Canon 7 on the sacrament of matrimony; Denz. 977.

<sup>2</sup>Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930; Denz. 2236.



Church does not recognize the marriage of non-Catholics as valid when true consent is given and no impediment of the natural law exists.

*(1) Solemn Religious Profession and Papal Dispensation*

“Non-consummated marriage between two baptized parties or between one baptized and one unbaptized is dissolved by the very fact of solemn religious profession, and also by dispensation of the Holy See, granted for a just cause at the request of the two parties, or even of one of them, against the wish of the other” (Can. 1119).

As the Council of Trent declares, solemn religious profession of itself dissolves a ratified but unconsummated marriage (Denz. 976). It is only solemn profession in a religious order strictly so called which has this effect, not simple profession (not even in the Society of Jesus), nor the solemn vow of chastity made during the reception of the subdiaconate.

Two conditions must be fulfilled for the Apostolic See to dissolve a ratified, non-consummated marriage:

- 1) There must be legally accepted proof that the marriage never was consummated.
  - 2) There must be a just cause for the petition (Can. 1119).
- Such dispensations are granted only by the Holy Father.

*(2) The Pauline Privilege*

“Legitimate marriage between unbaptized persons, even if consummated, is dissolved in favor of the faith by virtue of the Pauline privilege. This privilege is not applicable to a marriage contracted between a baptized and an unbaptized person with a dispensation from the impediment of the disparity of worship” (Can. 1120).<sup>3</sup>

This canon expresses the privilege called Pauline because it is based upon the words of St. Paul: “For to the rest I say, not the Lord: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to live with him, let him not put her away. And if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, let her not put away her hus-

<sup>3</sup>The Church could, however, dissolve such a marriage, since even with the dispensation the marriage is not sacramental.



band. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but, as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. For a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace" (I Cor. 7:12-15).

1. **Interpretation of this privilege.** Pope Innocent III gave the first authentic interpretation of these words. The Church understands this privilege in such a way that if either partner is converted to the faith from paganism and is actually baptized, while the other partner perseveres in infidelity, the newly converted party can enter into a new marriage with a Catholic, provided the conditions laid down by the law are fulfilled.

The application of this privilege requires great knowledge and skill; it is certainly no do-it-yourself project for the incompetent amateur. The following conditions are explained, therefore, as a guide to understanding how the Pauline privilege is applied, not as a directive for interfering with the work of a chancery office.

2. **Conditions respecting this privilege:**

1. The Pauline privilege, according to Can. 1120 § 2, does not apply to any marriage contracted between a baptized and a non-baptized party when the marriage was contracted with a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of worship.
2. The privilege may be invoked:
  - 1) If the non-baptized party deserts the convert, even without fault, due to circumstances beyond his control.
  - 2) If the non-baptized party refuses to live peacefully with the newly converted party.
  - 3) If the non-baptized party consents to live with the convert, but only on condition of endangering his spiritual life, e.g., by opposing his right to worship; by offering temptation to grave sin; by blasphemy, etc.
3. If the newly converted partner has, after receiving baptism, given the other spouse a legitimate cause for separation, the privilege may not be invoked (Can. 1123).



4. Before the converted party may contract another marriage validly, he must (except in special cases provided for in law) ask the non-baptized partner:

1) Whether he is willing to be converted and baptized.

2) Whether he is willing to live peaceably without opposing the practice of the convert's faith (Can. 1121).

5. The bond of the former marriage which was contracted while both parties were infidels is not dissolved when the convert is baptized, but only when he contracts a new marriage validly under the privilege (Can. 1126).

3. **Significance of this privilege.** Thus the law safeguards the rights of both parties: the right of the convert to practice his faith in peace; and the subordinate right of the non-baptized party to preserve his marriage, with due respect for the faith.

4. **Extension of this privilege.** By divine decree, the Pope possesses the power to dissolve, for a just cause, any marriage which is not both ratified and consummated. In particular, the Pope may dissolve a valid consummated marriage between a baptized heretic and an unbaptized person, thus permitting a convert to the faith to contract a new marriage. This is sometimes called "the Helena privilege," or "the privilege of the faith."

### C. Separation of Spouses

It is clear that a ratified and consummated marriage is absolutely indissoluble except by the death of one of the parties. Such a marriage establishes a special union between the spouses. How far does such a union extend? What are the obligations that flow from this indissolubility?

Because marriage makes the spouses "two in one flesh," they must share a common life to discharge the obligations arising from their union. Canon law determines: "Married persons are bound to live together unless they have a just cause for separation" (Can. 1128). This means that they must share a common "bed, board and dwelling."



There is a variety of just causes which can excuse marriage partners from maintaining this shared life, and there are different degrees of separation, either total or partial, perpetual or temporary. The following is a summary of excusing causes in relation to different degrees of separation.

*(1) Causes for Perpetual and Total Separation*

- 1) Adultery is the only cause for *complete separation* without mutual consent. "Adultery on the part of one of the spouses, without breaking the bond of marriage, gives the other spouse the right to terminate their common life even permanently, unless he has himself consented to the crime, or been responsible for it, or has condoned it expressly or tacitly, or has committed the same crime" (Can. 1129 § 1). Thus one loses his marital rights by adultery when these conditions are fulfilled:
  - a) It must be formal consummated adultery, i.e., knowingly and freely committed. Gravely unchaste acts other than copulation are not adultery.
  - b) There must be moral certitude that the adultery took place. While suspicion is not enough, direct evidence is not required.
  - c) The other spouse must not have consented to the adultery.
  - d) The other spouse must not have been responsible for it, e.g., by frequent unreasonable denial of marital rights, or by deserting the marriage partner.
  - e) The adultery must not be mutual.
  - f) The adultery must not be condoned in any way. "There is tacit condonation when the innocent party, knowing of the adultery, has freely continued to treat the guilty one with marital affection; condonation is presumed unless the innocent party expels, deserts or brings legal accusation against the adulterer within six months" (Can. 1129 § 2).
- 2) If both parties freely consent to embrace a higher state (i.e., religious life or priesthood), and obtain a dispensation from the Holy See to do so, they may separate totally and permanently (Can. 542 § 1, 987 § 2).



*(2) Causes for Total but Temporary Separation*

- 1) If either spouse formally joins a non-Catholic sect.
- 2) If either spouse educates the children as non-Catholics.
- 3) If either spouse leads a criminal and disgraceful life.
- 4) If either spouse causes grave spiritual or physical danger to the other.
- 5) If one partner makes common life unbearable by cruelty.
- 6) If other similar causes are present.

When the cause for separation ceases, the common married life should be resumed. In cases where the separation has been pronounced by the Ordinary for a definite or an indefinite period of time, the innocent party is not bound to resume the common life until the stated time has elapsed, or until he is ordered to do so by competent authority (cf. Can. 1131 § 2).

*(3) Causes for Partial Separation, either Temporary or Permanent*

Married people may continue to maintain a common dwelling and share the same table while they discontinue marital relations and live as brother and sister, either permanently or for a limited time:

- 1) By mutual consent for a grave reason.
- 2) Whenever either spouse is not obligated to fulfill the marital rights of the other party.

If a case should arise in which it is not possible for the couple to exercise marital relations and their proximity would constitute a proximate danger of incontinence, they have a moral obligation to remain apart until such danger passes.

*(4) Authority Competent to Allow Separation*

The general principle is that the local Ordinary is the usual authority competent to allow separation, and that ordinarily it may not be undertaken on private authority. One reason for this is that marriage is a symbol of the union of Christ with his Church, and to interfere with this sacred signification, the authority of the Church must be invoked. Another reason is that marriage is not simply the concern



of the married people themselves but of society as well. Society, therefore, has a right to judge whether there is sufficiently grave reason for separation.

The following cases illustrate how this principle is applied:

- 1) A dispensation from the Holy See is required for married people who wish to enter the religious or clerical state.
- 2) A declaration from the local Ordinary is required for a separation based upon adultery which is not public.
- 3) On his own authority the innocent party may separate from a partner whose adultery is publicly known.
- 4) When danger would arise from the delay involved in approaching the local Ordinary, the innocent party may leave on his own authority when a cause for total but temporary separation is present (cf. *supra*, 56, Section (2)).

In all other cases the authority of the local Ordinary should be sought before separating.

#### (5) *Rights and Duties of Separated Spouses*

When separation is based upon adultery, the innocent party is never obligated in justice to recall or to accept the guilty partner. However, he may do either in a spirit of mercy and charity. The innocent party always retains the right to recall the guilty one, and the offender has the duty to return, unless he justly fears grave cruelty from the innocent partner. If, however, the innocent party has consented to the other's entrance into religious life or the clerical state, he loses the right to summon him back to marriage (cf. Can. 1130).

In general, the efforts of all concerned in any way with cases of separation should tend to reunite the partners unless there is clear indication that continued separation is the lesser of two evils.

The education of the children belongs to the innocent party. If it is a mixed marriage, the education of the children belongs to the Catholic, even if he is guilty, unless the Ordinary decides otherwise. The reason for this is that the children have a right to Catholic education, and the best possible provision must be made for this. If the



Ordinary grants custody of the children to the non-Catholic, he himself must see that the children are properly educated.

#### 4. CIVIL MARRIAGE AND CIVIL DIVORCE

##### A. Civil Marriage

In the secularist society of modern times, it is commonly thought that the state has unrestricted rights over marriage.

The state certainly has some rights relative to marriage. The family is the unit of civil society, which clearly gives the state the right to legislate regarding property rights, reasonable standards of care for and education of children, and other such matters relating to the common good of civil society. Such legislation is especially necessary and reasonable in a society such as ours, in which the majority of the citizens do not belong to the Catholic Church.

The state may also provide for the marriage of non-Catholics, especially those who are unbaptized, over whom the Church has no jurisdiction. For the most part the Church chooses not to exercise her right to jurisdiction over baptized non-Catholics for the sake of the public peace. (Though disparity of worship has resulted in several declarations of nullity in cases of marriages between a person baptized in a Protestant church and a person unbaptized.) To the extent that the Church does not legislate, it allows the state to do so.

The state may not, of course, legislate contrary to the natural law in regard to marriage; it may not tamper with or change the essential matter of the contract. On the other hand, the state may establish impediments to marriages over which it has jurisdiction. The presence of such an impediment would render the marriage invalid if the state so held. In practice many civil laws regulating marriage and divorce are contrary to divine and natural law and, in regard to those bound to the law of the Church, are sometimes contrary also to ecclesiastical legislation.



(1) *Civil Marriage of Catholics*

The Church recognizes the right of the state to legislate for the civil effects of marriages and to provide civil marriage for non-Catholics who are not obligated to the form prescribed for her own children. If the civil law requires it, Catholics are permitted to contract the civil effects of marriage before an authorized civil official; thus it is not forbidden in this case for the Catholic parties to present themselves before a non-Catholic minister acting solely in the capacity of a civil official (Can. 1063 § 3). But while such civil requirements are frequently found in European countries, they do not exist in the United States.

Purely civil marriages *among Catholics* in the United States are completely invalid, both as contracts and as sacraments. American civil law everywhere recognizes pastors as empowered to officiate at marriages. Certain states require that the pastor secure legal authorization, but nowhere is it ever necessary to appear before a civil official—and much less before a non-Catholic minister—to secure the civil effects of marriage. The pastor is required to ask for the civil marriage license, to sign it after the ceremony, and to return it to the civil authorities.

(2) *Civil Marriage of Non-Catholics*

Non-Catholics, baptized or not (provided they were never baptized “in the Catholic Church”), are not bound to observe the Catholic form of marriage if they contract marriage among themselves. An exception was formerly granted by Canon 1099 to persons born of non-Catholic parents, even though they were baptized in the Catholic Church, but who had grown up from infancy in heresy or schism or without any religion, when they contracted marriage with a non-Catholic party; it was abrogated by a *Motu proprio* of Aug. 1, 1948. This exemption hence applies only to such persons if married prior to Jan. 1, 1949 (AAS, 40 [1948], 305).

Thus civil marriage *between those not baptized in the Catholic Church* is completely valid if two conditions are fulfilled:



- 1) If the contracting parties are free of all invalidating impediments of the natural law, as well as of the civil and ecclesiastical law (if any).
- 2) If the contracting parties have the intention of contracting true marriage.

### B. Civil Divorce

A civil divorce is the dissolution of the marriage bond by the authority of the state, so that the spouses are considered free to contract a new marriage. The Church regards such a procedure as false and erroneous, because marriage is indissoluble.

It is the better opinion, although some deny it, that civil divorce is not an intrinsically evil action. The immediate object (which is the dissolution of the civil effects of marriage), as well as circumstances necessarily connected with it, do not seem to be essentially evil. Consequently, in certain circumstances, a judge could pronounce a civil divorce, a lawyer could advocate one, and the spouses could seek and accept it.

The element of possible scandal is certainly minimized by the constant application of divorce laws in many countries such as the United States. In cases of true necessity for obtaining the civil effects of divorce, there is generally sufficient reason for tolerating whatever possibility of scandal is involved.

#### *(1) The Judge and Divorce*

A judge may pronounce a civil divorce in cases where the marriage is certainly invalid. Such invalid marriages are: civil marriages between parties who are obliged to the form prescribed by the Church; marriages already declared null by an ecclesiastical court; marriages in which the bond has been lawfully dissolved by competent authority, or where a clearly invalidating impediment, such as previous marriage, was present.

Generally, it is the wiser course for the Catholic judge to seek to be relieved of trying divorce cases. When he cannot be relieved, he



should make it clear that his pronouncement is limited to the civil effects of valid marriages.

In the United States there seem to be sufficient reasons for the Catholic judge to lend remote and material co-operation in divorce actions. To pronounce a divorce is not an intrinsically evil act.<sup>4</sup> There is no evidence that divorce laws in this country were enacted out of hatred for the Church, as seems to be the case in some other countries. Also, it is evident that a judge could be impeached for refusing to apply the law, and thus Catholics would be practically excluded from an office in which they can make important contributions to the common welfare. Any directives of the local Ordinary must, of course, be observed.

### (2) *The Petitioners for Divorce*

No Catholic may seek a civil divorce for any reason without previously getting the permission of the local Ordinary.<sup>5</sup>

When the marriage has been declared invalid by the Church or when the bond has been legitimately dissolved, Catholics may seek permission to sue in court for the civil effects of divorce.

If Catholics sue for divorce in order to remarry, or to attempt to dissolve the bond of marriage, their action is gravely sinful. And if they seek divorce without permission from the local Ordinary, even though only for the civil effects of divorce, it is also gravely sinful.

Permission to sue for divorce is granted only for grave and urgent reasons. For example, in certain states a civil divorce is the only means to protect property rights and to secure custody of the children in cases of lawful separation.

### (3) *The Lawyer and Divorce*

In general, whatever is lawful for the client is lawful for his lawyer, because he is the agent of the petitioner. A lawyer is far more

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Pius XII, A.A.S., XLI (1949), 602 ff.; Abellán, "De Sententia Fundata in Lege Injusta," *Periodica*, XXXIX (1950), 21; Vlaming-Bender, *Praelectiones Juris Matrimonii* (Bussum: Brand, 1950), 558.

<sup>5</sup>Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, n. 126.



free than a judge to refuse divorce cases. To accept such cases, he needs a more serious reason than the loss of the fee.

Whenever a Catholic lawyer deals in a divorce action with Catholic clients who are validly married, he must always inform them that it is necessary for them to seek permission of the Ordinary before suing in the courts.

In dealing with non-Catholics marriages, the Catholic lawyer may enter a divorce action in these cases:

- 1) If the client's marriage is manifestly invalid.
- 2) If there are real reasons for *separation*, and the only practical means of securing it is through divorce.
- 3) If the client wishes merely to file a cross-petition to prevent the divorce or to protect his rights.

## 5. CONCLUSION

All that has been said in this chapter is nothing more than an explanation of the most authoritative words ever spoken on the subject: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).



## CHAPTER FOUR

# The Impediments to Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will consider not only the impediments to marriage as they are understood in the strict sense of the term, but it will also consider the 'impediment' which prevents true marriage taking place when a Catholic is involved if the form prescribed by the Church is not used. The chapter will end with some observations regarding the manner in which certain invalid marriages may be rectified, that is, made to be true marriages.

The study of the impediments can be a very detailed matter. The seminarian studies them far more exhaustively than they will be studied here, and the highly technical knowledge of them necessary to unravel the unusual cases often faced by canon lawyers is even more beyond our purpose. The reason for this treatment of the impediments is twofold:

- 1) A deeper understanding of the nature of the marriage contract and of its effects upon society and individuals will result from

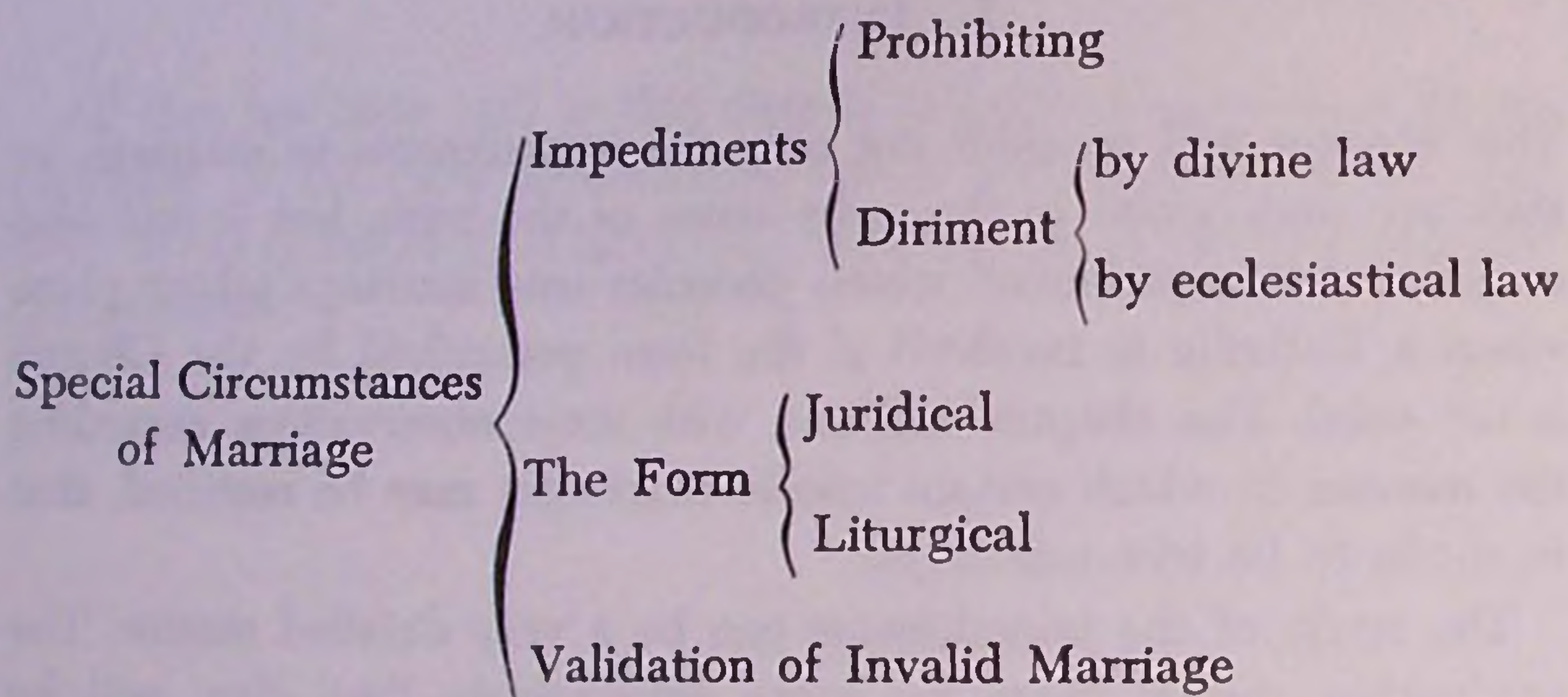


studying the situations in which lawful authority makes a marriage contract illegal or altogether impossible.

- 2) An educated Catholic should be able to offer some intelligent information concerning the factors which might result in a marriage being declared null. He should also understand that, though the law is clear, it is also involved, and that he is not prepared to fully explain the decisions of marriage courts, especially when his knowledge of the facts is limited to a brief and often garbled account in a newspaper or to hearsay evidence picked up in the locker room of the country club.

Incidentally, this information might help prevent the student himself from becoming involved in a situation in which he might wish to make an undesirable or even an impossible marriage.

The material of the chapter will be treated according to the following outline:



## 2. THE IMPEDIMENTS IN GENERAL

A matrimonial impediment is *any external circumstance affecting the persons of the spouses which, by a disposition of law, hinders them from validly or licitly contracting marriage*. Impediments arising solely from ecclesiastical law do not obligate the unbaptized.



In terms of their effects, there are two kinds of impediments to marriage:

- 1) **Prohibiting impediments** contain a grave prohibition against contracting marriage; but if the marriage is contracted, it is not (on this score) invalid; it is, however, illegal and seriously sinful. (Cf. the end of Section Four in Chapter One above.)
- 2) **Diriment impediments** gravely forbid marriage and prevent it from being valid; when such an impediment is present no marriage takes place.

### 3. PROHIBITING IMPEDIMENTS

In the present legislation of the Church, there are three prohibiting impediments: mixed religion, simple vows, and, where the civil law makes adoption a prohibiting impediment, legal relationship. This latter is not practical in the United States, and will not be studied.

#### A. Mixed Religion

Mixed religion is present when one party is a Catholic and the other is a member of a heretical or schismatic sect *and* validly baptized.

“The Church most severely forbids everywhere the contracting of marriage between two baptized persons, of whom one is a Catholic and the other is a member of a heretical or schismatic sect; and if there is danger of perversion for the Catholic party and the children, the marriage is forbidden also by the divine law itself” (Can. 1060).

The Church discourages mixed marriages. Because the spouses mutually administer the sacrament to each other, a mixed marriage implies a communication in things divine with one who, no matter how good and sincere he may be, nevertheless holds erroneous ideas about the teachings of the Christian religion. Experience proves that there is great danger to the faith of the Catholic party and often to



that of the children as well. If the danger to the faith of the Catholic and of the children cannot be rendered remote, then this impediment derives from the divine law, *and no dispensation is possible in such cases.*

Dispensations from this impediment are granted by the Holy See, generally through the local Ordinaries to whom special faculties are extended. A just and grave cause is required for the dispensation. Furthermore, the non-Catholic must give guarantees, in the form of solemn promises, generally in writing, that there will be no interference with the practice of the Catholic's faith; and both parties must pledge that all children will be raised in the Catholic faith. Finally, there must be moral certainty that the promises will be kept.

It is gravely forbidden for the parties of a mixed marriage to be married by a non-Catholic minister either before or after the Catholic ceremony. Catholics who do this are guilty of sacrilege and incur an excommunication.<sup>1</sup> This does not forbid a civil ceremony when the civil law requires it.

The penalty of an excommunication which is reserved to the local Ordinary falls upon Catholics who:

- 1) contract marriage before a non-Catholic minister in a religious ceremony;
- 2) enter a mixed marriage with an implicit or explicit agreement that some or all of the children will be educated outside the Catholic faith;
- 3) presume knowingly to have their children baptized by a non-Catholic minister;
- 4) knowingly allow the children to be educated or enrolled in a non-Catholic religion. (Cf. Can. 2319 § 1.)

In addition to forbidden marriages with baptized members of non-Catholic sects, the Church prohibits marriage with Communists, with those who have notoriously abandoned the Catholic faith even without joining another church, and with those who are notoriously affiliated with societies condemned by the Church. Priests are for-

<sup>1</sup>In some dioceses an excommunication is also inflicted upon Catholics who attempt marriage before a civil magistrate.



bidden to assist at such marriages without consulting the Ordinary beforehand.

If a public sinner, or someone notoriously under ecclesiastical censure, refuses to go to sacramental confession or to be reconciled to the Church before marriage, the pastor must not assist at his marriage unless there is a grave reason, concerning which he should, if possible, consult the Ordinary (Can. 1066).

### B. The Impediment Arising from Vows

Those who have made certain simple vows, either privately or in a religious community, are prohibited from marrying until the vow ceases to oblige or until they receive a dispensation from competent authority. There are five vows that prohibit but do not invalidate marriage: a vow not to marry; a vow of virginity; a vow of perfect chastity; a vow to receive holy orders; a vow to embrace the religious life (cf. Can. 1058).

It is gravely sinful to contract marriage in violation of a vow. Anyone who has made a vow that is incompatible with married life is bound to reveal this to the pastor during the pre-nuptial investigation.

(*NOTE* regarding vows: All private vows are simple. Public vows taken in a religious community are either simple or solemn. All temporary vows are simple. The permanent vows of almost all active, as distinct from cloistered or contemplative, religious women are simple, as are the permanent vows of communities of brothers and most modern communities of priests. All priests of the Latin rite have, however, the equivalent of a solemn vow of chastity.

Solemn vows are permanent vows as taken in one of the old religious orders, such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians. Solemn vows are made by lay brothers as well as by clerics in these orders. Many canonists hold that the difference between simple and solemn vows lies in how they are accepted by the Church; thus the Church can make the special regulation that the simple vow of chastity in the Society of Jesus is equivalent to a solemn vow in invalidating marriage. Note that, except for the Jesuits, the simple vow of chastity makes marriage illegal but not impossible; the solemn vow of chastity (and the simple vow in the Society of Jesus) makes marriage impossible, that is, invalid.)



## 4. DIRIMENT IMPEDIMENTS

Diriment impediments are so called from the Latin *dirimere*, which mean "to break asunder." A diriment impediment renders marriage null and void. In other words, when a diriment impediment is present marriage cannot take place. They are thirteen in number in the current legislation of the Church. Some of these impediments flow from the natural or the divine positive law, and from these no dispensation is possible. Others arise from ecclesiastical law and can be dispensed under certain conditions. First those which arise from the natural or divine positive law will be individually considered, then those which arise from ecclesiastical law. This distinction is of great importance, since the Church cannot dispense from those which she did not make. Note that two of the impediments arise only partially from natural and divine law. Hence they appear again in the list of impediments which arise from ecclesiastical law.

## A. Impediments Arising from Natural or Divine Law

Two impediments fall totally into this category, and two fall partially. *Previous marriage* and *impotency* are totally indispensable, since in both cases the matter of the marriage contract is not present. In the first case the perpetual and exclusive right over the body to those acts which are of their nature ordained to the generation of children has already been given by the married party and no longer belongs to him to give again. In the second case the impotent party is incapable of such acts and so cannot make a contract about them.

(1) *Previous Marriage*

Those already bound by a previous marriage, even if it was not consummated, cannot validly contract another marriage. Even if the previous marriage was invalid or if it was dissolved for any reason, the party is not free to contract another marriage until the nullity or dissolution of the former marriage is established with certainty according to law (cf. Can. 1069).



This impediment arises from divine law and does not admit of dispensation. What has been said regarding special cases in the previous chapter in the section on indissolubility must be kept in mind.

Catholics who presume, even civilly, to contract a new marriage, before the lawful dissolution of a former union, are excommunicated, and if they should die without signs of repentance are denied ecclesiastical burial as public sinners (cf. Can. 2356).

### (2) *Impotency*

Impotency is the impossibility of performing marital relations; it is a physical or psychological defect, or a combination of both, whereby one cannot naturally perform the marital act with a person of the opposite sex. Impotence may be *absolute*—precluding marital relations altogether—or *relative*, precluding relations only with some particular individual. Impotency must be distinguished from sterility, which is the inability to generate children, but not the inability to perform the act of generation. Sterility is not an impediment to marriage.<sup>2</sup>

The marriage contract has for its object *acts which are of themselves suitable for generation*. Since those who are impotent are incapable of such acts, they are therefore incapable of contracting to exchange them.

