



**Credible Catholic**

# **CREDIBLE CATHOLIC**

## **Big Book - Volume 11**

### **MARRIAGE**



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# **Credible Catholic Big Book**

## **Volume Eleven**

### **The Sacraments, Part 3 – Marriage**

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,  
Part Two – The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**

**NOTE:** All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

**Part One** from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

**We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said** in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

*"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."*

**If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?**

## Table of Contents

*NOTE- References to “section(s)”, throughout all volumes, refer to the “sections” denoted by Roman numerals under each Chapter title.*

<b>CHAPTER ONE: MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT</b>	<b>5</b>
I. <b>Marriage in the Old and New Testament</b>	<b>5</b>
II. <b>Marriage from the New Testament to the Modern Age</b>	<b>21</b>
III. <b>The Sacrament of Marriage Today</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE</b>	<b>29</b>
I. <b>The Exclusive &amp; Indissoluble Commitment of Eros</b>	<b>30</b>
II. <b>Three Additional Intentions for a Good Marriage</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: DECISIONS, EXPECTATIONS, ATTITUDES, AND HABITS THAT FOSTER SOUND MARRIAGES</b>	<b>46</b>
I. <b>Decisions and Expectations before Marriage</b>	<b>46</b>
II. <b>Daily Attitudes and Habits that Foster Sound Marriages</b>	<b>69</b>
III. <b>Conclusion</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE AND THE PROCESS OF ANNULMENT</b>	<b>88</b>

Note: No reference pages are given at the end of this document, because complete citations for all references are given in the footnotes.

## Introduction

As we begin the topic of marriage, it is important to reflect on a question that all potential spouses will want to ask of themselves – a question that reflects the heart of Jesus’ and the Catholic Church’s teaching on marriage – “Is this the person I wish to *serve* for the rest of my life?” Christian marriage is not about, “What’s in it for me?” but rather “What’s in it for us, our children, and the good we can do together for the world and God’s kingdom?” – and this requires faith-filled, generative, intimate, and self-sacrificial love for spouse and children unto the salvation of all. If we enter marriage with the illusion that we will now be set for life – that it will not require disciplined and loving service to the other, our expectations will be dashed