The impediment of impotency derives from the natural law. If the impotence existed before marriage and is permanent, it invalidates the marriage. No dispensation may be granted from such an impediment (cf. Can. 1068).

### (3) *Disparity of Worship*

This impediment is No. 9 in the next section, which treats of impediments arising from ecclesiastical law. It appears here as an impediment arising from divine law (and thus one from which no dispensation can be granted) only when proximate danger to the faith of the

<sup>2</sup>For thorough discussions of two different aspects of these problems, cf. John C. Ford, S.J., "Double Vasectomy and the Impediment of Impotency," *Theological Studies*, XVI (1955), 533 ff.; Aidan M. Carr, O.F.M.Conv., "Marriage and the Paraplegic," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, LX (1959), 123 ff.



Catholic party or of the children to be born of the marriage is present. The impediment arises from the divine law in this case because the faith cannot be sacrificed to any lesser good, since eternal salvation would be thereby endangered. Remote danger to the faith exists in every marriage of a Catholic to a non-Catholic; to be of divine law the danger must be proximate.

#### *(4) Consanguinity*

This is impediment No. 6 in the next section. It is of the natural law and cannot be dispensed when it involves the direct line or the first degree of the collateral line (brother and sister).

### B. Impediments Arising from Ecclesiastical Law

#### *(1) Age*

Men who have not completed their sixteenth year and women who have not completed their fourteenth year cannot marry validly. A year is regarded as completed on the day after the birthday. Thus, someone born on May 1, 1950, is sixteen on May 2, 1966. The purpose of this impediment, which is established by ecclesiastical law, is to insure that the parties have sufficient knowledge to make a valid contract of marriage. Dispensation from this impediment is very rarely granted (cf. Can. 1067).

#### *(2) Sacred Orders*

A marriage is invalid when attempted by clerics in sacred orders (Can. 1072). This law applies to those who have received the orders of subdiaconate, diaconate or priesthood. The impediment arises from ecclesiastical law, and the Holy Father can grant dispensations. However, it is not the practice to grant dispensations to those who have been ordained to the priesthood.

Among the penalties incurred for attempting marriage when this impediment is present is an excommunication simply reserved to the Holy See, both for the cleric and for his accomplice (cf. Can. 2388).



### (3) *Solemn Vows*

A marriage is invalid when attempted by a religious who has taken solemn vows, or even those simple vows which, by a provision of the Holy See, have the effect of annulling marriage (Can. 1073).

Those who break this law incur an excommunication simply reserved to the Holy See, both for the religious and the accomplice (cf. Can. 2388 § 1).

Dispensation from this impediment can be granted by the Holy See.

### (4) *Abduction*

As a matrimonial impediment, abduction is the seizure of a woman against her will for the purpose of marrying her. A similar case, but legally distinct, is that of keeping a woman imprisoned who freely leaves her home. In both cases, marriage is invalid between the woman and her abductor as long as she is under his power.

This impediment arises from ecclesiastical law (cf. Can. 1074), one which is established to safeguard the freedom of marriage. The impediment ceases when the woman is freed and restored to a place of safety in which she would be able to choose freely to marry. Priests should not assist at such marriages until they have consulted the Ordinary, who will determine whether the woman is marrying freely.

### (5) *Crime*

Crime, as an impediment to marriage, invalidates matrimony between two parties who have:

- 1) during the existence of the same lawful marriage, committed adultery with the promise to marry, or who have attempted marriage, even civilly; or,
- 2) during the existence of the same lawful marriage, committed adultery, when one of them has slain the lawful spouse; or
- 3) by mutual co-operation, either physical or moral, caused the death of a marriage partner, even though they have not committed adultery.

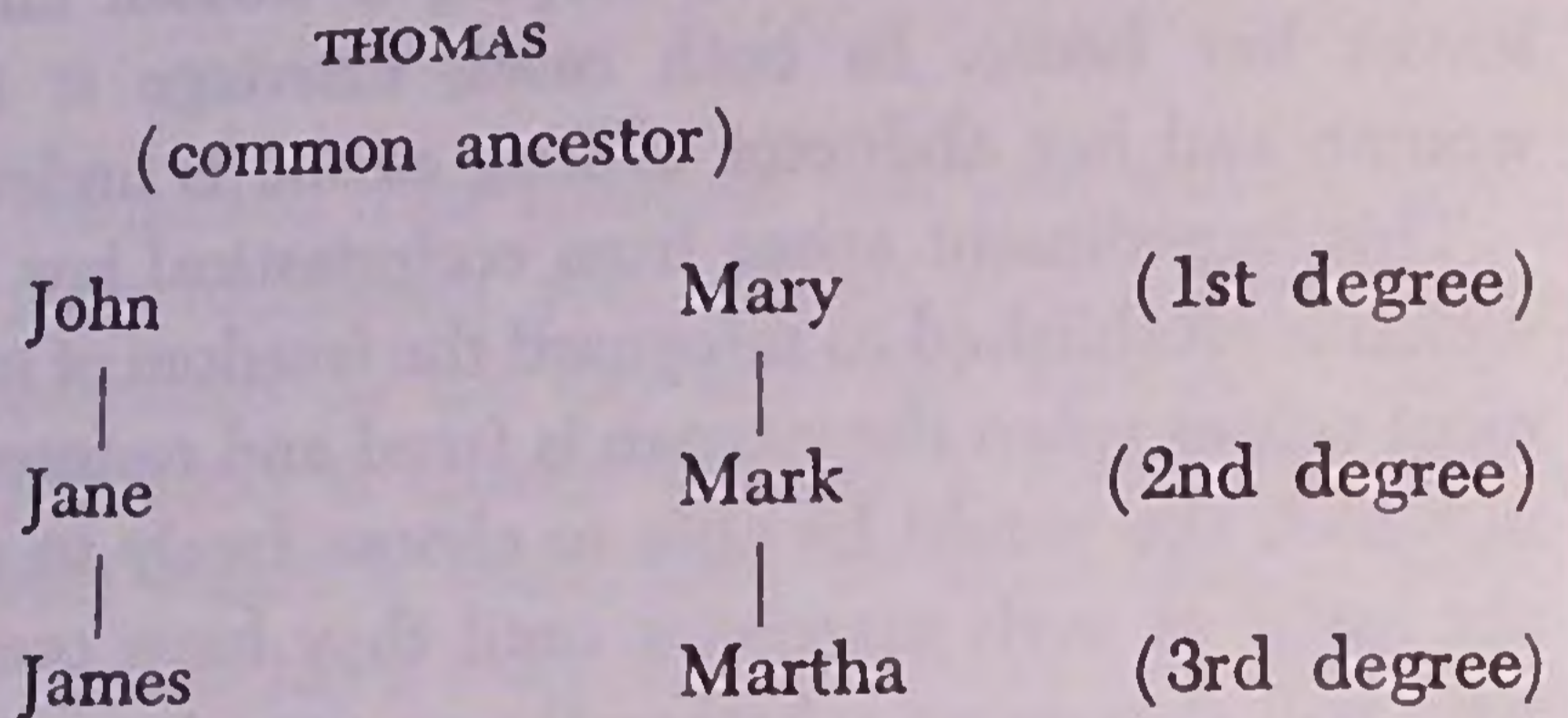


This impediment arises from ecclesiastical law (Can. 1075) to insure conjugal faith and the safety of the spouses, as well as to punish a very grave sin.

The impediment ceases only with dispensation. If the murder of the lawful spouse was secret, a dispensation may be granted for very grave reasons; if the murder was public, it is never granted in practice.

### (6) Consanguinity

Consanguinity is an impediment which invalidates marriage between certain blood relatives. In the direct line of relationship, marriage between all ascendants and descendants is invalid. In the collateral line, marriage is invalid to the third degree inclusive. This may be illustrated by the following diagram:



In the diagram above, Thomas—John—Jane—James are related to each other in the *direct* line of consanguinity (as also are Thomas—Mary—Mark—Martha). The individuals of the first column are related to the individuals of the second column in the *collateral* line. In this example, therefore, none of the individuals could, without dispensation, validly marry another.

Marriage is never permitted when there is a doubt that the parties are related in some degree of the direct line, or in the first degree of the collateral line (cf. Can. 1076). In the second (first cousins) and third degrees of the collateral line, the impediment is, it is certain, only one of ecclesiastical law, and one from which, in consequence, the Holy See may grant a dispensation.



This impediment can be multiplied by multiplication of the common stock, so that detection of the impediment should be left to those who have the required knowledge and skill, such as the local pastor.

#### (7) *Affinity*

Affinity is the relationship of persons which arises from a valid marriage (either ratified and consummated or only ratified), and which exists between the husband and those related by consanguinity to the wife, and between the wife and those related by consanguinity to the husband (cf. Can. 1077).<sup>3</sup> In the direct line in any degree it invalidates marriage; in the collateral line, it invalidates it up to the second degree. Dispensations from affinity in the direct line are extremely rare; they are more readily granted in the collateral line by the Holy See, generally through the Ordinary.

This impediment arises from ecclesiastical law and is designed to diminish the dangers to chastity, to include families in the charity and friendship of marriage, and to foster mutual reverence among in-laws.

#### (8) *Public Propriety*

Public propriety, as an impediment, arises from invalid marriage, whether consummated or not, and from public or notorious concubinage. It invalidates marriage in the first and second degree of the direct line between the man and the blood relations of the woman, and between the woman and the blood relations of the man.

This impediment arises from ecclesiastical law (Can. 1078) and is designed to preserve public decency and to safeguard the honor of the home. Dispensation may be granted by the Holy See, generally through the Ordinary.

If a marriage appears genuine, but is invalid for any reason, it gives rise to this impediment. Upon the termination of such a union, then, the husband could not validly marry the grandmother, mother, daughters or granddaughters of his so-called wife. A purely civil

<sup>3</sup>Affinity contracted among the non-baptized becomes an impediment for marriages contracted after the baptism even of only one of the parties. Cf. Bouscaren, *op. cit.*, IV, 89.



marriage involving at least one Catholic party is no marriage at all, and does not appear to be genuine; hence it does not give rise to this impediment. If, however, such a civil marriage were followed by cohabitation (as is commonly the case), then a dispensation from this impediment would be necessary to contract marriage with the blood relations of the so-called spouse in the first and second degrees of the direct line.

Concubinage means a kind of stable intimacy between a man and woman without any attempt at marriage. To cause the impediment, the concubinage must be public or notorious. It is judged public if it is well known, or can easily become well known. "Public" and "notorious" are technical legal terms, defined in Canon 2197, which are too involved to discuss here. But an obvious example of what the Church regards as public concubinage is the case previously mentioned, namely, the attempted marriage of a Catholic by a civil officer or by a non-Catholic minister, followed by cohabitation.

#### *(9) Disparity of Worship*

Disparity of worship is an impediment existing between a person baptized in the Catholic Church, or converted to it from heresy or schism, and an unbaptized person (Can. 1070). This impediment, precisely as diriment, arises from ecclesiastical law and renders a marriage invalid; it arises from divine law if danger to the faith is involved.

The impediment ceases if the unbaptized party is converted and baptized in the Catholic Church, or if a dispensation is secured from the Holy See, generally through the local Ordinary.

In cases of dispensation for disparity of worship, the same guarantees are required as for mixed marriages. It should be noted that a dispensation from this impediment does not imply a dispensation from other impediments that sometimes exist together with it. If the dispensation is invalid, the marriage is likewise invalid.

#### *(10) Spiritual Relationship*

Spiritual relationship invalidates marriage between the baptized party and the one who baptized him, or between the baptized party



and his baptismal sponsor. It does not arise between the sponsor and the baptized when the baptism is conditional, unless the sponsor at the conditional baptism was also the sponsor at the first ceremony.

This impediment arises from the ecclesiastical law and affects only those parties mentioned above. It applies only to valid baptism, both public and private. In order that the impediment arise, it is necessary that the one baptizing shall himself be baptized, and that the sponsor fulfill all the legal requirements for validly discharging his function.

Dispensation is granted by the Holy See, generally through the Ordinary.

### *(II) Legal Relationship*

This impediment arises from legal adoption and invalidates marriage wherever the civil law establishes it as an invalidating impediment (cf. Can. 1080). Thus when a country (as, for example, in Europe) or a state (as, perhaps, Rhode Island) so legislates, the impediment would also be considered invalidating by the Church.

## 5. THE FORM OF MARRIAGE

### A. The Juridical Form

The juridical form of marriage means the solemnities prescribed by law of the Church for the valid and lawful celebration of matrimony. The natural law requires only a sufficient manifestation of the mutual consent of the parties. The juridical form determines this natural precept so that the marriage is public according to law and celebrated in the eyes of the Church.

The ordinary juridical form requires that marriage be celebrated before the pastor or the local Ordinary, or by a priest delegated by either of these, and at least two witnesses. (Cf. Can. 1094).

It might be wondered why the sacrament of matrimony cannot be witnessed in the name of the Church by any duly ordained priest.



The principal reason is the very practical one that it would make the keeping and locating of records almost impossible. Even when a delegated priest officiates at a marriage, the obligation of making and keeping record of the marriage and of reporting it to the parishes of baptism of the newly married remains with the pastor or Ordinary.

For validity of the marriage, it suffices that the two witnesses have the use of reason and are capable of testifying to the marriage. For lawfulness, however, the following are excluded as witnesses (unless for a grave cause the Ordinary judges their presence more opportune): non-Catholics; excommunicated persons; persons declared infamous by law; adolescents; and militant Communists.

The Ordinary, pastor or delegated priest are the only qualified witnesses who ask for and receive the consent in the name of the Church, and who attest to this as public officials.

#### *(1) Those Bound to the Form*

The following are bound, under pain of nullity of the marriage, to observe the juridical form prescribed by the Church (Can. 1099):

1) All who are baptized in the Catholic Church or who have been converted to it from heresy or schism, even though they may later have left the Church, whenever they contract marriage among themselves.

2) The above-mentioned persons, if they contract marriage with non-Catholics, either baptized or not baptized, even after obtaining a dispensation from the impediment of mixed religion or of disparity of worship.

Non-Catholics (whether baptized or not), when they contract marriage among themselves, are not bound to observe the form when they marry, except as noted above.

#### *(2) Extent of the Obligation*

It is clear that the Church recognizes the validity of marriages contracted between non-Catholic parties. It is equally clear that she does not recognize as valid any marriage involving a person who at any time has been a Catholic either by baptism in the Catholic



Church or by reception into the Church when in such a "marriage" the essential form is not observed.

A purely civil marriage between Catholics is regarded as concubinage. Catholics who enter such unions are considered to be public sinners, and they may not be admitted to the sacraments until they either separate or are validly married. Children born of such unions are illegitimate.

In the common law of the Church, there is no excommunication attached to purely civil marriages, except when they involve clerics in holy orders or professed religious.

Any Catholic who appears for a religious marriage before a non-Catholic minister incurs an excommunication reserved to the Ordinary in addition to the effects just noted of purely civil marriage. The Third Council of Baltimore decreed that in this country the same penalty should fall upon Catholics who dare to attempt marriage even before a civil magistrate, after obtaining a civil divorce from a previous valid marriage.

## B. The Liturgical Form

### *(1) The Sacred Rite of Matrimony*

Except in case of necessity, baptized Catholics and converts must also observe the rites for the celebration of marriage which are either prescribed by the Roman Ritual or sanctioned by praiseworthy custom. In this country the following ceremonies usually take place:

1. The priest, vested, says a few words, designed to recall to mind the momentousness and sacredness of this sacramental union.

2. He then asks and receives the consent of the parties, according to the prescribed formula.

3. Joining the right hands of the husband and wife, he has each repeat after him the formula expressing acceptance of the other as a partner for life.

4. He pronounces them man and wife (the public and solemn approval of the Church of the contract the parties themselves have entered into).



5. After sprinkling the spouses with holy water, he blesses the ring (or rings, in a double-ring ceremony) and repeats the formula for the groom to say, who places the ring on the bride's finger. He does the same for the bride in a double-ring ceremony.

6. The actual marriage ceremony is concluded with prayers asking God's blessing on the spouses and on their sacred union.

### (2) Customary Ceremonies

It is a most excellent custom for the ceremonies of sacramental marriage to be followed by the celebration of Mass, during which the spouses, the wedding party and the entire congregation are invited to receive Holy Communion and the solemn nuptial blessing is given. If the rubrics permit, this will be the special votive Mass *pro sponso et sponsa*; on the days when this Mass cannot be said, a commemoration of it is made, and the three special prayers of the blessing are given as in the votive Mass.

The solemn nuptial blessing may be received by the married couple even after they have lived a long time in the married state. But it is only given at Mass (except by apostolic indult), for the Mass is the fit setting for so solemn a benediction. It cannot be given if the bride is a widow who received it in her former marriage (although by apostolic indult a substitute for the solemn blessing may be used), nor can this solemn blessing be given during the penitential seasons (the first Sunday of Advent to Christmas, inclusive, and from Ash Wednesday to Easter, inclusive) without the special permission of the Ordinary. The blessing cannot be given during a Requiem Mass, on All Soul's Day, or on the last three days of Holy Week.

### (3) Sacred Rites and Mixed Marriages

The Church forbids the use of all sacred rites in the case of a mixed marriage—not only the nuptial Mass but any Mass which might be taken as a part of the ceremonies, and, of course, the solemn nuptial blessing. The Ordinary may permit (except for the Mass) some of the usual ceremonies. To prevent more serious evils, he may even permit the celebration of the marriage in church, but



frequently such marriages take place outside church. This liturgical 'disapproval' reflects the Church's attitude toward such dangerous alliances; but it should not be forgotten that if the marriage is taking place with the Church's permission and the non-Catholic party is baptized, the mutual contract is a true sacrament. In any case, the priest who witnesses such a marriage is permitted to—and should—say a few words concerning the sacredness and holiness of the state to which the parties aspire.

## 6. VALIDATION OF AN INVALID MARRIAGE

When an existing marriage is found to be invalid, there are various courses of action open to the parties involved to set the matter aright. This is so delicate, difficult and complex a question that we cannot enter fully on the matter here. The proper preliminary action is, of course, to consult a priest (preferably the local pastor or curate), who will consider the matter and consult the chancery office or other qualified experts to see what can be done.

For the moment we will consider only the validation of a marriage which is null through lack of observance of the prescribed form. To validate such a marriage (more accurately, *attempted* marriage), it must be contracted again (the parties must again give and receive consent) *in the form which is prescribed by the positive law of the Church*. Those who attempt marriage before a Justice of the Peace, for example, would have to give and receive their mutual consent again before a duly authorized priest; otherwise, in the eyes of God and of his Church, there is no marriage, the parties are living in concubinage, and any children born of this union will be illegitimate.

Other reasons may exist for the invalidity of a marriage, of course—presence of a diriment impediment, lack of internal or external consent, etc. Different remedies must be found if such marriages are to be validated, but each case has to be judged by itself, and the problem properly worked out by competent ecclesiastical authority.



If there is any doubt about the validity of a marriage for any reason, consultation is necessary to resolve the doubt.

## 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Christian marriage, with its unity, indissolubility and sacramentality, is a divine answer to the security naturally desired by parents and children alike. Any attack upon marriage is recorded in terms of broken hearts and broken lives. The teaching of the Church regarding impediments is a bulwark designed to protect the security and sanctity of marriage.

There are certain impediments which admit of no dispensation because they protect some fundamental divine or human right. Other impediments protect rights less fundamental, and these may be dispensed.

However, it is to be kept in mind that dispensation does not involve a destruction of the evil effects which the impediment was designed to forestall. A mixed marriage, for example, is still mixed even when entered into with a dispensation; the basic fact of uncongenial religious views remains unchanged. There is no magic in dispensations; rather there is a call for greater responsibilities on the Catholic party for fostering the security and sanctity of the marriage. Dispensations are more safely granted to those strong in faith; too often they are sought by the weak.

The entire teaching on dispensations is a declaration of the Church's reverence for marriage, and this reverence extends to all valid marriages contracted by those who are not her subjects. Although it may sound paradoxical in the light of some contemporary pronouncements, the Catholic Church is a more staunch defender of the sanctity of many non-Catholic marriages than the very people who claim falsely that she holds them in contempt.

Marriage cases, especially those in which there is question of dispensation or other action necessary for validation and those in which dissolution or annulment are sought, are handled by the marriage court



of the diocese in which the marriage took place or of the diocese in which the petitioner lives. The normal manner in which they reach the diocesan chancery is through the pastor to whom they should first be referred. In a matter that requires trial, a decision in favor of the marriage may be appealed to the metropolitan marriage court (the archdiocesan see of the ecclesiastical province in which the diocese is located) or, if the court of first instance is that of an archdiocese, to the court of the diocese designated by the Holy See as the appeal court. If the marriage is declared null the defender of the bond always appeals. If both the first and second court decide in the same way the matter is usually settled. If the court of second instance reverses the first court, the case is sent to the Sacred Roman Rota, which makes the final decision. It is interesting to note the figures released by that court for its hearings of marriage cases during the year 1956, which are typical.

The Rota handed down 256 decisions in cases seeking declarations of nullity of marriage. In exactly one-half of these cases, the court recognized the non-existence of the marriage bond, and handed down a decision of nullity. The cost of the legalities was borne by the plaintiffs in 153 of the cases; 103 cases were handled without fees. Of the 153 cases in which fees were paid by the interested parties, 70 decisions of nullity were granted, and 83 were denied. Among the 103 cases handled gratis, 58 decisions of nullity were granted and 45 were denied.

The huge burden of work involving staffs scattered over the world and working in every language is another proof of the profound respect of the Church for the sanctity of this great sacrament.

These facilities are available to all Catholics, but happy are those who have no need of them. The impediments are a bulwark, and the wise Christian will employ them as such in advance and as a preventive.



## Conclusion of Part One

Search as you will through a dictionary, you will never come up with a satisfactory answer to the fundamental question about matrimony: what is it? But this should hardly be surprising—the dictionary only gives us more or less accurate descriptions of observable phenomena, not ultimate answers to ultimate questions. And the dictionary is little concerned with supernatural realities, which lie beyond the ken of the natural information man can secure by his unaided powers of reasoning. Yet the most important facts about marriage center around these two points:

- 1) It is an ultimate reality in the human scale of things, since the act of marrying establishes a permanent, lifelong relationship between a man and woman and is ordained to the perpetuation of humanity itself.

- 2) It is a supernatural reality, a purely human institution so divinized by the Savior of mankind that the contracting marriage is a sacrament of the New Law which creates a holy and sacred state of life leading to eternal happiness with God.



For a true understanding of matrimony, therefore, we must turn to the only type of science which deals successfully both with ultimates and with the realm of that which lies above the natural. Only theology can provide the sort of answers sought by the true seeker after the truth about this union of man and woman. And these, in brief, are the basic and fundamental facts which this divine-human science teaches us:

1. As a contract in the natural order, marriage is the marital union of a legally competent man and woman which involves the undivided sharing of a common life. Jesus Christ raised this institution of the natural law to the dignity of a sacrament: the lawfully exchanged consent of the contracting parties becomes a sacred sign of man's sanctification; by means of this sign grace is given to them for the proper and Christian fulfillment of the duties of matrimony.

- 1) The externally expressed exchange (or consent to exchange), by which groom offers to bride, and bride to groom, dominion over himself and herself with regard to raising a family, is the *matter* of this sacrament. The expression of acceptance of the groom's offer by the bride, and the bride's offer by the groom, is the *form* of the sacrament.

- 2) It is clear from this that the Christian bride and groom are not only the subjects or recipients of this great sacrament, they are its ministers as well. The priest who officiates at the sacramental ceremony is the Church's official witness of the conferring and receiving of the sacrament.

2. The marital union, both natural and sacramental, is brought into being by the consent of the contracting parties, i.e., by that act of the will whereby each party gives and accepts an exclusive and perpetual right over the body for acts which are of themselves suitable for the generation of children. Anything which vitiates the consent, therefore, will invalidate the contract and hence the sacrament.
3. The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children, but at the same time the marital union serves other intrinsic ends which are of secondary and subordinated import-



ance—the mutual help and solace of the partners, and as a remedy for concupiscence. Marriage may achieve other purposes than those mentioned, but these will be accidental to this union; the intrinsic ends, on the contrary, are those which matrimony attains of its very nature in the present state of mankind, and they cannot be separated from it by any human power whatsoever.

4. From this consideration of the intrinsic and extrinsic causes of marriage, it follows that two qualities characterize this state, distinguishing it and inseparable from it. These *properties* of marriage are unity (the union of one man with one woman) and indissolubility (the permanence of the marriage bond until the death of one of the parties).
5. To safeguard the holy state of matrimony, to protect its security and sanctity, the Church points out certain impediments to marriage, some of them arising from the natural law or the divine positive law (and thus permitting no dispensation), others determined solely by ecclesiastical legislation (admitting of dispensation for sufficiently grave reason). *Diriment* impediments gravely forbid marriage and prevent it from being valid; *prohibiting* impediments constitute a grave prohibition against contracting marriage but they do not invalidate a marriage so contracted.



PART TWO

# Preparation for Marriage



## Introduction to Part Two

An extensive literature is available concerning preparation for marriage. It is not the purpose of this second part to make the excellent books, pamphlets, articles, etc., written by learned and experienced priests and lay people, useless or obsolete. You have studied the nature of marriage and its place in human life. This study has been exact and accurate because it has remained objective and scientific. Marriage has been considered as a subject of theological investigation and from the point of view of canon law.

Now we are beginning to consider marriage from a different point of view. This approach is not properly scientific, yet it is not untheological. We have seen that for the Christian the contract of marriage is the sacrament. Marriage is a Christian vocation, a Christian way of life. It is the genius of Christianity that it sanctifies man as he is, a creature composed of body and soul, made to live and love and work in an earthly world with heavenly union with God as his goal. If we would understand Christian marriage we must look at it in this context.



Marriage is almost as universally valid a subject of study as man himself. There is no intention here of entering upon a sociological, psychological, biological or historical study of marriage. The purpose of this part of this book is to call attention to the relevance of man's redemption and his eternal destiny, the relevance of his religious condition with its advantages and its obligations—the relevance, in short, of the understanding of man that comes from faith and is developed by theology—to the various aspects of marriage, and especially to the adequate preparation for Christian marriage in the world in which we live. Reread the remarks concerning the study of this part in the general introduction to this book, and note particularly the article referred to in the footnote at the end of the Introduction.

Students often ask why so many things are mentioned in Part Two of this book which pertain rather to young adolescents than to college-age men and women. The question results from a misunderstanding of the purpose of a college marriage course and of this book. This course is designed to help the student to achieve a mature and intelligent understanding of the role of Christian marriage in society and in the life of the individual. It is not a Pre-Cana course designed to prepare you for your own marriage. Certainly what you learn in this course should be very useful for that purpose, but that is accidental. A college is not a technical school; it has as its main purpose the cultivation of the intellect rather than technical training or even moral formation. If this part stimulates you to focus your Christian understanding of the nature of man and the purpose of his life on marriage and upon the laws, customs and attitudes with which society surrounds it and the preparation for it, this part will have achieved its purpose.

In a sense, preparation for marriage begins with birth and even before. A person does not select the family into which he or she will be born, but he is influenced in ways beyond reckoning by the kind of family into which he is born. Pass over for now educational, racial, religious, economic and other factors. Consider for a moment only the differences that might have been made in your character had your family been larger or smaller; had your parents been more deeply



or less deeply in love with one another; had you been one of the younger rather than one of the older children, or vice versa.

While every normal person is responsible for his behavior, there are many factors in anyone's personal make-up which influence for good or for evil, and yet for these one is not responsible. Some have advantages in this regard that others do not. At the same time everyone has obstacles to overcome in the struggle for salvation—in the struggle to be a virtuous human being—that are not shared by others. Since marriage is a contract deeply affecting the personality of the contracting parties, the kind of a person one is has a great deal to do with the kind of a husband or wife one will become.

### 1. KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

One may wonder why, since these factors cannot be changed, they should even be mentioned. What is past is past, and even those parts of it over which a man had control at one time are now forever determined. What is the point of raising the specters of the past in a consideration of preparation for marriage in the future?

The answer is simple. The past is determined but it is not gone. It is part and parcel of what we are today. God has called us all to be saints. We cannot start with what we were ten days ago or ten years ago. We must start with what we are right now. But we are intelligent human beings. We must understand what we are right now in order that we may know the assets and liabilities with which we must work. The tendencies to good or to evil that are more or less natural to us, the virtues we have cultivated, the vices we must overcome, the positive and the negative factors that go to make up the individual character that is ours—all these things we must know in order to understand just what we must do. (This is put in the first person plural because we are all involved in this struggle to be all that, with God's grace, we can be. But you must consider this and what will be said in these chapters, not in the narrow and exclusive context of your own life, but as they affect all the fellow members of our human society.)



Then we can use what is good to eternal advantage and minimize the evil. Marriage is so intimately personal that only a good *person* can be a good husband or wife. Wholesome growth in virtue is, in consequence, itself a preparation—a remote but necessary preparation—for marriage.

## 2. THE NEED FOR PARTICULAR VIRTUES

Marriage does not exhaust all the potentialities of the human personality, and so certain virtues are more necessary than others for one who intends to seek his salvation in the married state. It is hardly necessary to enter into lengthy discussion of these virtues—a few hints by way of example should suffice to stimulate your own thinking on this subject.

Since, for example, marriage is a communal affair, the virtues which regulate a man's relationships with others will be particularly necessary. The importance of charity, the greatest of all the virtues, goes without saying. Justice, and many of the specialized virtues of the justice family, will also be especially significant. Prudence, patience and affability will have their place. Since marriage is particularly concerned with the acts ordained to generation, the more one cherishes and the more perfectly one practices the virtue of chastity, the more perfectly one will be prepared to live a good and happy married life. The unselfishness, the consideration for others produced by these virtues, prepares a young man or woman to fill, successfully and happily, the roles of husband and father, wife and mother. By their nature these high offices imply the very opposite of self-seeking.

## 3. REMOTE AND PROXIMATE PREPARATION

We have been speaking of remote preparation for marriage. Yet such preparation is necessary for successful human living in the single state as well, and is properly treated in other sections of theology.

Our chief concern in this part, on the other hand, is with the *proximate* preparation for married life. "Proximate" as used here does not mean so much what is proximate in time as what is proximate in



purpose; that is, what is more specifically and directly ordained to fitting oneself precisely for life as a wife and mother or as a husband and father.

Society has a high stake in the preparation made by the young for marriage. The stability of marriage and its effectiveness in producing healthy family life directly affect the security and prosperity of society. Those who complain that selfishness, dishonesty, preoccupation with pleasure, vandalism, sexual deviations and other grave evils are increasing at an alarming rate can look to the breakdown of the family as their fertile soil. The distorted notion of marriage fostered by our laws and customs can hardly produce strong well-ordered families.

Some day as members of a parish and parish organizations, as parents and teachers yourselves, as lawyers and judges, as employers, as business and professional men, as political leaders, or just as citizens taking an active role in politics, you will surely have the opportunity to affect in some way the customs and even the laws which relate to marriage and the preparation of the young for marriage. It would be tragic if you failed to be an influence for good, because you, a Catholic college graduate, had never given serious thought to what marriage has to do with a Christian life and to the effect of the customs and practices relating to marriage preparation on the successful establishment of a Christian family.

We shall consider the proximate preparation for marriage under the following headings:

- |                                |   |                           |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Preparation<br>for<br>Marriage | } | Courtship                 |
|                                |   | Psychological Preparation |
|                                |   | Intellectual Preparation  |
|                                |   | Personal Considerations   |
|                                |   | Religious Preparation     |



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Courtship and Its Problems

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is not the purpose of this chapter to consider the problems courtship itself brings up, but rather to indicate some of the effects of courtship and its influence on the happiness and success of married life. The term *courtship* is used in a general sense, to describe the boy-girl relationship from the first consciousness of sex up to and including the engagement period. This chapter will first consider the relationship between the sexes as it is in a general way ordained to marriage, and then the particular relationship between a specific young man and young woman which is ordained precisely toward their future marriage.

### 2. THE GENERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SEXES

At the age of puberty boys and girls begin to notice one another and begin to be attracted toward one another. The response of the individual to this natural impulse, from the time it is first experienced



until it culminates in marriage, has much to do with the kind of a marriage partner the person will be. Unfortunately, many customs concerned with the boy-girl relationship in our society are not calculated to help the youth to form a truly Christian attitude (or even a wholesome natural attitude) toward sex. We must be realistic, of course. We must recognize that these customs are part of American life and cannot be ignored. Yet, at the same time, we must also recognize that as Catholics we cannot accept such customs when they are absolutely opposed to Christian standards.

#### A. Modern Customs

##### (1) *The Problem*

Our society is dangerously close to madness on the subject of sex.<sup>1</sup> Christ condemned a man's even looking upon a woman with lust (cf. Matt. 5:28), a prohibition flagrantly opposed by the entertainment world, by advertising people, by newspapers, etc. In the past few years, the mentality indicated by this attitude has profoundly affected even the customs surrounding the relationship between boys and girls. Older people remember, for example, the shyness of boys and girls in their early teens. This is nature's own way of protecting young people from newly discovered emotions of which they understand very little. Formerly a boy's first signs of interest in a girl were the subject of gentle teasing on the part of his elders and of friendly ridicule from his companions, and this had the wholesome effect of moderating these interests and of restraining undue associations. In this way young people were given the time to achieve some balance and maturity with respect to their relationship with one another.

The present social situation has largely removed these healthy restraints. The attitude of the modern American world toward boy-girl associations presents two contradictory aspects:

- 1) Interest in the opposite sex is often encouraged and even hastened by many parents before a youngster is out of the jump-rope and tree-house stage. Long before marriageable age has been

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution*, Boston, 1956.



reached, courtship has progressed to the point at which marriage should actually take place.

2) At the same time, the age at which it becomes possible to assume the normal obligations of marriage has been pushed back by increased educational requirements, military service, economic necessities, and other factors.

Thus it has become the normal thing for boys and girls to pass through a lengthy period of close contact before the time when marriage becomes feasible, and this intimate relationship has become socially acceptable—it is even encouraged by our society and new social customs. Yet the dangers of this situation should be apparent. It is obvious that the manner in which young people conduct themselves during this period will inevitably affect, and most profoundly, the kinds of husbands and wives they will eventually be. It is equally obvious that the guidance and control provided by those responsible for them will be of the utmost importance, for boys and girls will not have the experience or maturity to handle the situations arising from relationships which are premature, too frequent, and too intimate.

It should be noted that 2) above does not say that the age at which marriage is possible is pushed back; it says rather that the age at which it becomes possible *to assume the normal obligations* of marriage is pushed back. There is a great difference, since many young people today are marrying before they are able to establish a normal self-supported family. They are depending, for example, upon the help of parents. Some help from parents is, when possible, quite reasonable. Yet if it is excessive it can seriously diminish the mature responsible attitude toward marriage so necessary to the establishment of a healthy family unit.

Sometimes the bride expects to work to support the young couple until the young man finishes his education. This arrangement can work if it is well planned and of brief and determined duration. Yet, aside from the temptation to look upon the conception of a child as undesirable during this time, there is another danger in this plan. Sometimes a young man's gratitude to his wife for her part in the successful completion of his education develops into a psychological barrier between them. A man naturally desires to be and to be looked



upon as the protector and provider for his wife and family. The gratitude is turned in the wrong direction; a man's gratitude to his wife should rather be for her love and her dependence upon him. In the present example, a man's gratitude to a woman is associated with childhood and his mother rather than with adulthood and his wife. This is not a wholesale condemnation of an arrangement becoming quite common, but it is an aspect of this plan which wise young people will consider. Obviously, depending upon personal considerations, it will be far more significant in some cases than in others.

### *(2) Solutions for the Problem*

1. The period of close social relationships between boys and girls before marriage age has been reached should be made as short as prudently possible. In our present society it is more or less inevitable to some extent that boys and girls should come into close social contact. But certain steps can and should be taken to limit and lessen the grave dangers inherent in this situation.

1) There are ways—differing according to local circumstances, of course—to prevent dating from beginning at ridiculously early ages. These will be discovered and utilized by wise parents, priests and educators.

2) Adult supervision can and should be exercised over the boy-girl relationship of children for a much longer period than is now generally the case. Paradoxically, lack of such supervision is today the rule—one more instance of what some have called "adult delinquency." Modern parents and the rest of the adult world devote long hours to supervising the sporting activities and play of their children, from cub-scouting to college athletics, with the result that they leave the children little opportunity to develop ingenuity in getting along with one another and determining their own sports programs. Whatever disadvantages such extensive supervision may have for self-development on the part of young people, it at least shows that adults will concern themselves with matters which affect their children, so long as they understand the problem.

If these adult energies were channeled into areas in which adult advice and control is necessary, rather than merely useful, a great



step forward would be taken. Boys and girls could be taught to get along with one another and to enjoy one another's company in wholesome ways. Children thrown together in early adolescence without such supervision have little more than animal instinct to guide them in their behavior. If their first experiences in mixed company are confined to supervised parties at which "pairing off" is subtly discouraged, they can learn that the opposite sex is made up of people, not merely of stimuli for the sex appetites.

3) Measures can be taken to shorten the courtship period at the end as well as at the beginning. Efforts must be made by society as a whole to make earlier marriages possible; in individual cases, where circumstances justify such procedure, parents and those in authority should see that the opportunity for early marriage is given to young people for whom postponement would be difficult or morally dangerous. In such individual cases, however, care must be taken not to relieve the young people of too much responsibility. Responsibility is of the essence of maturity, and marriage is for adults, and for adults alone.

2. Regulations of the relationship between the sexes should eliminate many of the occasions of sin which might otherwise be a serious problem. Seldom under present social pressures can the period of courtship be kept to an ideal length. But Christian ideals, and the present and future health of our young people—their physical health, their psychological and mental health, above all their moral and spiritual health—must not be permitted to be victimized by these same social pressures. With proper regulation of this period in the lives of adolescents much can be done to avoid or eliminate the dangers of this unhealthy social situation.

This means no more than the exercise of sound common sense, a common sense, however, made far from ordinary through the light of faith. Here above all is the place for that much misunderstood but absolutely essential virtue of prudence. Going steady, company keeping over long periods to the exclusion of others, the frequency and circumstances of dates—all these are problems, and prudent guardians will consider them seriously to find workable Christian solutions to the difficulties they create. Young people who have any sense will not



resent the advice, nor even the commands, of those responsible for them. They will realize that if they were capable of making their own decisions in such matters they would be ready to marry and start rearing their own families. The teen-ager who objects to parental regulation of dating with the complaint, "They don't trust me!" already has his answer. Of course parents and guardians don't trust him—and if he had any common sense, he would know enough not to trust himself.

If parents realized the basic psychological fact that children need and want strong parental authority, many tragedies would be avoided. Very young children seem sometimes to be in revolt against the rule of their parents, but this is merely the way in which they instinctively test it. Their security depends upon its being unshakable. The weaker the authority seems to be, the more will they test it. Very young children begin to realize that authority exercised only in anger is not strong authority. Parents who give in too easily to their children are selfishly indulging themselves at the cost of the very ones their love should guide, protect and control.

Though about different matters, the situation is essentially the same in the relationship between parents and adolescent youngsters. When children are older, however, the problem is complicated by attitudes already formed between the parents and the children. More parents would have the courage gently to exercise strict rule if they could hear, as priests often do, the young adults, often as young as eighteen or nineteen, who thank God that their mother and dad took no nonsense from them when they were younger.

### B. The Dangers of Unchastity

Only too often youngsters do not realize how dangerous to chastity some of their behavior is, and hence those in authority must use that authority to lessen these dangers as much as possible. Here precisely is a fundamental reason for supervised social relations among young people—that they not be led into temptation unwittingly through irresponsible conduct. On the other hand, the teen-ager fails to appreciate the terrible consequences unchastity can have. So while we



cannot enter into a detailed discussion of the problems of chastity before marriage at this time, it will be useful to point out some of the dangerous effects of the infringement of this angelic virtue.<sup>2</sup> In this way the vital importance of the pre-marital period of relations between the sexes for one's happiness (both temporal and eternal) will be underlined.

(1) *Loss of Grace*

*Every deliberate sin against chastity is by its nature a grave offense against Almighty God.* These are mortal sins—they destroy the supernatural life of grace in the soul, the divine life won for us by Christ through his Cross. For the sake of temporary pleasure, the sinner forfeits his right to heaven and his friendship with God, and by his rebellious act earns instead God's condemnation: if unrepented (and no one before sinning can presume that he will receive the grace of true repentance), these sins have eternal damnation as their just recompense, an eternity of desperate unhappiness and pain.

Estrangement from God, and from the divine power which is the grace of God, has results which should shock anyone into realization of the horror of sins of lust. The sinner cannot take one single step toward the life of glory, he cannot merit any one of the divine helps so necessary for his salvation. Without grace the ability to resist temptation—even to recognize temptation—is seriously impaired. In consequence, sins of lust very frequently become habitual, and the difficulty of repentance correspondingly increases. Immersion in sins of the flesh leads to blindness with respect to spiritual aims and ideals; the sinner becomes blind even to his own good, and to the eternal good of his immortal soul. Loss of faith, or a serious lessening of faith, is an all too frequent consequence of unchastity. Experienced Newman Association chaplains report that most Catholics who claim to lose their faith in the classrooms of non-Catholic universities are generally disposed to accept arguments against the Christian faith

<sup>2</sup>Several fine books have been written on this very subject. Particularly recommended is *Modern Youth and Chastity* by Father Gerald Kelly, S.J., an inexpensive 108 page booklet published by "The Queen's Work." Also highly recommended is Dietrich von Hildebrand, *In Defence of Purity* (London: 1930 and many editions since); and Leon Joseph (now Cardinal) Suenens, *Love and Control* (Westminster, Md.: 1961).



and morality by first yielding to unchaste habits. St. Augustine, drawing from his long experience first as a sinner then as a saintly director of souls, explains this in a brief statement: "If you do not live as you believe, soon you shall begin to believe as you live." The unchaste person lives as a beast.

The supernatural consequences of unchastity are serious indeed—horrifying to any one with the least knowledge of the life of the spirit which is our vocation as Christians. We may briefly summarize these effects under three headings, each having a negative and a positive aspect:

Negative	Positive
loss of divine happiness	condemnation to eternal torment
loss of divine life	man stripped to his natural powers which are already weak by reason of original sin
loss of divine power and assistance	proneness to evil—difficulty in doing good

### (2) *Natural Consequences of Unchastity*

Aside from the supernatural consequences of sins of impurity, young people often do not understand the profound effect of such sins upon the personality. They lessen substantially, if they do not completely destroy, the respect and reverence that mature, wholesome, happily married adults must have toward the sexual relationship. Furthermore, they strike hard at the confidence a man and his wife must have in one another's virtue in order that their marriage may be free of the contamination of jealousy and suspicion.

The preservation of purity in the years before marriage is an important contribution to a happy marriage in many other ways besides those just mentioned. Young people who commit sins against purity



soon develop the vice of lust, which constantly seeks opportunity for expression. Youths afflicted with this vice look upon young people of the opposite sex, not as persons, not as human beings who might well prove interesting and pleasant friends and companions; rather they look upon them for the most part simply as potential companions in sin. In other words, the eyes of such young people are practically closed to much of the beauty, goodness, charm and real worth in other people and in the world at large. The merely animal aspect of sex assumes an importance far in excess of its real worth. Any real understanding and appreciation of companions of the opposite sex becomes next to impossible. A bestial selfishness is developed toward them: for all practical purposes they come to be considered as existing only to provide excitement and thrills for oneself.

An attitude like this—the all but inevitable effect of a lack of chastity—often results in such a lack of wisdom in the selection of a marriage partner that a successful outlook for the marriage is appreciably diminished. A person of this stamp may (but probably will not) deliberately decide to look for desirable qualities beyond the merely physical. But how is he or she to know how to discover, recognize or appreciate such qualities, when concern for them has been so limited during the years of dating?

Furthermore, the virtue of chastity is exactly the same virtue after marriage as before. If what was forbidden by this virtue to the unmarried was illicitly done before marriage, there is little hope that the prohibitions chastity lays upon the married will be observed.<sup>3</sup> Premarital impurity goes far to corrode the qualities which would make a young person a good husband or wife.

### C. The Need of Virtue

Young people sometimes think their elders are kill-joys trying to take the fun out of life. Perhaps some are. But for the most part par-

<sup>3</sup>Hence the imperative necessity of a quick recovery of virtue through sincere contrition and devout reception of sacramental penance. The Eucharist and the sacramental graces of Christian matrimony will further strengthen and perfect this virtue in those worthily receiving these sacraments, so that past mistakes and bad patterns of conduct can be supernaturally remedied through grace. See below, pp. 93 ff.



ents, priests, school authorities and others who legitimately place restraints upon the activities of the young are helping to prepare them for a wonderfully happy married life. Wise boys and girls will enjoy one another's company and learn to appreciate one another as human persons redeemed by the blood of Christ, full of grace, intelligence, worth, joy—good companions, good friends, good fun. They will keep to a minimum the occasions on which they are alone with nothing to do, and they will avoid the affectionate caresses that soon enkindle passion. No matter what others are doing they will be confident of their own principles, and will sacrifice the excitement of the moment for the happiness of a lifetime.

Their Christian point of view will lead them to understand that one virtue cannot be preserved without the help of others. Humility will make them docile to the wisdom of the Church and of their parents, even when they are unable to see "why" something should be done or avoided. The queenly moral virtue of prudence will help them to be obedient, as well as to see the consequences of their actions in good time. Faith and hope will help them to bear what may seem at the time to be a true burden: holding fast to virtue when their non-Catholic associates disregard or condemn it. Through the charity of Christ they will be helped to see the difference between genuine love, which produces joy and peace and happiness, and the counterfeit animal love which produces unwholesome excitement, worry and fear, and which drives peace from the soul. They will soon learn the advantages of going to Mass and Communion, and the great value of a simple, unself-conscious prayer with the "date" with whom they go dancing. God does not set his face against young lovers. He is their Father. He loves them and he loves their love if it is real, and fit for him to see.

#### D. Conclusion

The period of general courtship, then, that stage of life during which boys and girls get to know one another, to date and to find themselves sometimes strongly attracted to one another, is a time of life during which much can be accomplished to fit them for marriage. At



the same time it is a period of danger during which much can be done to lessen or even to destroy the possibility of happiness and contentment in married life.

### 3. PARTICULAR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COUPLES

In the period of general courtship a young person acquires some awareness of the characteristic ways of thought and behavior of the opposite sex. It is the way of nature that, after this period of casual interests in various members of the opposite sex, a particular boy and girl will pair off and develop more than a transitory interest in one another. When the young people have decided that their interest in one another has become exclusive, they begin to "go steady." Finally, when definite plans for marriage can be made, the young couple usually becomes engaged.

In this section we shall discuss, without attempting to cover the whole subject by any means, some of the problems and situations brought up by these three steps toward marriage: the occasional date; going steady; engagement.

#### A. Occasional Dates

The development of more than casual interest in a particular member of the opposite sex is not an extraordinary phenomenon of the courtship period. And such associations do not invariably lead to marriage. Normally, in fact, the thought of marriage is so far in the background, so obscure and vague, as hardly to be recognized. Nonetheless, what begins as "just another date" may well lead to more serious interest in the person dated. There is a very real possibility of such occasional dates eventuating in marriage or the serious consideration of marriage.

It is of vital importance for young people to recognize this possibility. Only too often they see nothing wrong with "occasionally"



dating a non-Catholic or someone else who, for one reason or another, would be unsuitable as a marriage partner. Attempted marriages and marriages with manifestly unsuitable partners are born in just such occasional dates where there was no serious intention of marriage at all. But perhaps the most common example is the date which results in a mixed marriage, an all too frequent and dangerous consequence of not choosing one's companions properly.<sup>4</sup>

### B. Going Steady

If an awakening of interest in particular members of the opposite sex is a natural development for adolescents, "going steady" long before any possibility of marriage is present *is not a natural situation*. It may be the code of the teen-ager, it may be (and, unfortunately, today frequently is) a tolerated or acceptable custom of our society; but it is not the way of nature that young couples fourteen or fifteen or sixteen years old should date each other frequently and exclusively. This practice is wrong and dangerous—sometimes so dangerous that it is seriously sinful. For the normal effects of steady dating are acceptable only in those who can soon arrange to marry.

To stir the emotions when there is no hope in the visible future of being able to indulge them legitimately is dangerous and unnatural. A very hungry little boy, smelling dinner cooking, can control his appetite when mother tells him just when dinner will be and that it will not be long; likewise the sex appetites stirred up by frequent and steady company keeping can be controlled if the marriage can be

<sup>4</sup>Mixed marriages are of themselves forbidden by the Church, for reasons only too fully justified by sad experience. This should not be obscured or de-emphasized by the fact that, to avoid greater evils, dispensations for mixed marriages are granted by the Church when sufficient reasons and guarantees are present. Since the occasional date may well lead to the desire to marry, with the subsequent danger of establishing a family lacking unity in the all important matter of religion; and since no one may deliberately place himself in danger of doing what is in itself wrong without a proportionately grave reason for running the risk, then an important conclusion with respect to the occasional date follows: *to date a non-Catholic without special circumstances being present (such as lack of suitable Catholics in the area) could easily be sinful, at least venially sinful and perhaps even gravely so.*



reasonably soon and some determination can be made as to the time. Without the assurance of his mother that dinner is almost ready, the small boy would find the control of his hunger an intolerable burden; the same is true of the emotions of the young couple who can foresee no end to their waiting.

### C. Engagement

According to established social custom, the period of fairly steady company keeping becomes formalized as an engagement when the couple reach the momentous decision to marry and an approximate time for the marriage can be set. Since the problems of going steady and of engagement are basically the same, we shall consider them together here.

The period of steady company keeping and especially of the engagement should be long enough for the couple to get to know one another, but it should not be so long that it presents serious sources of temptation. Often, of course, special circumstances are involved. In such cases (for example, during long periods of separation due to educational, military or economic necessity), the prudence of the couple and the advice of parents and priest will help to determine the proper course of action.

#### *(1) The Dangers of This Time*

When a couple begins to keep steady company and marriage to one another seems likely, a temptation can easily arise to anticipate the behavior that is proper only for the married. If an engaged couple yields to this temptation, it can be catastrophic for the future marriage, sometimes even more so than pre-marital impurity with others. The worst effect of pre-marital sexual contact is found in this: the love of the couple is powerfully expressed for the first time in sin. Their love becomes a hideous thing, hateful in the sight of God. God will forgive the truly penitent sinner, but nature can be unforgiving.



*(2) The Punishment of Nature*

The most common way in which nature punishes married people whose first sexual experience with one another was sinful is by depriving them of wholehearted confidence in one another. No matter what they may say to each other, each knows that the other was deficient as far as the virtue of chastity is concerned. Their confidence in each other's faithfulness rests only on the love they profess for one another. As man and wife grow older, this love comes to be expressed less frequently; thus their confidence in their love, and in the faithfulness it produces, must in the nature of things depend more and more on a deep realization of the goodness and virtue of the partner. If confidence in this goodness and virtue has been destroyed in the beginning, anxiety and suspicion may easily take the place of the peace and trust upon which lasting marriage must rest.

It is of the utmost importance that engaged couples preserve chastity in order that the physical symbol of the deep spiritual union formed by the marriage bond may be holy from the beginning, and may become a source of divine blessing for their union.

*(3) Restoration by Grace*

Loss of chastity before marriage is, then, a most serious matter, especially when it involves a couple planning to marry. Not only does it seriously offend God, resulting in the loss of grace and the supernatural life of their souls; it has severe repercussions, psychological and even sometimes physical, in the natural order as well, in the wholeness and wholesomeness of the relations between the sexes. But while there is life there is hope, and that hope is found in the grace Christ gives to the truly contrite and repentant. And so powerful is this divine assistance, which elevates, strengthens and heals man's sin-wounded nature, that an essential restoration to primal chastity is truly possible. Together with his recovery of virtue, the evil effects of pre-marital unchastity, even its natural consequences, may be



avoided, suppressed or at least minimized.<sup>5</sup> This interior renewal, truly a re-creation by grace, must be the determined aim of anyone so unfortunate as to have fallen into a sin of the flesh.

#### (4) *The Conditions of Recovery*

Yet what is divinely possible through sanctifying grace does not take place automatically; God saves us only if we co-operate with him. Thus even the sacrament of penance will work its healing, restoring effects only in the measure in which, on our part, no obstacle is placed to its fruitful reception. The following points will help to bring this fact home:

1) One who is "surprised" into sin—who unexpectedly succumbs to a sudden temptation, unforeseen and unpremeditated—does not destroy the natural safeguards of chastity. A natural sense of shame, the habits of continence and other natural virtues, and the warning of his conscience—these are not totally corrupted by his sin, and as natural dispositions assist in the avoidance of evil and the practice of virtue. Thus such is his natural condition that he can more easily co-operate with the actual graces God gives for the asking. In this way he can prepare himself (through true and sincere and wholehearted sorrow for his past fault and a genuine will to avoid future sins and the occasion of sin) to receive in full the graces of the sacrament of penance.

<sup>5</sup>Not all the damage wrought by sin can be repaired, as St. Thomas points out: "Virtue can be recovered by penance with respect to its formal element, but not with respect to the matter with which it deals. For if a man having the virtue of magnificence squanders all his wealth, he does not recover his riches by repenting of his sin. Similarly, the person who has lost virginity by sin regains, by repenting, the firm resolution of virginity but not the matter with which it deals. Respecting this matter of virginity, one may consider the physical integrity of the sinner (which we hold to be accidental to virginity), and this can be miraculously restored by God. But there is something else which cannot be restored even by a miracle—that one who has experienced venereal lust should cease to have had that experience, for God cannot make that which is done not to have been done" (*Summa*, II-II, q. 152, a. 3, ad 3). St. Thomas elsewhere points out that though these two aspects of chasteness cannot be recovered, still through penance the penitent may rise to a greater grace than he before possessed and sometimes even recover something greater than the dignity of the innocence he has irrevocably lost (cf. *Summa*, III, q. 89, a. 2 and a. 3).



2) The case is much more difficult for the deliberate violator of chastity, for the frequent sinner, or for one who sins habitually. If truly penitent (having at least imperfect contrition), he may through sacramental penance regain the supernatural life lost by his sins. But this does not automatically guarantee a full recovery of the natural safeguards of chastity. Preservation of chastity, while entirely possible, will be very difficult for such a sinner. Conscience will be dulled, unlawful pleasures made attractive by former patterns of conduct, occasions of sin difficult to recognize and resist. Just as even a sincere confession does not make drink less attractive by nature for the drunkard, so neither does sacramental penance make chastity more appealing in the natural order for those who have violated this angelic virtue with deliberation or with frequency.

3) The *possibility* of sorrow for sin and a subsequent restoration to friendship with God through his grace is no surety. One who callously sins today, expecting to redeem himself by future confession, is guilty of gravely presuming on God's mercy. Infinite though his mercy is, God remains sovereignly free in the bestowal of his gifts, and the sinner has forfeited any right to them. Repentance is not man's work but God's, and God cannot regard with favor one who so deliberately and presumptuously enters into evil.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The experiences of courtship inevitably influence the marriage of a young man and a young woman. Many of these influences are too subtle to be easily determined. Yet some are quite plain. We have discussed the more obvious, but young people should take this matter seriously and give some personal thought to the manner in which they are conducting themselves in their relationships with members of the opposite sex. They should seriously ask themselves if their conduct is such that it will contribute to the happiness of the family they may some day establish. It is not too much to say that the future happiness not only of the individual but of the entire family they hope to establish may be seriously affected.



## CHAPTER SIX

# Psychological Preparation for Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

What we mean by psychological preparation for marriage is this: the formation of mental attitudes conducive to living successfully as a Christian husband or wife. Important elements of this formation have already been discussed, and others will be discussed in the chapters that follow. We shall confine ourselves here to considering the importance of the total psychological attitude and to pointing out factors of its formation which are not discussed elsewhere.

Every facet of the total human personality is not directly involved in the marriage contract, but it is practically impossible to discover any personality factor—indeed any part of the totality of human living—that is not at least indirectly involved in the making of a successful marriage. The union established in marriage is so close, the bonds of family life so intimate, that it is hard to imagine husband or wife having any convictions, prejudices, interests or occupations which have no effect whatever on the family.



Since a successful marriage between Catholics is possible only as a Catholic marriage, it is easy to see that such success is possible to the degree that the husband is a good Catholic man and the wife a good Catholic woman. To be such requires the formation of a genuine Catholic mentality, and the formation of a Catholic mentality concerning marriage presupposes, in turn, a universal Catholic mentality. With this fundamental fact in mind, we shall consider in this chapter on the psychological preparation for marriage the following points:

1. Obstacles presented by the world we live in to the formation of a true Catholic outlook.
2. Obstacles to the formation of a Catholic attitude toward marriage.
3. The formation of a Christian mentality in general.
4. Special factors important to each sex.

## 2. OBSTACLES TO FORMING A CATHOLIC OUTLOOK

There is a vast subject contained under the heading of this section, and it would be worthwhile for any Catholic to investigate it thoroughly. But our purpose here is much more limited: to indicate only the general problem with which the modern American Catholic is faced.

### A. The Question of Values

We live in a society that can be called with justification "post-Christian." Many elements of modern civilization were formed under the influence of Christianity, and many of these forms are preserved despite the fact that the reason for them has long been discarded. (Outside the Catholic Church, for example, marriage is generally still contracted "until death"; yet many enter it with at least the implicit conviction that if it "doesn't work out" they will try again.) It is important to give some consideration to the extent of the opposition between the standards of Christ and the standards of the world we live in here and now. But at the same time we must recognize two facts:



- 1) Only the fanatic denies that some compromise is tolerable and must be expected in the community at large.<sup>6</sup>
- 2) Some compromises, on the other hand, are so evil as to be completely intolerable.

The vast majority of our contemporaries do not seek what we seek, because they do not know what we know. That is a compliment—and it is intended as a compliment—to our non-Catholic fellow citizens. It implies that by and large they are good at heart, that when they behave differently than we know we should behave it is not the result of malice but of ignorance, and, in many cases, of invincible ignorance. Frequently they condemn us as undemocratic; they scoff at our beliefs; they ascribe to us the most nefarious and pernicious purposes. But it would be presumptuous and probably wide of the mark to think that most of them have any other purpose than to defend sincerely what they think is right. Yet sincerity is no substitute for truth. Obviously it would be wrong for us who have the faith to conform our lives to standards established by those who have only natural reason tainted by original sin to guide them.

### B. Distortion and Reaction

A good Catholic home, devout attention to the word of God preached from the pulpit, Catholic schooling, Catholic books and periodical literature—all these things (together with a careful avoidance of reading, entertainment, conversation and other media which are in plain opposition to truth and sound moral standards) will do much to help in the formation of a Catholic outlook. Yet we cannot avoid more subtle attacks which are influencing us at every turn, often without our even noticing them. Respect for the truth, for example, can easily be broken down by the constant barrage of lies hurled upon us by “reputable” advertisers.

<sup>6</sup>To tolerate something is to recognize that it is not good, but that to take measures to eliminate it would result in greater evils. The saint practices tolerance with perfect supernatural prudence. He is far from being a fanatic, but he may see that what seems tolerable to others who are without his vision and courage may not, in fact, be tolerable at all. Furthermore, he sees that far fewer evils are tolerable in himself than in others. St. Thomas wisely notes that heroic virtue cannot be demanded of ordinary people under normal circumstances.



### *(1) Un-Christian Influences*

We would have to be rather stupid, for example, to accept as the truth the claim that a particular brand name makes one cleanser better than others made of exactly the same active chemical ingredients; or that one cigarette is objectively better than all others, when at most it has a slightly different taste. Yet we have come to accept such false claims (whether we believe them or not is not the question) as a reasonable means of promoting one's business. Similarly, we seldom advert to the fact that what amounts to no more than the retailing of malicious gossip is far from honorable journalistic enterprise. Such examples could be multiplied endlessly. The important point underlying these illustrations is that there are essentially un-Christian influences to which we are constantly subject, and that these have much to do with the formation of our mentality and, therefore, of our total personality.

### *(2) Christian Values*

The young Catholic should make every effort to avoid the distortion of values consequent upon an excessive desire to be "modern," to be a "success." So far as possible he must first identify and then counteract the more subtle influences to which he is constantly subject. To the extent that he does this successfully he will be well prepared to establish a Christian home. For then he can provide his children as they grow up with a Christian atmosphere and with a genuine Christian sense of values. If he casually compromises with the world at every step of the way, he is compromising his own happiness, and that of his wife, and the happiness of his children.

## 3. OBSTACLES TO THE FORMATION OF A CATHOLIC ATTITUDE TOWARD MARRIAGE

Christianity radically changed men's thinking concerning the role of woman, and concerning marriage and family life. Non-Christian peoples have looked upon women as instruments for the preservation



of the race and for the pleasure of men. Christianity insisted upon the human dignity of woman and her vital role as a *partner* in marriage. She is never to be considered a mere instrument for the satisfaction of lust. A man must not even look upon a woman with lust in his heart. Woman is the helpmate of man and therefore subject to him, but with a subjection based upon love rather than fear. The love a man must have for his wife will cause him to take her into his counsel and to respect her wishes, even to the point of deferring to them whenever possible.<sup>7</sup> Such is not the standard of the pagan world.

#### A. Attitudes of the World

##### (1) *The Insecurity of Marriage*

The modern American woman thinks of herself as "emancipated." She votes, she goes to college, she holds positions of importance in the business, professional and educational world. These things are, in themselves, well and good. But a disturbing possibility presents itself. Is not the "career girl" the saddening symbol of woman's seeking her security where it will not be found—and where she doesn't really want it? For women of today can no longer count on finding their vocation, and the security guaranteed by a true vocation, where it should be.

<sup>7</sup>Pius XI in his encyclical on Christian Marriage (*Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930) expresses this notion beautifully but firmly. He says: "For if the man is the head, the woman is the heart, and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love. Again, this subjection of wife to husband in its degree and manner may vary according to the different conditions of persons, place and time. In fact, if the husband neglect his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the family. *But the structure of the family and its fundamental law, established and confirmed by God, must always and everywhere be maintained intact.*" (Ital. added.)

Later in the same encyclical, speaking of the so-called emancipation of women, he says: "This equality of rights, which is so much exaggerated and distorted, must indeed be recognized in those rights which belong to the dignity of the human soul, and which are proper to the marriage contract and inseparably bound up with wedlock. In such things undoubtedly both parties enjoy the same rights and are bound by the same obligations; in other things there must be a certain inequality and due accommodation, which is demanded by the good of the family, and the right ordering and unity and stability of home life."



The very possibility of divorce has robbed woman of the security Christianity gave her. To be able to give her life to her home and to be secure in her knowledge that her home will be her life, she must meet all but impossible conditions. She is told that she must do the housework, cook the meals, bear the children and care for them; and with all this, the modern wife and mother must still be more attractive in real life (at thirty and more) than a movie queen in celluloid. Unless she fulfills these requirements her husband can look elsewhere—society will not object.

To be sure, few men would want or expect so much of their wives. Nonetheless, many are sold on the idea by promoters, and women themselves are victims of this false propaganda. Modern American life does not encourage the ideal of Christian marriage in either man or woman.

### *(2) Marital Standards*

The "normal" approach to marriage in modern American society is far from Christian. Divorce, birth control, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual experience—these are widely accepted without question. From time to time concern is shown at what appears to be the unfortunate consequences of such things: family relations courts, counseling services, juvenile delinquency, psychiatrists' couches are increasingly alarming signs of serious social disorder. But the idea that there could be anything intrinsically wrong with modern marital standards is looked upon as definitely "medieval," if not downright subversive.

Catholics are well aware that the evils countenanced by our society are sins. Yet it is one thing to be aware of a fact and quite another to appreciate the significance of the fact. The prevailing standard of values—even among the respectable people who dominate the society in which we live—cannot help but influence our Catholic people. A form of adultery does not cease to be hideous in the sight of God because society, by overstepping its authority, grants approval to it; but it is hard to realize this fact and its full implications. Young Catholics must become fully conscious that the "standards of decency" proposed by secular society fall far short of those proposed by Christianity and even of those demanded by human nature.



## B. Love and Marriage

To develop a proper attitude toward marriage it is vitally necessary, first of all, consciously to seek to deepen one's appreciation of the evil in those things which, although acceptable to modern society, are contrary to God's laws and man's true good. The slightest objective consideration will immediately show up these evils in their true light. But the Christian *must reflect* on these things; he cannot afford simply to drift with the dangerous currents of modern opinion and practice. There are, moreover, even more subtle assaults upon a wholesome Christian view of sex, love and marriage.

To be aware that these are attacks, and then to be aware of their corrosive influence on right attitudes and true standards—this, too, is of vital necessity. The young, unfortunately, can have little appreciation of the depths to which human love can and does reach: experience cannot be communicated adequately. A truly mature adult knows in his own life, and in the lives of others, the trials and joys, the pain, anxiety and suffering that life brings, and he knows its satisfaction and contentment as well. He can appreciate the deep union of love which the enduring of these things together effects between a man and his wife.

The young seldom have experienced the beginnings of a truly unselfish love, the kind of love that can result in happy marriage. They are easily impressed by the counterfeit love fed to them constantly by movies, magazine stories, television, popular songs and other media. In consequence they cannot understand why older people are often not only unimpressed but even disgusted by the latest teen-age idols. What they do not realize is this: for their elders, human love is deserving of the respect and reverence which belong to what is wonderfully significant, mysterious and profoundly holy. Little in modern life is of much help to young people in forming such an attitude toward the bond of love which alone can join man and wife in permanent and rewarding marriage union.

We have used the word "holy" (and even "sacred") to describe the marriage union. Few today view marriage in the light of what is meant by these terms. Even those who regard marriage as "normally"



a life-term contract are far from appreciating the sacredness of this union. This is hardly surprising: it is in the deposit of revelation alone that the concern of God for the marriage of men is made known. Its sacramental nature, its mystical symbolism of the union between Christ and his Church—these things are lost upon those of little faith, or of no faith whatsoever. Hence the necessity that those having the faith should ponder these things well. Otherwise their reactions will be formed by the influence of the world rather than by the teachings and precepts and example of Christ.

#### 4. THE FORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN MENTALITY IN GENERAL

The very consideration of the obstacles to the formation of a Christian mentality suggests the way in which they can be overcome, the many steps that can and should be taken by young Catholics to prepare themselves to live fully Christian lives. In this section we will speak of some of the more basic of these steps.

##### A. Formation of the Mind

Let us recall, in the first place, that God made man *rational*. To achieve his destiny a human being must have knowledge of it, and he must direct himself toward it by his own intelligence. God has enlightened the intellect of man by faith; he aids it to function well in practical matters by the supernatural virtue of prudence; four of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit give further assistance to the intellect of man. But it must be the man himself who knows, who recognizes his own destiny; he himself must, by his own mind enlightened and assisted by God, order his life to the accomplishment of that destiny. Hence a most important conclusion: whoever seeks to walk the way of salvation in the married state must have at least a basically correct mental attitude toward marriage. The more correct his attitude (that is to say, the more Christian it is), the more easily will he achieve his purpose.



### B. Formation of the Soul

The devout living of a total Christian life is fundamental to achieving the total Christian outlook which is of such vital importance. This includes frequent reception of the sacraments, prayer, avoidance of the occasions of sin, and practice of the virtues. Prudence especially is important, since by means of this virtue the young person recognizes where wise teaching and sound advice are to be found. If the young person understands that his elders are not devoted to eliminating all joy from his life—that, on the contrary, they see dangers of which he is unaware, deeper meanings (and so more far-reaching consequences) than he is yet equipped to appreciate—then he would be disposed to move rapidly toward the intellectual and emotional maturity that so many never achieve at all.

The youngster who closes his mind while still in his teens will either learn only by deep shocks and crushing failures, or he will go through life with the mind of a teen-ager. A teen-ager's mind is a wonderful thing when one is sixteen. But it is pitifully inadequate equipment for a man or woman, especially if they assume the responsibilities of marriage.

### C. Formation of Character

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
*Hamlet, Act 1, Sc. 3*

Courage is of prime importance for the development of a Christian mentality with the emotional maturity necessary for successful married life. It takes courage to stand up to the world. "The world" sounds rather nebulous, and it is easy to credit oneself with the courage to stand up to it. When it is reduced, however, to practicality: to one's companions; to the immediate desires for money, for recognition in one field or another, for pleasure, for acceptance; to the problems great or small which face you at this moment—then "the world" becomes somewhat more difficult to face.



Courage is necessary to stand up for one's principles. It is easy to fool oneself into thinking one has courage by quietly changing principles whenever they get in the way. For the world does not manifest its respect for those who stand up to it (even though it cannot help but respect them): it ridicules them; it calls them cowards. And lack of recognition of one's valor, of one's nobility, is a hard pill for pride to swallow. It is easier—more comfortable and socially acceptable—to give in.

Thus without courage a youth will soon find himself accepting his principles, his way of life, more and more from the world. We have already seen something of the extent to which the principles of the world oppose those of Christ. A successful Christian marriage is not made, and cannot be made, by the man or woman whose way of life was constructed from the example of the movies, of the national and local teen-age arbiters of behavior and fashion, and of other purveyors of the worldly wisdom so firmly supported by the jibes of the drugstore crowd. Christian lives are lived and Christian marriages are made by Christians, not by weaklings.

##### 5. SPECIAL FACTORS IMPORTANT TO EACH SEX

Common sense, confirmed by the encyclical of Pius XI on the Christian education of youth,<sup>8</sup> easily reaches the conclusion that a suitable total formation takes into consideration the vast differences between the sexes. Fundamentally, these differences are based upon the different roles man and woman are destined to play in all of human life, and especially in the family.

<sup>8</sup>"Besides, there is nothing in nature itself which fashions the two (sexes) quite different in organism, in temperament, in abilities, to suggest that there can be or ought to be promiscuity, and much less equality, in the training of the two sexes." The rapidly changing conditions of modern life have prompted recent popes to speak frequently concerning the role, function, dignity and general position of women. Various statements will be found in collections of papal documents, such as the periodical, *The Pope Speaks*. For papal teaching before 1950, W. B. Faherty, S.J., *The Destiny of Modern Women* (Westminster, Md.: 1950) is useful. On the general subject of sex differences, L. F. Cervantes, S.J., *And God Made Man and Woman* (Chicago: 1959) is recommended.



It may be objected (and it is frequently objected) that many things—algebra, for example—are no different for boys than they are for girls. But is this true? Experienced teachers are aware that it is not, that even in a subject seemingly so indifferent to the sex of its practitioners as algebra, different methods of presentation are often very useful in getting this or that point across. In point of fact, women are seldom great mathematicians. But it must be made clear at the outset, lest what is said stimulates fruitless argument, that we are speaking of *differences*, not of superiority or inferiority.

#### A. Differences between Man and Woman

Having begun to realize that the advantages of equality bring with it disadvantages as well, the modern woman is again beginning to recognize that she differs in much more than the merely physical. Her real happiness depends to no small degree on systematically developing the mental and spiritual qualities that belong to her precisely as a woman. The very reason for the creation of woman is to fill the role of wife and mother. The more womanly she is, therefore, and the more manly her husband, the more they will be able to contribute to success and happiness in marriage.

If during youth and the period of general courtship wholesome and pleasant associations have been formed with members of the opposite sex, an observant youth will acquire a sympathetic appreciation of the differences of outlook, of interests, of needs and ambitions which characterize the sexes. Since marriage requires in the partners an unselfish concern for one another born of mutual love for one another, this understanding can be of great help in expressing such concern intelligently. The husband will be able to see that things that are quite unimportant to him can easily be of great concern to his wife, and vice versa. It will help man and wife to know how to please one another, and this will go far to insure the happiness of their family life.

#### B. Functional Differences and Their Effects

The differences between man as man and woman as woman are founded in the different functions that belong to them in family life.



It is for the man to earn a living for the family, to be in contact constantly with the world outside the family, to co-operate with other men in doing the work of society. For this reason he easily forms interests and friendships outside the family circle. On the other hand, the wife bears the children and provides most of their early care. Her life is close to the home; her one great friend is her husband; much of her contact with the world is through him.

The conclusions which can be drawn from these general principles cannot all be noted here, by any means; nor can we point out the many exceptions that are possible. Yet to illustrate the significance of these fundamental differences in function, one or another conclusion may be given by way of example. Thus it is easy to see that the husband who comes home each night with nothing but troubles and a bad disposition to offer his wife, or who cannot wait to get his nose into a sporting event on the television, is not making much of an effort to fulfill his role as his wife's one great friend, or to give her contact with the world outside the home. On the other hand, the wife who spends too much time visiting and seeking entertainment for herself outside the home is neglecting her duties and giving evidence of immaturity.

Another conclusion, and one of the utmost importance in establishing a happy relationship even from the days of courtship, is this: a man looks at his woman in a different perspective than that in which a woman views her man. It is in the nature of things that a man's primary concern is his work. While he is about his work, and even some of his recreation, he can forget quite completely about his wife. A man's work should be in itself challenging, fulfilling and rewarding to him. It should demand the best that is in him. On the other hand, the man to whom she has given her love is seldom far from a woman's thoughts. A woman's normal work—cooking, cleaning, caring for babies and small children, all the routine cares of a house—is seldom in itself rewarding. A woman finds her joy not so much in the work itself as in the loved ones for whom she works.

A wise woman will realize this and will not fear that her husband has ceased to love her if he fails to call when she expects him to, if he forgets an anniversary, or fails to notice the new way her hair is



fixed. At the same time, a wise and considerate husband will discipline himself to remember the things that his wife wants and expects. He should understand that his wife works directly for him and for their children; he works only indirectly for her. He works principally to achieve. That is the way of a man. His reward is in the success of the work itself, hers is in the evidence he gives her of his satisfaction with her and love for her. She will be a happier woman and a better wife if he does not fail to let her know of his love and devotion.

Marriage is a process of adjustment of man to woman and of woman to man. Sympathy, understanding and a deep realization that they are different not only physically but mentally and spiritually; the further appreciation that these very differences enable them to complement one another in forming a perfect, holy and fruitful union—these considerations will help a man and wife to live a lifetime of joy and happiness and peace.

The same realization will assist them in rearing their children. Boys seldom need to be cautioned to develop most manly qualities, but they often need guidance in developing the kind of gentleness and sympathetic understanding for women that only the truly strong can fully possess. A father should remember that his sons will best learn such manly gentleness from the example of his own behavior toward his wife. Also very helpful is the quiet "man to man" word of advice given to a boy from time to time concerning what is wise and courteous toward his mother or his sisters. Girls, on the other hand, should be cautioned to be womanly. A woman can be at best a sad imitation of a man. The young girl will do much better to find her model in her mother's model: the greatest woman of all, Our Lady.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Intellectual Preparation for Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Animals mate by instinct. Since man is an animal he also possesses an instinctive sense, but in man instinct is not very well developed. It does not have to be, for man is a *rational* animal: God has given him intelligence, and his reasoning powers enable him to make judgments concerning the proper course of action to take. Such judgments necessarily imply both knowledge of and consideration of all of the pertinent factors. Thus where man's underdeveloped instinct has nothing whatever to say, it is not difficult to see that one must do some investigating before passing judgment. But when instinct functions there is sometimes a temptation to rely on it. That is often the case in regard to marriage, and it is a serious mistake.

In primitive societies many of the complications affecting marriage in our complex modern civilization were unknown. Even in such aboriginal societies, however, we find complicated systems of customs and taboos surrounding marriage; these, together with the instructions given by those responsible, provided the information deemed



a necessary preliminary for a happy marriage. No matter how primitive, society thus underlines two important conclusions: 1) instinct is not enough; 2) marriage is too important a part of life to be undertaken on the basis of uninformed "common sense." Systematic instruction is certainly necessary as a preliminary to happy marriage.

This is more than ever the case in modern society. So many false and harmful notions about marriage are so widely propagated that young people can hardly avoid absorbing some of them, at least in part. Instruction is necessary to counteract these unsound ideas. Pius XI in his encyclical on Christian marriage says: "Since everything must be referred to the law and mind of God, in order to bring about the universal and permanent restoration of marriage, it is indeed of the utmost importance that the faithful should be well instructed concerning matrimony; both by word of mouth and by written word, not cursorily, but often and fully, by means of plain and weighty arguments, so that these truths will strike the intellect and will be deeply engraved on their hearts."

What kind of intellectual preparation, then, can contribute to the making of a happy marriage?

## 2. THE COLLEGE MARRIAGE COURSE

### A. Preliminary Training

Growing up in a happy home under the guidance of wise parents is, as we have seen, of unequalled importance in the total preparation for marriage. Sex instruction suitable to the age and circumstances of the child and youth should be provided by parents; when necessary, educators must supply this teaching, but it should be clearly recognized that the responsibility is the parents', and the most efficient of all schools is a truly Christian home. Sex information should be given privately and without levity, and yet without undue gravity; it should be imparted more or less casually, to avoid giving it an appear-



ance of excessive importance. This is especially true in the case of younger children, when it is necessary or advisable to instruct them on such matters.<sup>1</sup> These things should have been accomplished by the time a young person reaches college age.

### B. Instruction in the College

Pope John XXIII in an address to the Sacred Roman Rota (Dec. 13, 1961) called attention to the fact that he was repeating what he had said the year before to the same group:

It is necessary that the doctrine of the Church on marriage be better known and disseminated in all its forms. . . . The invitation is renewed today with distressed intensity, because there persists the widespread sense of danger, deriving in the first place from lack of solid doctrine and honesty of information. Subjects that require preparation, maturity of judgment, sincerity of conscience, are written and spoken of, to say the least, lightly; it is necessary for the faithful, as well as all society, to be enlightened, forewarned and well oriented.

In an excellent article on the problems faced by those who wish to live Christian married life in our American society and what the Church is doing to help them, Monsignor George A. Kelly (whose books listed in the bibliography are highly recommended) says,

If Christian couples in general must have a profound sense of mission, which will cause them to bear witness to the faith as the early Christians did, then it would seem that a special responsibility falls on the shoulders of those who have had the privilege of a Catholic college education. If we cannot expect leadership from the supposed leaders, whence will it come? And if it is too true that many parishes

<sup>1</sup>Highly recommended as effective assistance for parents in instructing their children on "the facts of life" are two 70 page pamphlets published by the Franciscan Herald Press (1434 W. 51st Street, Chicago 9, Illinois), *Listen, Son* (for boys) and *Mother's Little Helper* (for girls); these are not sold publicly but may be purchased (at 50c each) through one's pastor or directly from the publishers; each pamphlet is divided into three parts: for those from 9 to 13, 14 to 16, and 16 to 19. Image Books publishes an excellent book in the same vein, *Parents, Children and the Facts of Life*, by H. V. Sattler, C.S.S.R. (65c). For teen-agers themselves the pamphlet already recommended, *Modern Youth and Chastity*, by Gerald Kelly, S.J., (an inexpensive 108 page booklet published by "The Queen's Work") is especially valuable; it will greatly aid parents also in their delicate and necessary task of counseling and guiding adolescents.



have not yet found adequate place for the intellectual and apostolic talents of these alumni, it is, alas, also a fact that too many of these bachelors, masters and doctors are committing themselves more to the pursuit of the status symbol than to the glorification of Christ in the world.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the college marriage course has already been discussed.<sup>3</sup> It is not our purpose to discuss the role of the college here. The important point to be noted is that having taken a college marriage course does not eliminate the need of such immediate personal marriage preparation as a pre-Cana course. The college marriage course is designed to familiarize the educated Catholic with the institution of marriage, its role in society, and the ways in which Christian standards of marriage conform to and conflict with the standards accepted by the society in which we live.

### 3. POST-COLLEGE MARRIAGE INSTRUCTION

College is a very good place to learn that there are many practical things one should know which contribute to successful married living. These things cannot and should not all be taught in college, but college can teach, at least in general, how to go about learning these useful things.

#### A. Private Study

Many of the practical things of particular value for married life can be learned for oneself through private reading. A brief selective bibliography of such material has been appended to this book, but it is well to note that books and pamphlets on these subjects are constantly appearing. By the time you are ready to marry there will surely be more and perhaps even better publications than are now in print. Your diocesan Cana Director, your Catholic newspaper, good

<sup>2</sup>"Marriage in America," *Catholic Mind*, LX (1962), 9.

<sup>3</sup>See the Introduction to this book. Attention is again called to the full statement of the purpose of a theologically orientated college marriage course cited in the footnote at the end of the Introduction.



Catholic periodical literature, your parish priest and others will direct you to such useful material.<sup>4</sup>

### B. Organized Group Study

A great deal of practical physiology, psychology, sociology, economics (home and otherwise), nursing, and even a bit of penology are practically indispensable for the successful management of home and family. Many of the things most valuable to know will never be learned simply by reading and casual information gathered from parents and friends. For this reason most dioceses have arranged regular conferences for engaged people (formally or informally) and for married couples.

In some dioceses attendance at such conferences is compulsory, for long experience shows that many marriages fail because of a lack in one or both parties of the type of knowledge imparted in these meetings. It is characteristic of the wise man that he knows how little he knows. Ignorance is most serious when it is not realized. As soon as marriage becomes more than a remote possibility, you should consult your parish priest concerning the opportunities for intelligent instruction which are available in your locality.

In many dioceses special instruction classes in preparation for marriage are established; frequently, too, study groups will be sponsored by individual parishes. Often enough young Catholic married couples will get together themselves on an informal basis to discuss common problems and find Catholic answers to the questions married life raises, especially in modern society. But three Catholic organizations devoted to the promotion of Christian ideals in marriage and in family living deserve special mention here because they exist on a national scale.

#### (1) *The Family Life Bureau*

This organization of the National Catholic Welfare Conference was established by the bishops of the United States over twenty-five years

<sup>4</sup>An excellent source of information is available in The Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C.



ago to promote movements and activities beneficial to family life and to counteract what is injurious to family life in our civilization. The Bureau sponsors an educational program for young people and for parents to promote a Christian attitude toward sex and marriage. It seeks to encourage religious practices in the home and common family interests, and attempts to realize this program by means of various publications and studies and by organizing the family apostolate on a parish basis wherever possible. To promote an active interest in its work, the Bureau sponsors lectures, discussion groups, newspaper columns and articles, books and pamphlets. Affiliated with other national and international organizations, it co-operates with social agencies, secular and ecclesiastical, with similar purposes.

### *(2) The Christian Family Movement*

This young and apostolic organization, founded by a group of Chicago lay Catholics, has enjoyed remarkable success. In about fifteen years' time it has grown to a membership of nearly 40,000 couples and exists in nearly every diocese in the United States. In addition another 40,000 are active in the CFM in Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Australia, etc. Its purpose is to foster conditions in the community which will aid wholesome family life. It is organized along parish lines in groups of three to six couples which meet in the members' homes every two weeks. The first half-hour of the meeting is devoted to a prayer and to discussion of Catholic doctrine. Then about forty-five minutes is given over to a consideration of actual local conditions and everyday family life. In these meetings the members try to discover how closely their lives conform to the standards of Christ and what changes can be made to make their lives and their environment more Christian. Members of the CFM have had much to do with promoting the Cana Conference Movement and the Pre-Cana Conference, and are among its most enthusiastic and active supporters.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Information concerning the Christian Family Movement can be obtained from the national headquarters at 1655 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago 12, Ill. A monthly paper, *Act*, is published at \$1.00 a year.



### (3) *The Cana Conference Movement*

Outgrowth of a series of days of prayer and study for married couples conducted in New York by Father John Delaney, S.J., and in St. Louis by Father Edward Dowling, S.J., in 1944, the Cana Movement is now organized in most American dioceses. It sponsors both pre-marriage and post-marriage conferences; in these meetings priests, medical doctors, married people and other qualified experts help the couples present to face, understand and solve on Christian principles the problems they must meet. Cana work generally falls into three divisions: (a) Pre-Cana Conferences to prepare young people for marriage; (b) Cana Conferences to help married couples to make the best of their marriage; and (c) Follow-up Cana which is very similar to the work of the CFM described above and, indeed, is often carried on by the CFM.

1. **Pre-Cana Conferences.** These generally consist of a series of three evening gatherings, limited as far as possible to couples who intend to marry within six months. Priests, experienced married people and doctors discuss Christian marriage, Christian love, the handling of money, early adjustment to one another and to the coming of the first child, morality in marriage, marriage as a vocation, etc. Opportunity is presented to question each speaker.

2. **Cana Conferences.** The Cana meetings, held in the afternoon or evening, last about three hours. They generally run something like this: a talk; a short conversational break; a shorter talk which usually pin-points a particular problem touched on in the longer talk given earlier; a coffee break; a discussion period. These conferences are given on many different subjects of interest and utility to the couples in attendance. Where possible Cana is organized on a parish basis, since in that way more homogeneous groups can be gathered and more pertinent subjects chosen for discussion.

Since each diocese has its own problems and its own opportunities, the Cana movement is organized on somewhat different lines from place to place. It is, however, definitely a growing thing everywhere. In some dioceses attendance at Pre-Cana Conferences and a promise



to attend Cana Conferences is exacted of all couples planning to marry—an indication of how valuable its work has been found by many bishops. The work of Cana has brought much happiness into many homes. No young Catholic whose way of salvation lies in the married state can afford to neglect the great help this organization can provide.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. INFORMATION ON SPECIAL PROBLEMS

##### A. Physiological Problems

Often it is advisable for young people contemplating marriage to consult a reliable Catholic physician concerning the physiological aspects of marriage. If after marriage it is discovered that satisfactory sexual relationship is not achieved within a reasonable time, such consultation is clearly indicated. The sexual union is a wonderful symbol of the deep love between married partners. If it is not desirable, enjoyable and productive of satisfaction and contentment to both partners, something may well be wrong; patience and thoughtfulness may right the difficulty, but should it persist competent advice should be sought.

A happy sexual relationship is not the only thing in marriage; it is not even the most important thing in marriage. Yet it should be recognized that the marital act is the physical expression and manifestation of the married couple's mutual and sacramental love: it is an important element of marriage, and consequently its successful fulfillment is vital to a happy marriage. Young people who have preserved their purity sometimes think that they must have overestimated the satisfaction the sexual union would produce. It is quite possible that some physio-

<sup>6</sup>Since Cana is organized on a diocesan level there is no national office. Inquiries should be made of the diocesan Cana office. If none exists, information can be obtained from the Chicago Cana Office, 720 N. Rush Street, Chicago 11, Illinois.



logical or psychological difficulty (which could be easily overcome through the advice or treatment an experienced doctor could give) might prove an obstacle for years to complete contentment in married life. Loving concern for one another should be sufficiently great to overcome the couple's reluctance (the natural result of shame or embarrassment) to seek such advice.

### B. The Rearing of Children

The "Sunday Supplement" child psychologist is often the worst enemy of happy and successful family life. Good contributions in child psychology have been made by some reliable practitioners, but many of those who write popular books and articles solving all the problems of child-rearing are ignorant of the nature and purpose of a human being and sometimes even irresponsible. Parents should be wary of placing too much reliance on the fine-spun theories of the quacks who easily invade this field.

Parents who learn to control their tempers, to judge objectively, and to punish according to guilt and not according to their own feelings will achieve much more good than those who have only mastered the books of the theorists. A general understanding of the psychological development of the human being will stand wise parents in good stead. Small children are good at assimilating information, not at making judgments. Thus small children are much happier when decisions are taken out of their hands, when they are made to obey. They may object, even vociferously, but inwardly they are content. When they see that their objections are unavailing they soon drop them.

To give an example: a small child asks for a piece of candy. Mother offers the child a box containing several kinds. The child is being forced to make a selection without knowing the facts; he does not know what is in each or which kind he would like best. Not even an adult can make an intelligent decision without knowing the facts. To the child this decision is important. Before making his selection



he may ask if he may have two pieces. This is to lighten the pressure; he now has room for an error. If the parent hands the child a piece, a formal protest may be made that another would be preferred; but if habit teaches that the parent's decision is final, the child will go happily away. This illustrates just one small conclusion from the wealth of learning available to you in college and applicable to the problems you will face as life goes on.

### C. Consulting a Priest

Priests are often asked how they can know anything about marriage and child raising. The question implies not only curiosity but a kind of mistrust. Yet it would be most unwise to underestimate the practical value of the priest's advice—he can well know more than you, and more than you think he knows. To the married man the concept of marriage is intimately associated in his mind with the virtues and shortcomings of *his* wife. He knows much more than the priest about one particular marriage, but much less about marriage generally. The extensive studies of the priest and his wide experience, not only as a confessor, but also outside the confessional as the confidant of countless people, prepare him to give wise objective advice concerning the problems of married life.

There are many occasions which arise in married life when the consultation of a priest is dictated by ordinary good sense. Quarrels which demand arbitration; problems where information or experience is lacking; difficulties and decisions and unexpected developments and crises—at such times, and on innumerable occasions similar to these, a visit to the rectory to “talk things over” with a man God has specially chosen to assist the laity in attaining their supernatural destiny surely can do no harm and is frequently productive of much good. While the priest is not by any means infallible as a counsellor, prudence and wisdom and objectivity, plus God's assistance, are on his side. It is a combination hard to beat.



## 5. CONCLUSION

What can be called the intellectual preparation for marriage is logically divided, then, into four periods:

- 1) The first is the general impressions that are formed in childhood.
- 2) The second is the experience gained in the normal wholesome boy-girl relationship of the teen years which culminates in the systematic instruction concerning the nature of marriage and the laws governing marriage gained in a school course.
- 3) Then during the time of courtship in the strict sense, when marriage becomes a proximate matter, advice of parents, priest, physician and older married couples will be sought both in general discussions such as Pre-Cana Conferences and in private consultations when prudence so directs. Thought will be devoted to making use of the general fund of knowledge that has been acquired to achieve a better understanding of what is wise and what is prudent. Reliably recommended books and pamphlets will be read and even in some cases studied, including at least one book by a doctrinally solid author which has as its purpose to point out the holy and vocational aspect of marriage as a means of growing supernaturally and achieving eternal salvation.
- 4) Finally, since marriage is the work of a lifetime, learning will never cease. No marriage is fully achieved on the wedding day. An open and eager mind ever prepared to learn more about one another and about successful family living should characterize the spouses throughout their married life.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Personal Considerations

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Certain people are not free to marry at all. The list of invalidating impediments explained in Chapter Four makes it clear, for example, that those who are already married, as well as those who are impotent and those who have not yet reached the proper age—all these, among others, cannot contract marriage. Still others, as that list discloses, are not free to marry certain persons, such as those too closely related to them, those with whom certain crimes have been committed, etc. Other limitations on the right to marry are to be found in the list of impediments to contracting marriage legally.

The primary concern of this chapter, however, is not with such personally disqualifying restrictions of the right to marry, but rather with other factors of a personal nature which demand serious consideration in preparing for marriage, especially in a proximate manner.



## 2. PERSONAL PROBLEMS BROUGHT UP BY IMPEDIMENTS

### A. Dispensations

Sometimes dispensations from the ecclesiastical impediments to marriage are granted under certain circumstances.<sup>1</sup> When the Church grants a dispensation, it does not eliminate the evil element inherent in such a contract, the evil which is the very reason for the existence of the impediment. The Church merely determines that in this particular case it deems the evil of forbidding the marriage greater than the evil of permitting it. Those who are heading for a marriage that will require a dispensation should keep this fact in mind. It is a factor to be seriously considered (and remedies which will obviate or minimize the evil inherent in the situation must be seriously discussed) before agreement to marry is reached. After marriage the couple must exercise great care to prevent the evil circumstance which is the reason for the impediment from influencing their personal lives, their life together, and especially the lives of their children. This is a large order, a truly difficult and drastic course to secure true marital happiness. But the situation must be faced squarely, the remedies for the evil frankly used, if the marriage is to be successful.

Another practical conclusion results from a realistic consideration of the situations requiring dispensations. It is this: *to keep company with someone with whom a dispensation to contract marriage would be necessary, one must have a reason of proportionate gravity to that required for the granting of the dispensation.* No one has a right to walk blindly and blithely into evil.

### B. Mixed Marriages

The observations made in the preceding section are especially applicable in the case of mixed marriages. More souls are lost to the

<sup>1</sup>The invalidating impediments which arise from the natural law do not, of course, admit of dispensation.



Church as a result of mixed marriages than are gained.<sup>2</sup> The element of failure is in such marriages from the beginning. The other elements of success may be so strong (all good Catholics, of course, think that they are when they contract such a marriage) that the marriage will survive and perhaps even be very happy. Even in such cases, however, the Catholic party, and often the non-Catholic party as well, realizes that something very important has been lacking in their union.

Furthermore, the evil ensuing from mixed marriages which are successful is often *greater* than that of those which fail. Archbishop Whitesides of Liverpool in a letter to his clergy put it this way:

The chief evil accompanying mixed marriages is not so much the weakening of the faith of the Catholic party as the gradual emasculation of the faith of the children in successive generations, with all its attendant evils. . . . Beginning with one mixed marriage, the mixed marriages springing from that initial one increase almost in geometrical progression from generation to generation. It is only what might be expected. In a mixed marriage, owing to the non-Catholic parent's influence, direct or indirect, the faith of the children is almost invariably weaker than that of their Catholic parent. The definite line of cleavage between truth and heresy becomes blurred, the "odium haeresis" almost disappears, and the wholesome abhorrence of mixed marriage is lost.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. EXTERNAL PRESSURES AND SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Many personal factors must be taken into consideration in order to exercise prudence in selecting a marriage partner. There are many such factors which would seriously militate against a successful and happy marriage union. For it must be remembered that marriage is

<sup>2</sup>Recent sociological studies have turned up some revealing—and frightening—statistics on *valid* mixed marriages. Whereas only 5% of non-Catholic partners are converted during their marriage, over 40% of the Catholic parties cease to practice their religion; roughly 40% of all children born in such marriages are either unbaptized, or baptized as Protestants, or baptized only (i.e., do not receive any formal instruction in the faith). The effects of invalid mixed marriages are, naturally enough, even more appalling. Cf. J. L. Thomas, S.J., Ph.D., "Mixed Marriages and the Future," in *Sanctity and Success in Marriage* (Family Life Bureau, Washington: 1956).

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Ter Haar, *De Matrimoniis Mixtis Eorumque Remediis* (Rome, 1931), 170.



not an adventure of a few months, nor an arrangement which only covers youth.

Some of the more important among the elements which should be considered before entering marriage will be mentioned here. There are others which common sense and the advice of parents, priests or thoughtful friends will disclose in particular circumstances.

### A. Pride and Prejudices

There are certain false notions which prevail in society. These notions affect everyone, whether one subscribes to them or not. Marriage takes place, not in some utopia, but in the real world. Prevailing prejudices can easily place upon a marriage strains greater than it can endure. Marriage is no way to register one's protest, no matter how legitimate it may be, against society. Marriage is too sacred to be used as a means to some lesser end, even if that end in itself be a deserving one.

#### *(1) The Race Problem*

Whether we like it or not, society is riddled with racial prejudices. In some places these prejudices are so strong that marriage between the races is prohibited by law or results in serious legal disabilities. Such a marriage may even result in physical danger for husband and wife, as well as for the children born to them. In other places where the feeling is not so strong, serious social pressures may still be expected. Such pressures may be able to be endured for a time, but in the long run they can and often do turn love into hatred; because of them—and through no personal fault of the married couple—what would otherwise be a happy marriage may end in complete failure. For this reason the priest will advise strongly against such a marriage.

*But the right to contract such a marriage cannot be denied.* If the couple, knowing these facts, insists upon going through with the marriage, and all other things are in order, the Church will arrange their marriage. Where the civil law forbids it, the minor inconvenience of



the couple's going to another state to contract the marriage may be necessary, to avoid the much greater inconvenience of legal penalties and popular demonstrations against the Church and her ministers.

### (2) *Nationality Prejudices*

Much less important than formerly, but still in some places a matter to be reckoned with, is the national origin of the parties. Generally prudent measures can be taken to prevent this from becoming a major factor (unless it is combined with other elements, such as economic and educational differences). On all of these points prudent advice should be sought. Young people are often generous and idealistic. They are inclined to make light of the unreasonable prejudices of society. In doing so they easily underestimate the corrosive influences those prejudices can exert on the happiness of their marriage despite all that they can do.

### B. Family Attitudes

Difficulties are often raised by one or both families which would not be a serious issue so far as society as a whole is concerned. In such cases the wishes and advice of the family—especially the head of the family—should be listened to with respect. The objections should be weighed seriously, and if they are valid they should be heeded. If the objections are inconclusive, *ordinarily* the couple to be married should make some concessions, if this can be done without grave inconvenience and if some good can be accomplished by it.

It is true that for those who have reached the legal age for marriage provided for by the civil law, the approval of the families is not necessary. Yet it is equally true, and a fact to be taken into account, that if one or both families do not approve, a consequent strain will be placed upon the marriage. It may prudently be determined that the strain will not be sufficient to imperil the marriage seriously, or that the families will eventually change their attitude. Yet family disapproval should be avoided if at all possible, and should be given serious consideration if it cannot be avoided. Often



a parish priest can be of much help in ironing out such family difficulties.

### C. The Economic Factor

The economic factor is one of great importance. It is dangerous to undertake marriage when the economic future is extremely uncertain. In these days of military service, lengthy educational requirements for most professions, and a widespread lack of willingness to endure privation, young people often make plans based on the wife's working at least for the first few years. That may be well enough, but the purpose of marriage is to bring children into the world. Marriages do not start happily unless children are desired from the beginning. If in the very nature of things a child is going to be an almost intolerable economic burden, there is a very serious argument against contracting marriage immediately.

#### *(1) Economics and Temptation*

1. Birth control. One of the principal "excuses" for the practice of birth prevention is the economic one. Catholics are perfectly well aware of the fact that the use of instruments, chemicals or medicines, as well as the unnatural termination of the marriage act for the purpose of preventing conception, is seriously sinful for anyone, Catholic or non-Catholic. Many arguments can be offered against these practices, but if Catholics are not swayed by the fact that they are mortally sinful, it is not a matter of great consequence whether other arguments avail or not. Many Catholics, however, seem to think that there is no objection whatever to the practice of periodic continence based on calendar computations or temperature indications as a means of avoiding conception.

2. Rhythm or periodic continence. The practice of restricting marital relations to the wife's periods of low fertility is known as "rhythm" or "periodic continence." Unlike contraception, this practice is not contrary to the natural law. It consists in a calculated use of nature and requires self-denial; it does not involve the frustration by immoral means of natural functions and processes. When it is effective, periodic continence avoids conception, and either renders the marriage



childless or limits the number of children. In consequence, rhythm results in the total deprivation or the diminution of the principal good of matrimony, the *bonum proles*, the offspring.

This deprivation or diminution of the principal good of the married state is *in itself* an incompleteness, a lack, an absence of due perfection; in terms of the ends and goods of marriage, it is of itself an evil. Obviously a couple must have good reasons for tolerating this evil; there must be compensating reasons to justify such a self-inflicted deprivation, and there must be moral certainty that the married couple are able to sustain without spiritual harm the sacrifices it necessarily involves.

Of its very nature, rhythm eliminates spontaneity from the marriage relationship and introduces an element of calculation. It creates difficulty in avoiding selfishness in what God intended as a perfect exercise and symbol of the unselfish love which is the wonderful preservation of happy marriage. Rhythm can easily lead to a curtailment of freedom in the exercise of those very rights which are the object of the marriage contract.

Clearly, then, this is a practice to be undertaken with caution. It is not "the Catholic method of birth control." Some recent writers, even among Catholics, reject the use of the word "tolerate" in connection with the practice of periodic continence. Moved by a genuine concern for married people in whose lives serious reasons for family limitation have developed, these writers maintain that it is not tolerable but positively virtuous to practice periodic continence. This confused thinking rests upon a basic misunderstanding of morality. It is virtuous to tolerate. When the Church grants a dispensation from mixed religion it tolerates the marriage of a Catholic to a baptized non-Catholic. The Catholic entering the marriage with a dispensation is certainly not dispensed to commit a sin. A human act which is not a sin is an act of virtue. The evils of the mixed marriage are not removed by the dispensation; in this case it is simply considered that it would be a greater evil to forbid the marriage.

The dangers to conjugal life which are normally involved in the practice of periodic continence are an evil which in the presence of serious reasons can be tolerated. It is virtuous to tolerate them in



such circumstances. But to deny that these dangers exist is foolhardy. Pope Pius XII expressed the hope that science would increase the precision in determining the fertile period. If this were done it would proportionately lessen the dangers to the secondary ends of marriage. The word "tolerate," therefore, does not imply to one who understands the meaning of Christian morality that the one who tolerates is doing evil. When serious reasons for avoiding conception are present it is virtuous, and sometimes could be highly virtuous, to tolerate the evils involved in periodic continence.<sup>4</sup>

### (2) *Economics and the Future*

In addition to the importance of certain economic provision for the establishment of a family, another economic factor should be taken into consideration. It is not unimportant that the parties come from similar economic backgrounds. This is significant to the extent that the standard of living, social contacts, and reasonable ambitions are determined to a great extent by economic factors.

1. **Similarity of ambitions.** A girl who has been used to being able to keep up with "the country club set" may think herself quite willing to struggle along in an apartment in shantytown with a man in a low-income bracket. But often in the back of her mind she is telling herself that her young man is really interested in studying law in night school and will eventually be getting his exercise on the golf course. She may even have him convinced that he is interested in such a program. Yet in reality he may be quite happy working at his job. They may easily talk themselves into thinking that they see eye to eye as to the kind of life they want for themselves and their children, and as to their ambitions for the future. Yet in truth they may be far apart. The young man may well be condemned to a miserable life trying to live up to his wife's ambitions and trying to meet the economic conditions which, despite her protestations in the beginning, she really deemed necessary all along.

2. **The choice of a career.** Another factor closely allied to the economic aspect is the type of work the young man does or wishes to

<sup>4</sup>A full discussion of these reasons will be found in Part Three, Chapter Ten.



do. This is especially true if he is very seriously interested in an occupation which is incompatible with normal married life. He may want to be an explorer or a travelling salesman. A young woman should be quite sure in such a case that she understands what is involved, and that she is willing to go along with her prospective husband's way of life.

#### 4. FACTORS OF PERSONALITY

##### A. The Role of Education

###### *(1) Educational Background*

Difficulties often arise in a marriage because of significant differences in educational background. This is easy to understand when the educational level of the wife substantially surpasses that of her husband. It provides the basis for a feeling of inferiority on the part of the husband which can easily result in resentment. The wife can easily surpass her husband in intelligence without creating any problem (especially if she is prudent as well as intelligent), but a wife's college education can be a source of friction when the husband has not had the same advantage. The opposite situation is not nearly so significant. If a problem arises from lack of education on the part of the wife, it is not because the wife develops a feeling of inferiority (though sometimes this happens), but because she is unable to provide the kind of companionship that her husband may desire. This difficulty is only present when education has produced intellectual interests in a man; all too often in these days this is not the case.

###### *(2) Marriage and Education*

It is often the case today for young people to marry while contemplating considerable additional education for the husband after marriage. Under these circumstances, a serious question arises. If one or more children should arrive before the educational program



is completed, will this result in such economic hardship that the young man will either have to discontinue his studies or watch his family endure more than he can reasonably expect of them? If he has to discontinue his studies and take work that he does not want, a kind of job with which he will never be content, he may grow to look upon his family as a drag upon him. He may be too considerate and he may love them too much to say so; but missed opportunities of this sort could easily change his entire outlook on life and his entire disposition. These questions should not be lightly passed off by young people considering marriage.

#### B. The Well-Being of the Parties

Certain very personal qualities assume great importance when a lifetime of union is under consideration. It may, for example, seem the heroic and self-sacrificing thing to do to ignore chronic ill health or a family history of mental illness. One must not forget, however, that there is the welfare of children to consider. Their helplessness, especially in infancy, constitutes as much of a burden as the normal home can provide for. The further burden caused by the ill health of one of the spouses may demand sacrifices so heroic that they cannot be counted on in advance.

Moral health is essential in a prospective marriage partner. When courtship was considered, the importance of sexual morality was noted. Other moral factors are important as well. A dishonest person, one who is mean or even brutal, one who is inordinately jealous or suspicious, one who is selfish to a marked degree, or who is a cheat or a liar, and, of course, one who drinks to excess, is an unsuitable marriage partner no matter how much fun or how smart or attractive he or she may be. As for drinking, it should be noted that young people are seldom confirmed drunkards, but the signs of the future are in the present. If a young man (or, more rarely, a young woman) is so weak as to be unable to endure the difficulties of life in youth without the escape of alcohol, the chances are great that it will become progressively more necessary for him. Furthermore, if a young



man has to be anesthetized by alcohol to endure the company of the young lady he intends to marry, the young lady would do well to consider how long such a partial interest in her is likely to last.

Another moral failing that militates seriously against the possibilities of a happy marriage is inordinate ambition on the part of one of the prospective partners, especially when the same ambition is not shared by the other. To a person who is inordinately ambitious everything is a means to achieving the ambition, even including a marriage partner. The partner may be looked upon as a direct means (as when one marries for money or for social or business advantage), or as an indirect means (simply to provide easily for the relief of concupiscence, for example). But in neither case is the approach to marriage all that it should be.

### C. Love and Marriage

#### (1) *Compatibility*

No matter what qualifications a young man or young woman may have as a potential marriage partner, a strictly relative additional qualification must be present as well. Relative to the prospective spouse, the young man or woman must have the qualification of compatibility. Much has already been said of this qualification as it concerns economic, social, educational and religious ideas and backgrounds. But it is well to mention the matter specifically, since it extends to many other factors as well. A common outlook on many matters is important to insure a happy life together. The harmony of many families has been put to serious test by basic disagreements concerning the rearing of children, methods of spending leisure time, city or country living, association with each other's relatives and friends, and many other matters. Much can be done to learn one another's views on these and many other matters during the period of courtship, and they should receive the consideration they deserve.

#### (2) *The Primacy of Love*

Adjustment may be made for some personal factors; one admits of no compromise. *The success of a marriage is founded on the love which*



*husband and wife have for one another.* Their love should be one that will not only endure, but will grow and deepen as the years go by. Young people on the day of their marriage often think of their love as perfect. It may well be, in the sense that they love each other as much as they are capable of loving at that time. But as they live together in joys and sorrows, in worries, illnesses and disappointments, in pleasure and successes, as they laugh together, as they strengthen one another in trials and temptations and comfort one another in suffering and anguish, their love will deepen and grow and they will become more and more perfectly one. Of course, this presupposes that the love they bore for one another in the beginning was more than mere physical attraction. Young people often realize this. For that reason they often ask, "How can we know we are in love?"

### (3) *The Meaning of Love*

What is meant by love? *It amounts to a positive, favorable reaction to something that appears good to us.* A thing can appear good for three reasons: 1) because it is useful; 2) because it is delightful; or 3) because we discover in it an intrinsic worth which surpasses any advantage it may have for us. Any one of these—or any combination of them, of course—can move us to love.

When we love something (or someone) as useful, we tend to destroy it to the extent that this is necessary in using it. What we love as delightful we love only when and to the extent that it is delightful to us. The third kind of love can be granted only to a person, and Christ demands that we grant it to every person. A man may love a trusted employee since he is useful to him. He may find him anything but delightful. But he must never forget that his employee is a human being of intrinsic value, that this is of greater importance than his utility; and thus the employer must desire for him the eternal fulfillment of the potentialities in which his intrinsic worth consists more than he desires his continued utility to himself.

The love upon which marriage is based should contain all of these loves. A young man finds a woman he considers useful as a help-mate in bringing children into the world; as a companion (yes, and as a cook and laundress and cleaning woman and nurse and



everything else a wife and mother must be prepared to be); and as a means of attaining his eternal salvation. She appears to him delightful to look at, to be with, to talk to, to think of, and he trusts that she will be delightful as a sexual partner. But he also sees in her much more than the minimum potentiality for eternal glory. He sees her as beloved of God, well on the way to achieving glory. He sees her as virtuous and pleasing to God, as someone worth his self-sacrificing devotion. In this we see that married love, like all true friendship, is made perfect in charity.

Thus the love on which true marriage is based is infinitely above physical or biological attraction, although it may include such an attraction. It is completely different from that romantic, sentimentalized notion of love which furnishes the plot for so many soap operas, second-rate movies and TV dramas. This married love is the mutual attraction of two human persons redeemed by Christ and destined for heaven who want each other as companions and helpmates, as mutually enjoyable and delightful human beings, as persons of intrinsic value in the sight of God.

From what has just been said, a prudent judgment should be possible as to whether one is "in love" or not. It is also worth considering the kind of love a young man has for a woman whom he seeks to lead into sin in order to gratify his lustful desires. And a young woman can speculate on the fate she can expect from a man to whom she is more useful than good. What is merely useful is destroyed in the using and discarded when its usefulness is ended.



## CHAPTER NINE

# Religious Preparation for Marriage

Since marriage is truly a “way of life,” and since it is entered upon by the reception of a sacrament, it is apparent that preparation of a religious nature must be made before beginning one’s married life. Pope Pius XI says: “This religious character of marriage, its sublime signification of grace and the union between Christ and the Church, evidently requires that those about to marry should show a holy reverence towards it, and zealously endeavor to make their marriage approach as nearly as possible to the archetype of Christ and the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

While there is no need to go into any great detail on this subject, there are certain points concerning which information is useful, and other matters of which at least mention should be made and recommendations given. We will consider first of all the requirements laid down by the Church, dictated as they are by the principles of theology and by canon law; these may be considered as belonging to the religious preparation for marriage in the sense that they enter directly into the nature of Christian marriage as a sacred and holy union, symbolic

<sup>1</sup>*Casti Connubii.*



of the union between Christ and his Church. A second section will discuss the immediate spiritual preparation of the people to be married, offering some concrete suggestions to enable them better to prepare themselves for the reception of this great sacrament.

## 1. THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CHURCH

The requirements of the Church respecting marriage with which we are now concerned are those steps which may or must be taken in preparation for marriage according to the provisions of canon law and the teachings of theology. These are three: betrothal, pre-nuptial investigation, and the publication of the banns.

### A. Betrothal

#### (1) *Its Nature*

The betrothal here referred to is not the simple engagement which precedes most marriages. Rather it is a solemn engagement which is entered into according to the form prescribed by law. In this sense, betrothal is *a legitimately given mutual promise of future marriage exchanged between persons who are legally capable.*

This betrothal must be made in writing, dated, and duly signed by both parties and by the pastor or Ordinary, or by two witnesses.

#### (2) *Its Effects*

This solemn engagement, it seems probable, creates a grave obligation in justice to contract marriage at the stated time. It renders both parties incapable of *validly* contracting betrothal with anyone else. Solemn engagement also makes it *unlawful* (but not *invalid*) to *contract marriage with* another party. This is not a canonical impediment to marriage with someone else, but if anyone breaks a contract of betrothal without a just cause and marries another, he would be guilty of serious sin.



Betrothal can be dissolved in many ways. The parties may freely decide to end the agreement; or some notable circumstance, the previous existence or knowledge of which would have forestalled making the engagement in the first place, may necessitate a change. If one party breaks the promise by unchastity with another or by unduly deferring marriage, the other party is automatically free. The betrothal may also be dissolved by a dispensation from the Holy See, or by a choice of a more perfect state of life by one or both of the parties.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that betrothal is a very serious matter, closely akin to marriage itself. It is a practice becoming more widespread in the United States because of long engagements necessitated by military service. The practice has the approval of the Church, but in some places the Ordinary does not recommend it. The guidance of one's pastor should be sought. All who enter solemn engagement should be aware of the nature and extent of the obligations they assume.

#### B. Pre-nuptial Investigations

The obligation of making the pre-nuptial investigation to ascertain that the parties are free and capable of contracting a lawful marriage rests upon the pastor whose right it is to assist at the marriage. The Church has in our day issued detailed instructions that must be followed in all cases. In the dioceses of the United States there is a detailed form which makes a searching inquiry into the freedom and capacity of the parties who wish to marry. The purpose of all this investigation is both to safeguard the sanctity of matrimony and to protect the marriage partners against invalid unions and from future doubts about their marital status. Copies of the pre-nuptial investigation are kept on file in the parish, and must be produced in the ecclesiastical courts whenever anyone attacks the validity of a marriage.

Those contemplating marriage should call upon the pastor of the bride, or the priest who is to officiate, *at least one month* before the

<sup>2</sup>A more perfect state is attained not only by entering a religious order or receiving holy orders, but also by vowing privately to do either, or by vowing to remain chaste, etc.



date of the wedding. Both parties should secure a certificate of baptism issued within six months and a certificate of confirmation. Unless they are known to the pastor, both parties must be able to furnish proof of their identity. If one or both parties are minors, they must be able to furnish proof of the consent of their parents to the wedding. If one or both are widowed, they must furnish proof of death of their former spouse or spouses.

Other cases requiring further legal documents, such as those whose previous marriage has been declared null by the Church, will receive instructions from the pastor during their interview.

### C. Publication of the Banns

The banns are public announcements which should precede the celebration of marriage in order to detect any canonical impediments which may exist. The banns are to be published for three successive Sundays or holydays of obligation, either during Mass or at some other service attended by many people. The banns are to be omitted for all mixed marriages unless the Ordinary directs otherwise. The Ordinary may also dispense from publishing the banns in other cases.

The people are gravely obligated to reveal to the pastor or to the Ordinary whatever impediments they know of before the celebration of the marriage. But there are certain circumstances under which people are excused from revealing impediments:

- 1) If the revelation would be fruitless; e.g., if the pastor already knows, or if the impediment is dispensed.
- 2) If grave harm would result to the one revealing or to others.
- 3) If the impediment is known only through a sacramental or professional secret. This does not include promises, even if confirmed by oath.

## 2. IMMEDIATE SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

For the seminarian who is to be ordained to the priesthood, long years of study and constant progress in developing his spiritual powers



are necessary and are obvious prerequisites for the actual reception of the sacrament. The religious who is to take final vows has spent a considerable period in learning about the religious life and in fruitfully practicing the virtues essential to it. Both for the one and for the other, however, a special and more intense period of immediate spiritual preparation is necessary (it is, in fact, demanded by the Church) before they take the ultimate step which will determine their lives forever.

Sound reason, as well as even a rudimentary acquaintance with spiritual and theological principles, suggests that there is a real parallel here with the decisive step to be taken by the young couple about to be married. They should have passed through a period of intellectual and moral training for the way of life they are about to pursue; this remote preparation, so fundamental for a successful marriage, should be supplemented (as we have seen) by more direct education as they approach marriageable age. But not the least of the preparations by any means—surely as important as buying a trousseau or planning the wedding breakfast and honeymoon—is that which concerns the souls and spiritual life of the couple. They are to receive a great sacrament, they are to enter upon a lifelong career of infinite and eternal significance for themselves and for the children they hope to have, but of great significance also for the Kingdom of God which Christ came to establish on this earth.

In this section we hope only to suggest some of the steps the young Catholic couple might take to prepare themselves spiritually in a fruitful manner for their marriage. Other means will suggest themselves to young people interested in each other and in their mutual destiny.

#### A. The Choice of Models

Everyone should be devoted to our Blessed Mother and to St. Joseph, but young people who intend to marry should cultivate a very special devotion to them precisely as wife and husband, as mother and father of the Holy Family. Their devotion to one another and to the Child



given into their care, their perfect harmony and unity of purpose, and above all their submission to God in every regard, make them perfect models for married Christians. They should be regularly asked for help in preparing for married life and later in living it. When one's partner is determined upon, the young person should begin to share these prayers with the prospective partner. Many Catholic young people have arranged their engagement in the stillness of some nearly empty church before the altar of our heavenly Mother, even though the solemnities of the engagement may never be employed.

#### B. The Necessity of Prayer

From the beginning of the association between boy and girl there should be no bashfulness about praying together. When a provisional decision is made to share one another's life, it will be perfectly normal, if prayer means anything in one's life, to begin to share one another's prayers. Catholic young people will realize that without prayer their loved one would not have chosen them. Pius XI cautions young people to "pray diligently for divine help, so that they make their choice in accordance with Christian prudence, not indeed led by the blind and unrestrained impulse of lust, nor by any desire of riches or other base influence, but by a true and noble love and by a sincere affection for the future partner."<sup>3</sup> Knowing that it was in prayerful consideration that they were chosen, the prayer of the beloved will be especially dear, and it will be the first true intimacy the young people will share. They should read together the Book of Tobias where they will discover how pleasing it is to God that a union of prayer should antedate and later accompany and sanctify the carnal union of marriage.

#### C. Pre-Cana Conferences

Pre-Cana Conferences have already been mentioned. Attendance at these conferences will be another way of preparing religiously for

<sup>3</sup>*Casti Connubii*.



marriage. It should be realized from the beginning that the life of the spirit is engaged in marriage, that the very working out of eternal salvation in marriage will be a community project in a very real and tangible way. In talking about their prospective life together young people will be stimulated by Pre-Cana, and by reading and thinking, to discuss the dominant influence they desire religion to play in their home. They will make plans to begin their married life before God's altar and never in their hearts to leave it. Their one companion on their honeymoon will be the Father who loves them so dearly, who gave them to each other, who will grant them the children that will make their union perfect, and who alone can keep them in the perfect union of love.

#### D. A Retreat before Marriage?

The final means suggested for a truly spiritual preparation for marriage is a retreat made by the engaged couple—together where such retreats are arranged, but perhaps even better separately—as shortly before their marriage as possible. During this time of prayerful recollection, they can prepare themselves to receive the sacrament of matrimony with the most perfect dispositions possible.

It will be difficult, of course, especially for the girl, to "find the time" in the midst of many preparations, preliminary parties, and all that falls to the girl and her family to arrange. Yet just for that reason it will be especially important for her, lest the sacrament be obscured in the celebrations occasioned by it. Above all else values must be kept straight.



## Summary and Conclusion of Part Two

The considerations of this second part of our study of Christian marriage should at least have created the impression that marriage is a serious business, and a very complex one. There are, to be sure, whole areas of human conduct and possibility which are not directly involved in the married state, which can exist independently of it, and which may function more efficiently without the necessary entanglements of married life. But for those who are married there is no imaginable field of human behavior which does not concern, directly or indirectly, their life together.

It is this fact, coupled with the fact of the permanence of the married state, which indicates how thorough and all-embracing and deliberate must proper preparation for marriage be. It is a preparation which must take place on several levels—moral, spiritual, intellectual, psychological—at the same time; it is a preparation which begins in the home and extends through school years and beyond; it is a preparation which involves all of the general educating agencies of man (home, Church, school) and innumerable specialized agencies as well.



But in this preparation young people must actively interest themselves, actively engage themselves; they cannot simply absorb, if they are to achieve the maturity necessary to make their marriage a successful and happy one. This is a do-it-yourself project: while the tools are furnished by others, the material at hand is the lives and eternal destinies of the young people themselves, and they must be the ones who work it into proper shape with God's help.

The work of art a young Catholic couple will together construct is worth all the effort they put into preparing for it: their successful marriage and the family they build are one of the essential parts of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The particular conclusions reached in each of the chapters of this study of the preparation for Christian marriage are, therefore, of great importance. It will be worthwhile to repeat them in summary form.

#### courtship

1. The period of general boy-girl relationships is a crucial time in the development of moral character and of proper attitudes toward sex and marriage. Parents should recognize the dangers latent in these early relationships and properly educate, direct and supervise their children.

2. Conduct during courtship is of vast influence with respect to the couple's future marriage. This is a period of great value in helping the young couple to get to know each other better, but it carries its own temptations, and very serious ones. Avoidance of these is most necessary for the future success of the marriage.

#### psychological preparation

3. In our present society, the determination and preservation of Christian values and standards is very difficult, but for that very reason all the more essential; this is particularly true with respect to the Catholic attitude toward marriage.



4. Young Catholics must face these facts and prepare themselves psychologically to deal with them by forming a truly Christian mentality. This psychological preparation will take into just account the differences between the sexes, their characteristics, and their differing functions.

**intellectual  
preparation**

5. Marriage is not a haphazard adventure but a lifetime career involving two and more rational beings. It must, then, be prepared for *reasonably*, by suitable education of man's faculty of reasoning. Information in special areas may, in consequence, be a requisite; in such cases experts in these various fields should be consulted.

**personal  
preparation**

6. Two *persons* are united in marriage, and therefore the complex problems involving personality arise when serious consideration is given by two people to this permanent union. Questions of background—social, racial, educational background—must be raised by the couple contemplating marriage; the problems they may cause must be estimated gravely, and solutions for them discussed. Problems of the foreseeable future must be brought up and disposed of. No ostrich performance can be countenanced in so serious a matter.

**religious  
preparation**

7. Last and not least, the people to be married must think about, and act upon, the necessary preparation in the spiritual realm for their entrance on so decisive and sacramentalized a way of life. This means not only adherence to the Church's prudent requirements which safeguard the sanctity of their future state, but also a conscious and deliberate disposition of their souls for reception of the graces of the sacrament they will receive.



PART THREE

# Marriage in Christ



## Introduction to Part Three

In Part One of this book we have seen, with the assistance of that divine-human science which is theology, just what marriage is—what it is in itself as a human institution, what it is in the eyes of God as a supernatural reality, what it is according to the mind of the Church of Christ. From this consideration of the nature and essence of matrimony its characteristic traits or properties of unity and indissolubility were brought into clear light. In this light the laws which govern this sacred contract and institution—laws which flow from the very nature of the contract and sacrament, as well as the laws established by divine decree and by the legislation of the Church—were seen as the safeguards and guarantees of the inviolability of a vital human relationship which is also a way of life leading to eternal glory.

The facts about marriage thus determined and set forth lead naturally to the recognition of the importance of the marital contract and the bond it creates. This, in turn, underlines the necessity of proper preparation for so essential an element in human living. Part Two takes up these aspects of marriage—not in any exhaustive way, of



course, but rather by pointing out what is absolutely necessary by way of remote and proximate preparation from various points of view, and by suggesting considerations to be developed further through various means.

In this way we come progressively to a more profound realization of the significance of Christian marriage. It is the purpose of the final part of this book to point out specifically and in detail the implications which marriage should possess in the lives of those called by God to be saints—that is to say, in the lives of all those Christians who will embrace this way of life, as well as in the appreciation of all those Christians called to the religious life or to the priesthood.

Such a fuller understanding of matrimony involves two elements. On the one hand, since Christian marriage is fundamentally a contract, and a permanent society founded by and on the contract, the rights and duties arising from this contractual union of two human beings demand clear understanding and, so far as possible, concrete particularization. For it is in their relationship with one another, with their children, with the state and Church, and with God that the married couple will realize their destiny, will work out their eternal salvation. And it is in terms of human conduct, of human behavior, of the *actions* of man and wife that these relationships will be carried out. Hence a careful study of the guiding rules of Christian morality with respect to marriage and its relationships is essential to any true grasp of this way of life.

But Christian marriage is more, much more, than a question of human relationships, however noble, howsoever complex. Christian marriage is a sacrament of Jesus Christ, and the moment of contractual consent extends not only to the lifetime of man and wife but into eternity. The deep and far reaching implications of the fact that this human relationship has thereby become a divinized, sacramentalized way of life must obviously be explored if a truly Christian view of matrimony is to be obtained.

And so in this third part of our study of marriage our concern will be to develop, within the limits of such a work, these two further and completing aspects of Christian matrimony:



1) The morality of Christian marriage (Chapter Ten: The Obligations of Married People).

2) The sacramentality of Christian marriage (Chapter Eleven: The Significance of Christian Marriage).

The study of these two vitally important subjects will bring to a fitting close our investigation of this phenomenon of the life of mankind. It is to be hoped that this study will so culminate and perfect our previous considerations as to lead to the conclusion that Christian marriage is, in very truth, marriage in Christ.



## CHAPTER TEN

# The Obligations of Married People

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As is clear from the marriage contract itself, the state of matrimony establishes certain rights which in the divine plan only the partakers of this special state may enjoy. Rights, however, naturally imply obligations and duties corresponding to them and making them realizable. Matrimonial rights involve the spouses and their children, the natural fruit of this sacred union of two in one flesh. The obligations of matrimony will similarly concern the husband and wife, both as partners and as parents. Thus there are two major areas which we must investigate theologically:

- 1) The duties of the spouses to each other.
- 2) The duties of the spouses as parents to their children.

### 2. THE DUTIES OF THE SPOUSES TO EACH OTHER

#### A. The Conjugal Debt

“Let the husband render to the wife her due, and likewise the wife to the husband. The wife has not authority over her body, but the



husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife. Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by consent, for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and return together again lest Satan tempt you because you lack self control" (I Cor. 7:3-5).

Of its nature matrimony was designed by God to enable man to co-operate with him in the perpetuation of the human race, not merely here on earth, but "to procreate fellow citizens of the saints and members of God's household, so that the number of worshipers of God and of our Savior may be constantly increased."<sup>1</sup> The marriage act is the means by which man begins to realize these lofty divine purposes. Through this physical, sexual union are also realized (at least in part) the secondary but intrinsic and essential ends of matrimony: the mutual help and comfort of the spouses, and the legitimate enjoyment of pleasure and quieting of sexual concupiscence.

The notion that sexuality in itself is something low, degrading and shameful can be a tremendous obstacle to happiness in marriage. This idea is radically opposed to the Christian view of life. Yet it does, consciously or unconsciously, seep into the thinking of many Catholics, where it well may be the source of considerable unhappiness for the married couple and the whole family.

It is imperative that Catholics share in the true Christian view of the wholesomeness, goodness and nobility of sexual love in marriage.

The Christian's body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 6:14), and he is obliged to "glorify God" in his body. No exceptions are made to this rule: "Whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do all for the glory of God" (*ibid.*, 11:31). For the married, the very intimacies of marriage must be part of their offering of self to God. Indeed, the married are the only creatures, the only human beings, the only Christians who, by virtue of their state in life, are divinely commissioned to offer the divinely established goods of sex in keeping with the obligation ". . . to re-establish all things in Christ, both those in heaven and those on the earth" (Eph. 1:10). Clearly, then, marital relations are not something defiled or something unworthy of the Christian.

<sup>1</sup>Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*; Denz. 2229.



The truly Christian outlook is admirably expressed by St. Thomas: "The Holy Spirit dwells chiefly in man's heart, into which he pours the love of God; but next also in all the members of the body, inasmuch as they perform acts of charity."<sup>2</sup>

It must not be overlooked that the life established by Christ for his followers cannot be led by angels. The Christian life demands the body, and all its members, and all its functions. The Gospel simply does not apply to disembodied spirits. It is in the body and through the body that God shares the precious gift of parenthood which is a participation in his creative power. The Christian can use this gift out of divine love so as to merit his eternal salvation through the grace of Christ. Such a blessing and such an ennobling responsibility should be greeted by reverence and honor, not by revulsion and suspicion.

The proper use of the conjugal act is, therefore, the prime matrimonial obligation. In virtue of their voluntary and free exchange of consent, the partners, indissolubly established in the married state by the bond they have created, are bound *in strict commutative justice* in this matter. In particular, the obligations so arising may be summed up in the following conclusions:

1. The obligation of rendering the debt. From the very beginning each spouse has an equal right—and corresponding duty—with respect to the acts proper to married life. When the debt is justly requested (seriously, reasonably and legitimately), whether implicitly or explicitly, to render it is of grave obligation. An occasional refusal (especially if the debt is frequently or remissly requested) would not seem to constitute serious injustice, unless there is danger of incontinence or other serious evil. To make coition too difficult, or unpleasant, or grudging, or rare is an implicit denial of the request. To cause oneself to become sterile is clearly an unjust usurpation of the rights of one's spouse.<sup>3</sup>

2. Limitations on the right and duty. The right to the marital debt is not absolute. The physical, moral and psychological conditions

<sup>2</sup>Commentary on I Cor., VI, lect. 3, n. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Augustine Rock, O.P., "Conjugal Rights" in *Marriage*, XLIV (1962), 51-55.



of the individuals concerned may be such as to make absolute denial of a partner's request, or at least a postponement or restriction of it, entirely legitimate. An immoderate request; the use of immoral means; anything which would be a legitimate cause for separation; great danger to either party or their children—any of these may constitute sufficient reason for refusal. The situation, however, must be considered in the concrete and all factors weighed in accord with moral principles; an *a priori* judgment in so delicate and complex a matter cannot be given, since circumstances may alter the situation or radically change it.

3. The virtuousness of the marriage act. If the relations of married people are carried out for a good end and in due circumstances, the act is a virtuous one, an act of the virtue of marital chastity. For those in the state of grace it is a meritorious act, a step forward in their mutual advance on the road to heaven. That the conjugal act be virtuous the following conditions must be fulfilled:

- 1) *On the part of the act*: the act must be of its nature apt for generation; this requires penetration of the vagina, depositing of true seed within the vagina, and retention of the seed by the woman. Knowingly and willingly to prevent or endanger any of these three elements of true copulation would be seriously sinful.
- 2) *On the part of the end*: to exclude the primary end of marriage intentionally and to take means to impede it is a grave sin, whatever means are used. To abstract from this primary end and explicitly intend only the secondary end is not sinful, since the latter implicitly includes the former. So long as no unlawful means are used and the act is apt for generation, an *inefficacious* desire for a good reason (e.g., infirmity, poverty) that no children be conceived would not be sinful.
- 3) *On the part of the circumstances*: lest scandal be given (and parents should be especially careful in this regard, no matter what the age of their children), the act should be performed secretly. The moral circumstance of time enters the picture only in case there is danger of serious harm. The act itself,



saving an excusing cause, should always be performed in the natural and normal manner.

- 4) *On the part of the accessory acts*: acts more or less connected with the marriage act—looks, embraces, touches, kisses, etc.—since they are ordered to intercourse, of their nature, are gravely sinful for the unmarried; but for the very same reason they are lawful for the spouses, although they may be venially sinful when performed only for the venereal pleasure attached to them. Anything, obviously, which is opposed to the generation of offspring—satisfaction outside of the conjugal act, for example, or whatever might lead to the proximate danger of such satisfaction—is of its nature a grave sin. It is a sin not only against charity but has the added malice of a sin against one's partner's right, against commutative justice.

### B. Marital Chastity

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church. . . .” St. Paul's injunction (equally applicable, of course, to the wife) recalls the sublimity, the splendor, the magnificence of Christian marriage. Christ died for the Church, that he might sanctify her, that his spouse might be glorious and holy and without blemish (cf. Eph. 5:25 ff.). And as the sacrament of marriage is a symbol of this union, so ought the very state of matrimony to be its imitation, and the acts proper to the state to lead to an ever more perfect imaging of the spiritual marriage between God and man which is the Incarnation.

#### (1) *The Ideal*

Because of the vehemence of the passions aroused, and considering the fallen state of mankind, the preservation of perfect chastity at all times in the uses of marriage is no doubt very difficult; the circumstances of modern living do not lessen the temptations. But God is with, and in, and for the married faithful, and of the copious streams of Christ's grace they have a special right to drink—particularly of the sacramental grace of matrimony especially adapted by



God to meet the particular needs of married couples. Respect for divinely given life which it is theirs to propagate; a mutual love which is at once pure and unselfish in the generous giving of oneself; a deep realization of the sanctity which marriage possesses as a divinely ordained means for their eternal happiness and that of their children—these considerations will preserve the spouses God has joined together. If they co-operate with his grace, they will be preserved not only from serious sin, but even from the slight disorders which vitiate the moral beauty and perfection of these acts. Then truly the physical union complements and perfects the union of mind and heart. Christian marriage mirrors the divine.

### (2) *The Failures*

Unfortunately a secularist and materialistic world little appreciates these sublime facts. Even Catholics are affected by the growing malaise of the times, increasingly self-centered, increasingly oblivious of God and of God's laws, natural and positive, which are the only true guide to human happiness. To such as these, chastity is a dirty word, and marital chastity a puritanical joke. This attitude is reflected all too often in actions which are contrary to—or tend to become contrary to—the sanctity of marriage and the benefits it brings to men:

1. Sins with a third party in fact or in desire—sins of injustice as well as unchastity.
2. Sins of incontinence with oneself. These too usurp the rights of one's spouse in addition to violating the virtue of chastity.
3. Sins with one's partner by actions which destroy the natural order of these acts to generation. 'Birth control' is the euphemistic term the world would have us use. Actually this is *birth prevention*, directly opposed to the primary end of marriage and to the *bonum proles*. Such a practice not only produces grave spiritual and moral damage; it may lead to serious physical and psychological consequences, injurious as it is to the parties themselves, to their children, to family life, to the state and to the Church. At the very least it deliberately deprives the spouses of God's assistance, so necessary for the preservation of their marriage, for the proper fulfillment of their



duties to one another, and for the proper fulfillment of their duties to their children. (Is it not possible that we have here an explanation for parental contribution to juvenile delinquency?)

The proper name for this sin is as ugly as the sin itself: conjugal onanism (cf. Gen. 38:9). Whether artificial means are used or not, such an action is intrinsically against nature, essentially and gravely evil. Artificial preventatives vitiate the act from the beginning; there is no moral possibility of this action being other than evil and directly contrary to the very nature of marriage. Hence co-operation is not permitted with a partner who uses such measures. Faced with a problem of this sort, the innocent partner should consult the confessor.

Since 1952 great progress has been made in the development of anovulant drugs. These drugs, taken orally in the form of pills, have now reached a high degree of perfection. Dr. John Rock, a highly regarded medical research scholar who publicly proclaims himself to be a Catholic, has published articles in popular magazines and in scientific journals in which he defends the use of these pills to prevent conception as morally justified. But moralists unanimously declare their use for purposes of contraception as seriously sinful. If they are used, however, to cure or control serious organic disorders, even though temporary sterility results, such use would be licit. These points are confirmed by Pope Pius XII in an address of Sept. 12, 1958.<sup>4</sup>

"Every attempt on the part of the married couple during the conjugal act or during the development of its natural consequences, to deprive it of its inherent power and to hinder the procreation of a new life is immoral. No 'indication' or need can change an action that is intrinsically immoral into an action that is moral and lawful."<sup>5</sup>

This prescription holds good today just as much as it did yesterday. The use of artificial means to achieve contraception is immoral, not because the Church has so legislated, but because it is a direct frustration of nature itself. The generative faculties are given to human beings by their Creator in trust, to be used for the welfare of the human

<sup>4</sup>A good summary of the most up to date moral thinking on this question is to be found in *Theological Studies*, XXIII (1962), 239-247, by John J. Lynch, S.J.

<sup>5</sup>Pope Pius XI, *op. cit.*; Denz. 2239.



race. The responsible use of these powers immediately brings pleasure and mutual comfort and peace, and in the long run it ennobles those who thus faithfully fulfill the trust placed in them. To use them for pleasure alone, deliberately frustrating their purpose, is to cheapen and distort nature itself. If there were no Catholic Church birth control would still be evil. The Church can never change that fact.

### (3) *Periodic Continence*

Periodic continence or rhythm is the practice of restricting marital relations to the wife's periods of low fertility. We have seen in Chapter Eight that this practice gives rise to many formidable moral problems. These may best be understood and judged in terms of pertinent teachings of Pope Pius XII.<sup>6</sup>

First: it must be noted that it is possible to invalidate a marriage by a certain kind of agreement to practice periodic continence. "If at the time of marriage at least one of the couple intended to restrict the marriage *right*, not merely its *use*, to the sterile periods, in such a way that at other times the second party would not even have the right to request intercourse, this would imply an essential defect in the consent to marriage which would carry with it invalidity of the marriage itself, because the right deriving from the contract of marriage is a permanent and uninterrupted right belonging to each party in respect to the other."

Secondly: the mere fact that an agreement to practice rhythm does not impair marital rights is not alone sufficient to justify this practice. "The moral licitness of such conduct on the part of the couple would have to be approved or denied according as to whether or not the intention of observing those periods constantly was based on sufficient and secure moral grounds. The mere fact that the couple do not offend against the nature of the act and are prepared to accept and bring up the child which, in spite of their precautions, came into the world, would not be sufficient in itself to guarantee

<sup>6</sup>*Allocution to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives*, Oct. 29, 1951; cf. *Moral Questions Affecting Married Life* (National Catholic Welfare Conference, Washington, D. C.), 3-23. See also the excellent article of P. M. Quay, S.J., "Contraception and Conjugal Love," *Theological Studies*, XXI (1961), 18-40.



the rectitude of intention and the unobjectionable morality of the motives themselves.”

Thirdly: the married state by its very nature imposes upon those who embrace it the fulfillment of a positive work in providing for the conservation of the human race, and a serious reason is necessary to justify an intention not to fulfill this obligation. “To embrace the married state, continuously to make use of the faculty proper to it and lawful in it alone, and, on the other hand, *to withdraw always and deliberately with no serious reason from its primary obligation*, would be a sin against the very meaning of conjugal life.”

Fourthly: “from the obligation of making this positive contribution it is possible to be exempt for a long time and even for the whole duration of married life, *if there are serious reasons*, such as those often provided in the so-called indications of the medical, eugenic, economic and social order. It therefore follows that the observance of the infertile periods may be licit from the moral point of view; and under the conditions mentioned, it is so in fact.”

To these teachings of the Holy Father, we must now add three conditions flowing from the principles of justice and charity which are commonly proposed by moralists as being necessary for the licit practice of rhythm:

- 1) The agreement to practice periodic continence must be truly mutual and freely accepted by both spouses; although the agreement can be made only by both husband and wife together, it can be terminated by either alone.
- 2) There must be prudent assurance that the practice will not lead the spouses to sin.
- 3) The dangers to the secondary ends of marriage must be made as remote as possible. The more proximate these dangers are the more serious must be the reason for practicing rhythm. If, as sometimes happens, loss of affection and harmony becomes so great as a result of the strains of periodic continence that the stability of the family is jeopardized, obviously the practice must be discontinued.



Clearly, the practice of periodic continence is not a panacea for many of the most pressing problems of the married. In certain cases, undertaken for good motives based on serious reasons, rhythm can offer a legitimate solution to some problems. But it should be approached with caution. Under the best circumstances rhythm always involves deprivations; quite generally it presents temptations and gives rise to dangers to peace, understanding and harmony.

Surely the problems arising from rhythm are not to be compared with the evils of contraception. But it must not be forgotten that rhythm can lead to serious sin and to the destruction of marriage. There are circumstances in which prudence, charity and equity indicate the practice of rhythm, and there are circumstances in which these same virtues would forbid it. The problem of whether or not a given couple is willing, able and justified in practicing rhythm is a difficult matter in the order of prudence. Wise couples will not rely too much on their own unaided judgment, but will consult a priest for assistance in deciding whether or not periodic continence is really their personal answer to the problems they face.

#### *(4) Reasons Justifying Periodic Continence*

Pope Pius XII in the Allocution cited in note 3 refers to medical, eugenic, economic and social reasons for the practice of rhythm. There is no need to detail instances of such reasons. But the last type of reason includes a problem which must be faced, the problem of what has come to be called the "population explosion." Is the danger of overpopulating the world a sufficient reason for a Catholic man and wife to limit the number of their children by the use of rhythm?

An author recently stated: "The Catholic Church is the one so far insuperable obstacle to the solution of the world's population problems. On a reversal of its attitude may hang the survival of our own society."<sup>7</sup> This is no place for an amateur demographer to analyze the problem of overpopulation. The Church does not teach that everyone must have as many children as is physically possible.

<sup>7</sup>A. W. Sulloway, *Birth Control and Catholic Doctrine*, (Boston: 1959).



The high honor always paid to consecrated celibacy in the Church is evidence of that. Even in the case of married people, in an Address to the Seventh International Hematological Congress (Sept. 12, 1958) Pope Pius XII said, "When this method [rhythm] is used for proportionately serious motives (and the indications of eugenics can have a serious character) it is morally justified. . . . The Creator wished human beings to propagate themselves by the natural exercise of the sexual function. But to this positive law We applied the principle which holds for all positive laws: that they are not obligatory to the extent that their fulfillment involves great disadvantages which are neither inseparable from the law itself nor inherent in its accomplishment, but which come from another source and which the lawmaker did not intend to impose on men when he promulgated the law." In the same address the Pope commends married people with a genetic problem who take professional consultation as to the probability of bearing defective children for having "a high conception of their duty as parents."

In an Address to the Second World Congress on Fertility and Sterility (May 19, 1956) Pius XII, after recalling that "the individual aims of the married couple, their life in common, and their personal perfection can be considered only as subordinated to the goal which surpasses them, that is, paternity and maternity," makes clear that "the task of education surpasses, by its significance and its consequences, that of generation." Pope John XXIII makes the same point in an Address to the Sacred Roman Rota (Oct. 25, 1960). The task of education does not mean the most expensive prep schools and colleges, but it certainly indicates that a proportionate reason for limiting the number of children could be found in the problem of education.

The population problem is not taken so seriously by the Vicar of Christ, Pope John XXIII, as to restrain him from holding up large families as an example of reliance on divine providence (Radio Message of Jan. 7, 1962). The ease and rapidity with which many secular thinkers have become panic-stricken by what they see as the threat that the world is heading toward a population greater than it can provide for is in marked contrast to the calm appraisal



of the problem by the Holy See. Pius XII recognized many times the problem of overpopulation of certain areas of the earth, a problem not of the vague future but of today. In his Christmas Message of 1958 he noted that “. . . undoubtedly the rise of this problem and the continued failure to arrive at a solution of it is not due to some mixup or inertia on the part of divine providence, but rather to disorder on man's part—especially his selfishness and avarice. . . .”

Should such a problem on a world scale ever be shown to really exist (some of the best demographers deny that it does, e.g., Colin Clark), it is certain that artificial methods of birth prevention would be no more acceptable a solution than mass murder. On the other hand, it would seem that couples genuinely troubled by this problem (even if it now exists in their own country) would be able in good conscience to take it as sufficient reason to limit the size of their families by using rhythm. However, the public authority would never be able to legitimately penalize the conception of children by validly married people.

#### (5) *Absolute Continence*

The mutual determination not to use the sexual functions of marriage may be formed for reasons of self-sacrificing dedication to higher purposes, as in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Normally, however, when such a decision is made, it is the outcome of necessity. In some cases periodic continence may be quite impossible by reason of complete irregularity in the menstrual cycle. In other cases the danger in pregnancy may be so great that even a remote chance cannot be reasonably taken. Sometimes a couple will find that absolute continence is less of a burden than rhythm. In cases in which such a decision is more or less forced upon a married couple, they can certainly count on divine grace to assist them in doing what is necessary.

The first good of marriage is more effectively eliminated by absolute than by periodic continence. An evil is the absence of a due perfection. In this sense the absence of children is an evil since they pertain to



the perfection of the family. The existence of the marriage itself is the remote cause of offspring. The *remote* cause has been placed in the case of a couple practicing complete continence. The greater the good which has induced the practice of complete continence, the more acceptable is the lack of the perfection of offspring in the family.

The lack of offspring which results from the practice of periodic continence is, of course, the same absence of a perfection in the family as results from complete continence. Yet, since the *proximate* cause of offspring is placed by those who practice periodic continence, the extent to which the perfection of offspring is "due" is greater. Thus a greater evil in the sense of absence of a due perfection is here and requires a greater good to make it acceptable.

Since only the remote cause of offspring is placed by those who practice complete continence, this deliberate restriction upon the use of marriage, if undertaken for commendable reasons (as is plain from the example of the Holy Family), is praiseworthy and meritorious to the extent that it is motivated by charity and is thus heroic and sacrificial.

As Pope Pius XII points out:

It is wronging men and women of our times to deem them incapable of continuous heroism. Today, for many reasons—perhaps with the goad of hard necessity or even sometimes in the service of injustice—heroism is exercised to a degree and to an extent which would have been thought impossible in days gone by. Why, then, should this heroism, if the circumstances really demand it, stop at the borders established by the passions and inclinations of nature? The answer is clear. The man who does not want to master himself is incapable of so doing. He who believes he can do so, counting merely on his own strength without seeking help sincerely and perseveringly from God, will remain miserably disillusioned.<sup>8</sup>

Centuries ago St. Augustine enunciated a fundamental principle of the divine plan for mankind which is immediately applicable here: "God does not command impossible things, but when he commands he warns you to do what can be done, and also to pray for what you cannot do." And the Council of Trent completes this observation by adding, "and he helps you, so that you can do it" (Denz. 804).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Moral Questions Affecting Married Life*, 16.



## C. Other Duties of the Spouses to Each Other

*(1) Mutual Duties*

The married couple should live together, for domestic life is of the very nature of marriage, recommended as such by Christ (Matt. 19:5) and ecclesiastical law (Can. 1128). Wherever the husband fixes his home, there the wife should follow him, unless there is danger to life or salvation.

Their life together should be one of mutual love and assistance (cf. Eph. 5:25 ff.), a mutual giving of self, a mutual sharing of duties and burdens, of problems and responsibilities.

*(2) The Husband*

By nature and by divine law, the husband is head of the woman (I Cor. 11:3). His is the special duty to care for the body, soul and goods of the companion God has given him as a helpmate (Gen. 2:18)—his complement, so to say, his other self. He should remember, then, St. John Chrysostom's comment that the wife is "a ruler of second rank":<sup>9</sup> the same saint recommends that the husband should say to his young wife: "You share in the government of my home." He should heed his wife's rightful wishes and seriously consider her advice, while himself directing her and the family that is theirs by counsels, friendly persuasion, good example, and not by 'bossing.' Provision of the necessaries of life and such other goods as are fitting for their social status is his responsibility, and a primary one.

*(3) The Wife*

Wives should never forget that under God they are to love their husbands above all others, to esteem them, to yield to them a willing and ready obedience in all things not inconsistent with Christian piety (cf. Col. 3:18). The care of the household is the wife's, and the training of the children in virtue particularly devolves upon her. To desert these duties for unnecessary outside work (however remunerative it might be) or social activities (however much fun 'the

<sup>9</sup>*Commentary on Ephesians, 5.*



girls' are) is a serious matter, manifesting a selfishness and childishness incompatible with the nobility, dignity and companionship of Christian marriage. In these days, however, as the popes have repeatedly said, the modern educated woman should take as much of a role in civic affairs as is compatible with her primary duty to her family.

### 3. THE DUTIES OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN

As authors of the life of their offspring, the parents acquire authority over them. The honor, obedience and reverence children thereby owe to their parents imply, on the other hand, reciprocal duties which the parents owe their children—until such time as the latter can conveniently provide for themselves, or may reasonably be supposed capable of doing so. Since the natural law which confers these rights and duties is undetermined in particular, the civil power may, with respect to the public effects of parental authority, further detail its extent. The state obviously cannot supply for, or supplant, the rights of the parents with regard to the physical and spiritual upbringing of their offspring; but it must provide public aid to assist parents in fulfilling their duties and also safeguard needy children from parental neglect.

#### A. The Extent of Parental Duties

1. Nature itself as well as positive law obliges the parents to care for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of their children. The dependence of the child on his father and mother for his very life and for the attainment of maturity is at the root of the grave obligation which binds the parents to provide for his temporal welfare and to secure, by all the means in their power, his religious, civil and physical education (cf. Can. 1113).

2. According to their means, capabilities and social status, the spouses must provide the proper nourishment, clothing, housing,



medical care, etc., which will obtain the physical life and development of the children according to the standards of decent existence. During pregnancy, for example, the mother must avoid all things that will adversely affect the foetus. Paternal duties in this respect are obvious.

3. To care for the soul or spiritual welfare of the child is an obligation proportionately graver as the soul is of greater importance than the body. Hence:

- 1) The child should be baptized as soon as possible.
- 2) From the earliest age he should be taught his prayers and the fundamental tenets and practices of religion and morality.
- 3) Provision must be made for his necessary intellectual education according to the standards of the society in which he will live—as a Catholic. This means that parents are bound, by natural law, to send their children to Catholic schools, unless the Ordinary, for serious reasons and due precautions being taken, permits otherwise (Can. 1374). This obligation of natural law extends even (or perhaps especially) to colleges and universities; it includes even so-called 'neutral' schools, the tax-supported schools of the United States. These civil schools in prescindendo from religion create a materialistic and secular atmosphere and environment inimical to religious belief and practice and even to natural morality.
- 4) The effect of home environment upon children, especially the impressionable young, cannot be overestimated. Parents must provide a truly Catholic atmosphere for the proper rearing of their offspring. They must themselves furnish an example of virtue—particularly of the virtues of justice, chastity, modesty and religion—so that their children may guide themselves by their conduct. Above all, the charity of Christ should urge them to realize that 'charity begins at home.'

4. Parents are so to provide for the future of the child that he has a reasonable opportunity to live decently. To waste their goods, material or spiritual, in such a way as to make it impossible to provide adequately for their children's future would be gravely sinful. They should realize, however, that they cannot dictate to their chil-



dren the choice of a state of life. Counsel and advise them they must, according to their capacity and experience; but the child has a right to the free and independent choice of the state which will be his for life.

### B. The Carrying Out of Parental Duties

The Catechism of the Council of Trent, treating of the fourth commandment, points out three things parents should avoid in fulfilling their duties to their children:

**Too much indulgence.** To make an idol of the child, to fail to reprove or chastise him when a fault is committed, is as detrimental to the child as it is unwise and selfish of the parent. Excessive mildness is an open abdication of responsibility. In the Old Testament, the high priest, Heli, was visited with the heaviest chastisements by God for his over-indulgence to his sons (cf. I Kings 4:18 ff.).

**Too great harshness.** This extreme is also to be avoided, for the tender and delicate spirit of the child may be broken by such treatment, and he may become abject, fearful of everything, even coming to hate his parents. Over-severity, whether the parents wish or foresee the result or not, may easily lead to a complete loss of influence over the children. Correction when necessary, of course; but too much harshness may look like—may even be—unholy revenge upon the child. “Fathers,” admonishes St. Paul, “provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col. 3:21).

**Unworthy ambitions for their children.** “There are many whose sole concern is to leave their children wealth, riches and an ample and splendid fortune; who encourage them, not to piety and religion, nor to honorable employment, but to avarice and an increase of wealth; and who, provided their children are rich and wealthy, are oblivious of their good name and of their eternal salvation. Can anything more shameful be thought or expressed? It is true to say of such parents that, instead of bequeathing wealth to their children, they leave them rather their own wickedness and crimes for an inheritance. Instead



of conducting them to heaven, they lead them to the eternal torments of hell."<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Taken singly or fulfilled only for a limited time, the obligations of the married state could be discharged by a person of good will and strong character. Doing good is not specially difficult; but doing good well, i.e., regularly, under the impulse of supernatural charity, somewhat instinctively, and finding one's joy therein, presents a formidable challenge. This is not simply a pattern of behavior but a way of life. It involves what one is more than just what one *does*; it bespeaks a real change, a total dedication without reserve.

To attain such self-surrender is not easy for humans. It requires a persistent resistance to the instincts of selfishness. It requires the ability to be good *for* others and not merely *to* them. It demands an honest recognition of personal deficiencies, a willingness to strengthen others against shortcomings and to be strengthened by them in turn.

All of this, and more, is required for successful Christian marriage. Yet such attainment is clearly beyond the powers of unaided nature. Several courses of action can be adopted in the face of these responsibilities. Following a period of effort there can be an abdication terminating in a publicly proclaimed failure in the divorce courts. Or following the initial period of effort, there can be a relapse into a state of spiritual inertia called sloth which amounts to a kind of "spiritual divorce" in which only empty externals are preserved. Or, happily, there can be a mutual reliance upon the sacramental grace of marriage which, while never eliminating the difficulties completely, tends to lessen them greatly by making them endurable for the love of God which extends throughout the entire family. This grace enhances the joys of marriage and makes possible the acquisition of a divine reward for efforts which are seemingly only human.

<sup>10</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Bk. III, Chap. 4.



A strong and lively faith not only in God but also in one's partner is required in marriage. Happiness and success in marriage can never be found among the wedding gifts, they are not carried ready-to-wear. Rather they are to be sought and striven for over a lifetime. They can be had only at the cost of sacrifice, and of sacrifice it is said: "Only love can make it easy, and perfect love can make it a joy."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>From the *Instruction before Marriage* in the Appendix to the Roman Ritual.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# The Christian Meaning of Marriage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The long preceding study of the canonical and moral aspects of marriage, necessary as it has been, should not obscure some more essential features of this divine institution. Christ, we maintain, has elevated the natural marital contract and the resulting permanent bond to the dignity of a sacrament; in the Christian dispensation matrimony becomes holy and sacred; the union of two in one flesh is a consecrated and sanctified union for the faithful.

These are all fine-sounding phrases, they are all true, they all underline the special place which God has awarded to this state of life. But what do they mean in the concrete? How does sacramental marriage differ from the natural union of husband and wife? And what are the practical consequences of those differences in the lives of the faithful?

Let us try to answer these important questions. We shall proceed by examining, even more thoroughly than in Part One of this book, the nature of this great sacrament.



## 2. THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Like all the sacraments of the New Law, matrimony is a sacred sign which physically and instrumentally produces grace in the souls of properly disposed recipients. The external exchange of consent—an expression of interior intention—is not only a contract, then, it also symbolizes something other than itself, of a higher, supernatural order: Christ, and his grace, and our future eternal glory. Moreover, the sacraments effect what they signify: matrimony unites the couple not only to one another but to Christ; it produces not only an earthly conjunction but, through grace, a union with God, a participation of God's own life; it leads not to this world's pleasures only but to paradise.

Expressed in these general terms, the vast difference between natural and supernatural marriage is easy to see. But how, in particular, in concrete fact, does matrimony carry out these effects? What precisely does it do for the spouses' daily life that no other sacrament or source of grace can? In what practical way are the sacramentally united husband and wife so much better off—*precisely as husband and wife*—for here and hereafter, than the good married pagan?

A distinction taken from sacramental theology will help us to find precise and meaningful answers to these and other questions. As in all of the sacred signs which are sacraments, so in matrimony theologians distinguish three things:

- 1) the religious ceremony (*sacramentum tantum*)—the external rite with its special signification;
- 2) the symbolizing effect (*res et sacramentum*)—a reality caused by the sacrament and itself significative of a further effect;
- 3) the final effect (*res tantum*)—the ultimate reality signified and produced by the *sacramentum tantum*; signified, and on occasion caused, by the *res et sacramentum*.

A full consideration of these three in the sacrament of matrimony will carry us far toward the solutions we seek.



## A. The 'sacramentum tantum' of Matrimony

The expressed consent of man and woman to mutual rights over one another's body for the purpose of generation is a contract of nature, old as Adam and Eve, as necessary for the race as food and drink for the individual. It creates a permanent bond between two human beings and establishes a state of life which assures the perpetuation of mankind and the stability of human society. This is the unique natural institution which Christ elevated to sacramental dignity. Potentially and remotely this natural exchange of consent is a sign of Christ's giving himself to the Church and the Church's gift of herself to Christ—just as washing with water is, even naturally, a potential and remote sign of the spiritual cleansing effected by Christ's grace. But that it be a true sign, an actual and proximate sign, requires divine institution: nothing natural can of itself signify the world of the supernatural, for the supernatural is the world proper to God. A meaning, a *formal signification*, must be given these natural things, and God alone can impose this formal element.

*(1) An Essential Difference*

Thus the religious ceremony is the first essential difference—the fundamental difference on which all the others are based—between marriage as a natural contract and institution, and as a sacrament. The latter perfectly symbolizes, at the moment Christ so determines it, the mystical union between Christ and his Church, the redemptive Incarnation; the former does not.

We can scarcely overestimate the intrinsic importance of this fact, apart even from the tremendous effects it implies and causes. The free, deliberate acts of two human beings become an image of two things:

1) Of that moment before time was when God chose to give himself to mankind to redeem his fallen creature by his saving death: "Sacrifices and oblations and sin-offerings thou wouldst not, neither hast thou any pleasure in them. . . . Behold, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:8-9).



2) Of that complementary moment in the fulness of time when man accepts God's gift and gives himself in exchange: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:28).<sup>1</sup>

The baptized man and woman, in effect, celebrate the nuptials of God and man, express in their mutual acts of love the immortal love of Christ toward his Bride.

### (2) *Effects of This Difference*

What is the consequence of this difference? The very ceremony of Christian marriage is itself holy, sacred, consecrated, sanctified. It is not just any kind of sign, it is a *religious* sign, a sign proper to the virtue of religion; not just any kind of human action, but *liturgical* action, true and supernatural worship of God by the spouses and by the Church. Reduce the Christian marriage ceremony to its bare essential, the exchange of consent; strip it of setting, of the accidental trappings of music, procession, flowers and the like—the radical difference between the sacrament and the natural contract remains. The sublimity and dignity of this Christian action as compared with an exchange of consent by the unbaptized is recognized immediately by all who have the eyes of faith. Is it any wonder that the Church is so insistent on the observance of the proper juridical and liturgical form of matrimony?

But this figure, sublimely significative of the union between God and man, is not only itself holy, it is effective of holiness. For the sacraments are God's instruments as well as God's signs, and through them he showers upon man the copious blessings of the life and death and resurrection of the God-man.

### B. The 'res et sacramentum' of Matrimony

The non-sacramental exchange of consent produces a bond between the parties which permanently unites them to each other. In this

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Summa*, III, q. 30, a. 1.



conjunction or inseparable union of souls, by which husband and wife are pledged by a bond of mutual affection that cannot be sundered, the essence of the state of matrimony is found. This is what gives marriage its primary and specific perfection.<sup>2</sup> It is a great good prepared by God for his children, primarily for the offspring of this union, but also essentially capable of perfecting the spouses themselves. Hence matrimony—the bond of husband and wife—is primarily a social or common good rather than a matter of private advantage.

### (1) *The Supernatural Bond*

God does not make less provision for the higher order of grace than he does for the order of nature; and the more noble the cause the more noble the effect. Thus sound theology leads us reasonably to conclude that the first reality created by the consent of sacramental matrimony (the first *res* or effect) is a *bond* between man and wife of a higher order than the natural joining, a bond *intrinsically* superior because supernatural. For, as St. Cyril of Alexandria points out, “he who was bringing the nature of man under a new head, and refashioning the whole of it for the better, should dispense his blessing not only to those already called into existence, but also make grace ready for those to be born, and make holy their way into existence.”<sup>3</sup> By carnal generation the parents cannot transmit grace to their children—on the contrary, original sin is passed on in this way—but they can guarantee their birth and education in a holy and supernatural society, the Christian family, established by the sacramental bond of their sacramental marriage.

### (2) *The Perfection of the Bond*

This bond is both *res et sacramentum*—a *reality* and simultaneously a *symbol*—and on both scores it will be intrinsically more perfect than

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Summa*, III, q. 20, a. 2; *Supplement*, q. 44, a. 1; Leo XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, Denz. 1854: “Marriage is a sacrament, moreover, because it is a holy sign which gives grace, showing forth an image of the mystical nuptials of Christ and the Church. But the form and image of these nuptials is indicated precisely by the very bond of the most intimate union in which man and woman are bound together—a bond which is nothing else but the marriage itself.”

<sup>3</sup>*Commentary on John*, Book II, Chap. 1.



the natural bond. As a 'res,' a thing, the Christian bond acquires "a special firmness by reason of its sacramental character" (Can. 1013): unity of minds, hearts, bodies (permanent even in natural marriage) becomes indivisibility and inseparability. "Insofar as marriage is a sacrament," declares St. Thomas, "it possesses a further good, and this is signified by the very name given it, *sacramentum*."<sup>4</sup> For the indissolubility which is consequent on sacred symbolism ('sacramentum' in this sense means one of the goods of marriage) is, in its full perfection, found only in the sacramental union, whereas the blessings of children (*proles*) and mutual fidelity (*fides*) belong even to non-sacramental marriage. Intrinsically, then, the bond is immeasurably strengthened by the sacrament of matrimony. This new excellence will affect to a considerable degree the shared life of the partners, the life of the family, and ultimately the state and the Church.

The greater perfection of the Christian bond—this closer unity and firmer stability—may be seen from another aspect. We should recall that the marriage contract is caused, not by blind instinct or fleeting emotion, but by a deliberate and firm choice of the wills of the contracting parties: it is the mind judging and the will approving that makes love truly human, not superficial feeling or sensual attraction; it is this *human* love of the spouses for each other which leads to, and is manifested by, the permanent exchange of rights over each other's body; and this exchange, in turn, leads to the bond of matrimony.

In Christian marriage, "contracted in the faith of Christ," this human love—which is both the cause of the bond and the bond itself—will be sacramental and at least extrinsically supernatural. For this is the love of one sacramentalized person for another: both have been baptized with the baptism of Christ. It is a free deliberate choice *by* a Christian *of* a Christian as a lifelong companion. It is the mutual election of a life together which is sacramental in its cause, sacramental in its being, sacramental in its effects. The contracting parties *knowingly* (for implicit faith is a basic minimum for effecting the sacramental exchange of consent) and with *deliberation* (and this may be born of supernatural charity) unite themselves not only to each other but to Christ.

<sup>4</sup>*Supplement*, q. 49, a. 2.



They realize, implicitly if not explicitly, that a sacred and an inviolable bond arises from their wedding of souls, that their projected union is effected in Christ as well as to him and one another.

The love which urges two Christians to marry is necessarily *human* love, but radically different, radically higher love. For it must take into account the sacramentality with which marriage itself and all concerned in it have been invested by God. It is clear, on this account, that their love will effect an essentially different union (even apart from the fact that God himself acts through them as instrumental causes to create the sacramental bond)—a union more intimate, more binding, more meaningful, more all-embracing, more spiritual. The sacramental union is intrinsically more perfect because it is supernatural, both on the part of the contracting parties and on the part of its principal author, God himself.

### (3) *The Marriage Bond as Sacramental Symbol*

There is little wonder, therefore, that besides this perfecting of the natural bond an entirely new perfection, a new dignity and sanctity, is acquired by the sacramental bond: now it becomes the perduring symbol of the matrimony of God and man, of the love which indissolubly unites Christ and his Bride, the Church. The Christian bond is not only a *res*, it is a *sacramentum*—and this is a fact of vast consequence. For it is a practical sign, and together with the *sacramentum tantum* it produces the sacramental grace by which marriage daily approximates, and in increasing perfection imitates, the union it symbolizes. The matrimonial blessing which only the sacrament procures (and hence the good called the *sacramentum*) implies more than the indissolubility consequent on its sacred symbolism. It implies “all the goods which are the consequences of marriage from the fact that it is a sign,” “all the things which pertain to its signification.”<sup>5</sup>

What are these things, these goods, consequent on and defined by, the sacramentality of the bond of Christian marriage?

<sup>5</sup>*Supplement*, q. 49, a. 2, ad 4 and ad 7.



## C. The 'res tantum' of Matrimony

The grace by which man can fittingly accomplish all the works that a marriage "contracted in the faith of Christ" requires is the final effect produced by this sacrament. So St. Thomas concludes, correcting the less accurate observations of other medieval theologians.<sup>6</sup> He bases his argument on the fact that whenever God confers a special power on someone (e.g., the priestly power of holy orders), he also gives him the assistance which the proper fulfillment of the functions of that faculty demands (e.g., the grace of the sacerdotal state). By divine institution man and wife receive power over one another to secure the ends of matrimony; consequently, they receive the graces without which the fitting execution of marital functions would be impossible.

This is the special grace of the sacrament which is caused both by the exterior visible rite and by the interior, imperceptible bond as well. It is God's intention that this invisible bond should be manifested both by reference back to the expressed consent that brought it into being and by its perceptibility here and now in the lives of the married couple. This is the work of grace, the *res tantum*, which we will have to consider more thoroughly.

## 3. THE EFFECT OF MATRIMONIAL GRACE

Grace is always given, conferred *ex opere operato*, to everyone who receives the sacraments properly (Denz. 850, 851). Grace is a sanctification of the essence of the soul which makes man a partaker of the very nature of God; it is the radical principle of a human activity which now partakes of the divine activity, the action of God. And from grace flow its properties—the infused moral virtues, the theological virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit—to strengthen and

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Supplement*, q. 42, a. 3.



elevate the natural powers of the soul, to make them so divinely holy that they can serve as proximate sources of the divine-human activity characteristic of children of God and adopted brothers of Christ.

Each sacrament rightly received either begins this new life in us or intensifies it. But each sacrament also confers a grace which is special to itself alone, a grace which can be obtained in no other way than through the reception of this sacrament. All these sacramental graces are, in essence, participations of the divine nature and properties, rendering man capable of divine activity; they do not differ from each other in kind, then, as one animal differs from another (e.g., a dog from a cat). The difference rather arises from the manner in which each sacramental grace realizes in its own special way the common end of man's sanctification and his imitation of Christ.

#### A. The Grace of Matrimony

##### *(1) Sacramental Grace in General*

Sacramental grace is a modification or adaptation by God of sanctifying grace, and, consequently, of the virtues and gifts which, since they flow from grace, will be similarly modified. God adapts or modifies his gift to man for two reasons: because of the fallen condition of the creature receiving this divine life; and because of the special effects God wishes to procure in and through men in this earthly life. For special purposes demand special means to realize them.

He also gives the actual graces which will bring this work to fruition; through sacramental grace man acquires a right to these special graces (they are the natural complement, after all, of the adapted sanctifying grace) by means of which his activity is here and now directed to accomplish the ends God has in view for him.

How can we determine the particular modification of grace which is proper to each sacrament? The answer is easy, for essentially the sacraments are signs, and signs of the effects they produce. God works through these instruments he has instituted to bestow grace on man,



but he causes only insofar as they are signs, and their causality is hence defined by their signification.

*(2) The Special Grace of Sacramental Marriage*

What is matrimonial grace? We may answer this question simply by determining what is symbolized by the sacramental sign, which is nothing less than a visible manifestation of the union of Christ and his Church. The special modification in sanctifying grace wrought by the sacrament, therefore, is a grace of conjugal union, a grace that will enable the spouses to live a life together which will make visible the sacramental bond symbolic of Christ's bond with his Bride. Beyond the union of each spouse to God (a common effect of all sanctifying grace), the sacramental grace of matrimony effects the union of the spouses to one another and their union *as spouses* to God. As St. Thomas states: "Grace is conferred by this sacrament by which they belong to the union of God and the Church; this is most necessary for them, for they must so deal with carnal and worldly matters as not to destroy their union with Christ and his Church."<sup>7</sup>

Matrimonial grace, then, supernaturalizes the love of the spouses for each other; in addition, it supernaturally orders them to the practice of those particular virtues which will perfect their union, which will make of their married life a living image of Christ and his Church. This will mean, on the one hand, the overcoming by grace of the disorders inherent in man since the fall, which are obstacles to so perfect a union. On the positive side, this grace will bring a special increase of infused virtues and gifts and a right to the actual graces which divinely inspire and direct the virtuous action demanded of the sacramental union.

We will discuss each of these aspects of matrimonial grace in detail.

B. The Healing of the Wounds of Sin

St. Thomas holds that the sacraments are special remedies for the defects left by past sins, original or actual, defects which are obstacles

<sup>7</sup>*Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk. IV, Chap. 78.



to the promptings of grace and to virtuous action.<sup>8</sup> Christ's power works in the sacraments "by way of healing and expiation" to subdue the rebellion of the lower powers against reason and restore proper order among them. By the 'healing' effected by his grace, the soul of the Christian becomes susceptible of a greater increase of grace and sensitive to the impulses of the Holy Ghost.

### (1) *Grace and Concupiscence*

The special obstacle to grace which Christian marriage must face and its grace overcome is that of sexual concupiscence. Even natural marriage affords some remedy for this great human drive which is so frequently disordered: physical union, the most intense and vehement of bodily pleasures, is of its nature a morally good act in marriage, because this act and its concomitant pleasure are ordered to the goods of matrimony, goods which in God's design possess intrinsic value. Thus marriage represses concupiscence in two ways, both by providing opportunity for the legitimate use of sexual pleasure and, in so doing, by restricting sinful actions.

But great a remedy as the natural union is, it but touches the surface, so to say, of man's sexual disorder. It provides a cure for the acts of concupiscence, to be sure; but it leaves carnal concupiscence itself uncorrected. Only sacramental marriage, the Angelic Doctor points out, attacks concupiscence itself; only matrimonial grace penetrates so deeply into the soul of man as to repress this disorder in its root.<sup>9</sup>

### (2) *Grace and Nature*

In this life the grace of the sacrament of matrimony will not of itself procure the perfect submission of lower powers to higher which was integral to the state of original justice. But it will appreciably reduce the disorder. And thus it will proportionately render the married Christian more capable of resisting temptation and of acting virtuously, for he will be that much freer of the impediments to actual grace and to the workings of the virtues and gifts.

<sup>8</sup>*Summa*, III, q. 62, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>9</sup>*Supplement*, q. 42, a. 3, ad 4.



This is a fact of tremendous importance in the daily lives of the married faithful, and a most potent and practical motive for their preserving themselves in the state of grace—or recovering that state as quickly as possible, if they should unhappily fall. Let us repeat: only matrimonial grace produces this radical suppression of concupiscence. And it should be recalled that that grace will be restored to the truly penitent and contrite sinner through the sacrament of penance (Denz. 2193).

### C. The Special Increase of Graces

Christian marriage must be worked out in a set of concrete circumstances bewildering in variety and varying in difficulty. But in all cases the continual play of supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit is demanded. We may reasonably suppose that God adapts these gifts of his—just as he does their source, habitual grace—with the special effects of matrimony in mind. For only by the virtuous actions of the spouses does Christian marriage attain its ends and manifest its sublime symbolism.

#### (1) *The Virtues of Christian Marriage*

1. **Charity.** Primary among matrimonial virtues will be the supernatural love of God, and of our neighbor in and for God: *charity*. The natural love of the spouses for each other is perfected by the sacrament; it becomes a holy and pure mutual affection, deep-rooted and proven by action, of one Christian for another, in Christ. This conjugal charity will be evidenced not in physical attraction alone, nor in lovers' speech only, but primarily in the mutual assistance man and wife offer each other in the practice of virtue, in their daily growth in grace, in their ever more perfect imitation of Christ.

2. **Hope.** To face with equanimity the problems that a lifetime will bring is a sure sign of one of two things: of false and foolish egocentrism; or of a supernatural confidence in the mercy, the power, the love of God. In their ability to 'muddle through,' the Christian couple



will be divinely strengthened, for a special supernatural *hope* will be theirs. Whatever the difficulty, economic or social or moral or physical—and there will be many such difficulties in married life—they will have the assurance of God's all-powerful help in overcoming it. In consequence the spouses will be people of prayer, presuming not on their own talents and strength. On the other hand, domestic crises, great and small, will not unduly shake the religious and moral foundations of their household. Hope is always theirs.

3. **Faith.** The special quality which *faith* evidences in conjugal life reflects the fact that this is a social or common good, rather than a private one. The very environment of the Christian family will speak of God, of Christ, of Mary. The actions of the married couple as well as their words, within the home and outside, will testify to a living belief in Christ and his Church. In the proper sense, there is a real need of *impressing others* with the fact of this faith—their children, their neighbors. Like it or not, the Christian spouses will be considered by these others as models and examples of Christian living. Here their sacramental faith will enable them to help each other in realizing, without show or hypocrisy, the practice of their religion.

4. **Prudence.** Man and wife constitute a society, the smallest but most fundamental society of human life. In order to govern this society, the family, a special *prudence* is necessary, different for the man who is the head of the family and the wife who must “govern her household” (I Tim. 5:11-15) in loving subordination to his authority. What they do together as members of this conjugal society—their relations with others, with the state, with the Church—must likewise be ruled by virtue. Their role as models for others demands prudential guidance also. The necessity of this virtue in the daily lives of the couple is apparent.

5. **Justice.** To fulfill in a truly Christian manner their manifold duties to each other, and their obligations (singly and together) to their children, and their mutual obligations to the state and Church—this requires a special kind of *justice*, a justice which is quick to do what is right, rendering what is due without quibbling or stinting. The possibilities of lesser or greater failure in this field of human conduct



are many; for the spouses, matrimonial grace provides the only reliable guide and safeguard, a special virtue to suppress selfishness by cheerfully accepting obligations and faithfully fulfilling them.

6. *Religion.* The conjugal duty of providing a truly Christian atmosphere in the home for the sake of their children and of others, and of educating their offspring in the tenets and practices of their faith, points up the need for a domestic virtue of *religion*. This will bring home to the spouses the fact that they, as the basic social unit, have a special obligation to worship God, over and above their duties as individuals. The family rosary, for example; grace before and after meals; family attendance at Mass and common reception of Holy Communion, if possible—these and innumerable similar practices which God will suggest to husband and wife will enable them to pay their debt to the Lord of their home. In so doing, they will create an environment where the presence of Christ is manifest.

7. *Patience.* The friction of close and most intimate association with others can generate disastrous fires, as American divorce courts too frequently testify. A small but very important virtue, *patience*, helps the couple to suppress the causes of irritation, and in any case to put up with the faults of others—even to conquer the vexations arising from the constant patter of little feet. Slow to anger, quick to forgive, disinclined to bickering and quarrels, harsh words and unnecessary criticism, the patient spouse indeed witnesses to the grace of matrimony.

8. *Chastity.* The married state has its own special requirements for the virtue of *chastity*. Here the healing of man's deep carnal disorder by matrimonial grace prepares the way for the fullest realization of virtue. St. Jerome says: "The love which a wise man cherishes toward his wife is the result of judgment, not the impulse of passion; he governs the impetuosity of desire, and is not hurried into indulgence. There is nothing more shameful than that a husband should love his wife as an adulteress."<sup>10</sup>

Conjugal chastity will inspire the spouses, as an example to their children and to the world, to chasteness in conduct, in speech, in dress

<sup>10</sup>Against Jovinian, Bk. I.



—an example the world badly needs. For their own model the spouses will take the most pure union of Christ and his Bride. Finally, appreciating the objective and subjective necessity for communion with God, marital chastity will lead to a religious continence. They will abstain deliberately from the marriage debt at certain times (more frequently during the solemn fast of Lent, for example) to give themselves more fully to divine things—to prayer, to contemplation, to a fuller participation in Mass, Holy Communion and the other sacraments.

### (2) *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

Over and above these special marital virtues, the special help of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will make the wedded life of the Christian spouses more truly divine. St. Thomas teaches that these gifts are necessary for salvation, for they dispose the Christian to receive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and by means of these impulses divine action even in worldly matters becomes second nature, as it were, for the husband and wife.<sup>11</sup> In God's design for married life the gifts will have a very special and essential part.

1. Wisdom will lead to an appreciation of the divine nature of their sacramental life together, an internal realization of the dignity, the sanctity, the sacramentality of Christian marriage.

2. Understanding gives them a deep penetration of the truths of faith, especially of those truths by which as married people they must make perfect their life together and guide their family to its destiny.

3. Knowledge will enable them to judge quickly and surely, in a supernatural fashion, the meaning and value of the worldly goods and concerns with which they must necessarily deal. The new car, a dish-washer, the newest picture at the drive-in—these things will be seen in proper perspective as they concern the supernatural destiny of the spouses and of their children.

4. Counsel provides the assistance to handle with divine ease and assurance the innumerable domestic difficulties which are inevitable, especially in large families. So complex and involved can these situa-

<sup>11</sup>*Summa*, I-II, q. 68, a. 2.



tions become that wise solutions seem impossible. Without God's help, which is made available to man and wife through this gift, a solution may, in fact, never be found.

5. Piety is of special importance because of the necessity (and difficulty) of exercising parental authority. To some extent, for fallen man 'all power corrupts.' A deep reverence for the Father of all, a deep subjection to his authority, insures the proper exercise of the derived and participated authority of the parents, especially of the father.

6. Fortitude confers a divine confidence on man, in that he considers God's omnipotence as if it were his own: what he cannot do alone, he can do with God. It is hardly necessary to point out the situations where this gift will assist the spouses to face calmly and confidently the difficult courses of action their supernatural life demands. The imminent danger of yielding to worldly considerations (in the matter of having children, for example); the danger of departing, slightly or seriously, from the hard path of virtue (to secure material benefits for themselves or their children, for example)—these dangers will be met firmly and powerfully overcome.

7. Fear of the Lord so reverences the holiness and majesty of God as to fear any separation, howsoever slight or brief, from our Father who is in heaven. Through this gift the married couple will appreciate their need for full co-operation with God's grace, at the same time that they realize their right to his all-powerful assistance. Fear of the Lord will aid, suprahumanly, the sometimes difficult practices of Christian hope; it will, moreover, from its abhorrence of offending God, powerfully strengthen the rejection of sexual temptations and lead to a divinely chaste and temperate conduct of married life.

### *(3) Actual Graces in Married Life*

For any supernatural action man requires the here-and-now assistance of God. Habitual grace and the infused virtues and gifts make us ready to act supernaturally. But this divine aid of the moment (hence called 'actual' grace as distinct from the permanent grace



which is 'habitual') moves the Christian from his capability of supernatural action to actual performance, and guarantees its completion. Man remains free to reject this actual assistance, but it is always offered by a beneficent God.

Sacramental grace gives man a true right to this divine assistance. The Christian spouses at any time, in any situation—so long as they are in the state of grace—know that God is ready (even eager, we may say) to give them the infallible divine aid they need. Matrimonial grace, in consequence, is infallible insurance that God's help will be forthcoming for any of the actions which this state of life requires.

Truly can man and wife face with confidence all the inevitable problems of their life together: the sacrament guarantees that God is for them, they have but to co-operate with him. And thus they may say with St. Paul: "If God is for us, who is against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ our Lord" (Rom. 8:31-39).

Catholics know that no home is happy, no home is right, unless Christ, our Brother, is a member of the family. For this reason his crucified image holds the most prominent place in the home. Images of his blessed Mother and the saints are to be found in appropriate places. Catholic literature suited to the ages and educational levels of the various members of the family will be available. Mother, dad and the children will be equipped with missals (or prayer books suited to their needs) and rosaries. All these things are normal to a Catholic home.

But even more normal is the realization by all the members of the family that, if Christ is in their home, it is not because his image is on the wall; it is because he lives in the hearts of the members of the family. Special matrimonial grace, the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are present and operate only in those who are disposed, and to the extent that they are disposed, by sanctifying grace. Since sanctifying grace and mortal sin are totally incompatible, those in the



state of mortal sin stand "naked before their enemies." For a happy Christian family it is essential that its members be in the state of grace.

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

"When the faithful give their sincere matrimonial consent, they open up for themselves a treasury of sacramental grace from which until death they may draw the supernatural strength to fulfill their duties and offices with fidelity, with holiness, with perseverance.

"This sacrament not only increases the permanent principle of supernatural life, sanctifying grace, in those who place no obstacle, but it also gives them special additional gifts: good inspirations, seeds of grace, together with the augmenting and perfecting of natural faculties. Thus the spouses may appreciate interiorly (and not only know in an abstract manner) all that pertains to the state of matrimony, its goals and its duties; with firm conviction and efficacious will they may thus proceed to fulfill these goals and duties. Finally, this sacrament gives them the right to ask and receive the help of actual grace as often as the fulfillment of the duties of their state demands it."<sup>12</sup>

"Thus will they find the blessings of marriage to be daily increased by an abundance of divine grace; and living in the pursuit of piety, they will not only spend this life in peace and tranquility, but will also rest in the true and strong hope of reaching and possessing, through the goodness of God, that life which is eternal."<sup>13</sup>

*'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh.' This is a great mystery—I mean in reference to Christ and to the Church.*

—Eph. 5:31-32

<sup>12</sup>*Casti Conubii*, Denz. 2237.

<sup>13</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Bk. II, Chap. 8.



# Conclusion



There is only one heaven for everyone. Nun or private secretary, priest or politician, if they die in grace, will spend eternity in one another's company. Whatever way of life a human being may choose to follow, his essential task is the same as that of every human being: to work out his salvation. A man *should* choose an occupation which will help him in his essential task, but he *must* choose one that will not prevent him from achieving it. The way that most men earn their living is in itself indifferent to ultimate values. A man can be a good butcher, a good physician, a good musician without being a good man. A man cannot be a good priest or a good monk without being a good man because these occupations are of their very nature immediately ordained to the ultimate end. What about marriage?

Without Christianity there would be no priests or monks; without grace no man could worthily seek to be a priest or monk. But without Christianity and without grace men would marry. Marriage would be part of the life of human beings had grace never been granted, in the fictitious condition known to theologians as the state of pure



nature. Since, however, there is no natural end for man, and since his supernatural end can be attained only if he be "born again," Christ made marriage a sacrament to bring it into the order of those things by which a man achieves the end for which he is truly destined. Two conclusions can be drawn from this:

- (1) Marriage is itself a means to eternal salvation.
- (2) No man can be a good husband and father without being a good man, and if a married man is a good man he will be a good husband and father (unless he is impeded from this by something beyond his control). The same, of course, can be said of the woman as wife and mother.

Marriage is often called a vocation. In a sense this is incorrect. Since marriage is a normal development in human life, the "call" to marriage is nothing special but is inherent in nature itself. Yet in the sense that marriage is the "state of life" for married people, their way of salvation, it is by extension called a vocation. In Christian marriage men and women devote themselves to the numerical growth of the Church and, therefore, to populating the kingdom of heaven. By attempting faithfully to do all that is necessary to accomplish this, husbands and wives work out their eternal salvation.

Married people become two in one flesh. Their union is so intimate that to a great extent their salvation is worked out together. Many men have been saved by the virtue and prayer of their wives. Many women have been saved by the wisdom and courage of their husbands. Family prayer is not a new idea of the modern apostolate, it is required by the very nature of marriage and family life. Tobias was told by the Archangel Raphael:

*For they who in such manner receive matrimony as to shut out God from themselves and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule—which have not understanding—over them the devil hath power.<sup>1</sup>*

Knowing this, Tobias asked Sara to pray with him, and this was the reason he gave her:

*For we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Tobias 6:17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 8:5.



In other words, since God has called us to holiness he has made man's marriage holy. And this is much more true of the Christian whose marriage Christ has raised to the rank of a sacrament, not to ornament or embellish it, but to make it an integral part of the new life he came to give, the life to which we are born again, the life of the spirit.

Christ's way of life is the way of charity. The love of God and the love of neighbor are the great commandments in which all else is summed up. If marriage is the way of salvation for married people, it is because it has within it the capacity to lead them to the perfection of charity. There is only one heaven, but there are different means of approaching it. The priest, religious or lay person bound by vow to live as a celibate eliminates purely human love from his life in order to devote himself entirely and directly to the supernatural love of God and neighbor. The Fathers of the Church and the great theologians insist upon the importance of that last phrase when they speak of the vow of chastity. The vow of chastity is useless and is even a selfish thing if it strays from that one purpose which gives it its nobility and its glory.

The human race was commanded to increase and multiply and cover the face of the earth. This implies marriage. Every individual was not commanded to take a direct and active part in fulfilling this command. Some find that for reasons beyond their control they are unable to marry. Others forego marrying for noble reasons: to dedicate themselves to the service of God in cloistered prayer and silence or by works of mercy toward neighbor. As long as they persevere in their intention, those who so dedicate their lives in celibacy (and even those who do so in order to accept and sanctify a condition they are unable to avoid) can fly straight to God, a wonderfully direct and unimpeded flight. Yet from high things it is easy to fall. Not all can take this direct route. For most the way to charity is through marriage.

Marriage is a school of love. Human beings are lonely, and it is not good for them to be alone. Only by giving oneself to another can a human being find completion. Attracted at first by pleasing physical qualities or by an interesting and considerate personality, a relationship between a man and a woman can easily develop into a spirit



of unselfish dedication to one another. As children are born to their married union, the parents find in these children a common object of self-dedication. With the mighty help of nature itself, they learn with comparative ease to sacrifice themselves and to live for others. What else is this than to learn to love? The partners of such a marriage and the children of such a blessed union are wonderfully prepared for the practice of supernatural charity.

True family love acts like a poultice, drawing from the members of the family the poison of selfishness. Children fortunate enough to be born to parents with a deep love for one another, and an understanding love for their children, sanctified by charity, are seldom self-centered. We say "an understanding love, sanctified by charity," because indulgence sometimes passes for love. Parents who indulge their children are more concerned for themselves than for the children. They are immature, because they look upon their children as toys for their own amusement rather than as children of the eternal Father.

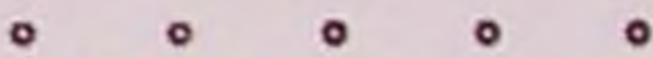
God commits children to the care of their parents to be formed in the image of God under their devoted guidance. Children who from their infancy sense that they are loved unselfishly, that others are devotedly looking out for them, soon learn to trust themselves to others and to be concerned for others rather than for their own narrow self-interest. On the other hand, in children who early sense a lack of unselfish love toward them, in children who are neglected or over-indulged, the instinct for self-preservation asserts itself, and the child becomes unduly concerned with his own interests, since no one else seems to be adequately defending them. Parents are not always to blame for the failures of their children, but when children are seen to be developing undesirable personality traits, parents can well afford to examine their own consciences.

Parents who frequently receive the sacraments and who, by means of the divine grace thus obtained, preserve themselves in God's love, are constantly receiving through the sacrament of matrimony the very special graces necessary to be the kind of husbands and fathers, the kind of wives and mothers, that God desires them to be and that they want to be. Catholic parents have a crucifix in an honored place



in their home; they have the images of the Sacred Heart and of our Blessed Mother on their walls; but more than that by far, they have the Spirit of God himself in their hearts. If God dwells in their homes it is because he dwells in their hearts. Their children will first learn of God from them—not from their lips but from their eyes. The work of parents is never finished until the children who first saw the image of God in their parents are face to face with God himself in the eternal kingdom.

Parents do well to reflect on the fact that while a man may be aware of the definition of the term "father" or "mother," the psychological impression made upon him by these terms, what these terms really mean to him, is in large measure due to what *his* father and *his* mother meant to him. If his father was a selfish man, without patience, understanding, kindness, how much meaning will it have for him to say "Our Father"? What will Mary or the Church mean to him as "Mother" if his own mother was less than a mother should be? Young people who seriously reflect upon the responsibilities they take upon themselves in marrying and bringing children into the world will not be hasty in the selection of a partner, or in entering a union so sacred that their own salvation and that of their children will in large measure depend upon its success.



*The eternal love of God called the world and humanity into being from nothing; the love of Jesus for his Church generates souls to supernatural life; the love of a Christian husband for his wife participates in these two divine acts because, in accordance with the will of the Creator, man and wife prepare the dwelling of the soul in which the Holy Spirit shall live with his grace. In this manner, through the mission providentially assigned to them, husband and wife are really the collaborators of God and his Christ; their very actions have something of the divine in them, and here too they may be called *divinae consortes naturae*.*

*Should we wonder that these remarkable privileges should imply also serious obligations? The nobility of divine adoption obliges Christian husbands and wives to many renunciations and to many*



*deeds of courage so that the body shall not restrict the soul in its climb towards truth and virtue, and that its weight shall not drag it toward the abyss. But, since God never asks the impossible and along with a precept he gives also the strength for its fulfillment, marriage, which is a great sacrament, brings, along with the duties that may seem beyond human strength, helps that show themselves supernatural.*

*We are firmly convinced, my dear husbands and wives, that these divine helps shall be given you, because you fervently asked for them, when, at the foot of the altar, you gave your hearts to each other forever.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup>Pius XII, *The Holy Father Speaks to Newlyweds* (Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Washington, D. C.), 56.



Appendix:  
The Book of Tobias



Unfortunately, many adult Catholics have read very little of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament. Some parts of the Old Testament, of course, are difficult to read and to understand. But as part of the study of Christian marriage it would be well to read the brief and charming Book of Tobias. It tells of high-minded men of a primitive society who strive to live by God's law despite the serious obstacles placed by living among pagan people. Their sacrifices to be faithful and their confidence in divine providence are fully justified by the God of Israel.

Scripture scholars argue about the nature of this book and about its exact text. It has come to us in several somewhat different forms, yet the differences do not disturb the message of the book. It is recommended here because it beautifully portrays human marriage under God, "For we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God" (8:5).

It is perfectly reasonable, in accord with sound scholarship and with what the Church teaches, to consider this book to have a historical



basis but not to be a simple historical record. The story is probably substantially factual but passed down orally for many generations before an inspired writer put it on paper, and story tellers may have "dressed it up" a bit in the telling. The purpose of the book is to teach God's care for his people, reverence for his law, and the peace that is the result of just and noble living.

Thus this is a story with a moral to it, and it should be read in that context. Remember, for example, that Semitic people use numbers symbolically. Sara's "seven" marriages need mean only "a goodly number," not just one or two, but several. The "three" of 6:18, 8:4 and 12:22 are not necessarily intended to be taken literally; what is meant is simply "a significant period of time."

The Jerusalem Bible's introduction to this book says, "It develops a very noble concept, Christian before Christianity, of marriage."<sup>1</sup> One of the principal themes of the story is the marriage of Sara and young Tobias. While they lived a good distance apart, both families were living in exile. Old Tobias was completely devoted to the corporal works of mercy, especially burying his fellow Israelites slain by an evil ruler, for which he nearly lost his own life. When he went blind he was ridiculed for his charities by those who should have had confidence in God, even by his own wife.

He sent his son on a long journey to collect an old debt. Raphael the Archangel, in the form of a man, offered to make the journey with him. On the way they stopped at the home of Tobias' relative, Raguel, who had a daughter with a problem. Sara had been married repeatedly to men more moved by lust than by the high-minded purpose of raising up children to serve God. Each one had been struck dead on the marriage night before consummating the marriage. When Raphael told him that he knew how to prevent this happening again, Tobias asked for Sara in marriage. Her father was reluctant, since he did not want Tobias to die, but under the law respecting kinsmen Tobias had a right that could not be denied. Nonetheless, the marriage having been celebrated, when the bride and groom went to the bridal chamber old Raguel headed for the back yard with a spade.

<sup>1</sup>The "Jerusalem Bible" is the popular name for *La Sainte Bible traduite en français sous la direction de L'École Biblique de Jérusalem*, published in Paris in 1956, a masterpiece of recent Catholic scholarship.



Since God had saved Sara for just such a holy union as this which was consummated after prayer in a spirit of Godly love, her father was happily able to fill up the hole he had dug. Instead of the *mohar* which the groom usually paid to the bride's parents, Raguel gave Tobias half of his fortune together with his daughter. Since she was his only child this seems to be an advance on the inheritance which would one day be theirs. Raphael went on alone to collect the debt owed old Tobias and brought the man who owed it back to help celebrate the marriage.

Finally, Tobias and Raphael set out with Sara and the riches given by Raguel to return to Tobias' worried parents, who are overwhelmed with joy by their return. Young Tobias did what Raphael had enjoined, and his father was cured of his blindness. The angel made himself known and departed. With great thankfulness to God old Tobias lived to ripe old age, and after his death young Tobias lived on in peace and prosperity to be a great-great-great-grandfather.

This story, beautiful in its simplicity, can help the student better to appreciate the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and the sanctity of the marriage of a man and woman who realize that they are "the children of saints, and must not be joined together like heathens that know not God" (8:5).



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<sup>3</sup>This pamphlet, like its companion, *Mother's Little Helper*, is not sold to the general public. Parents or other mature persons desiring copies should apply to their pastor or write to the publishers.

<sup>4</sup>See footnote 3.



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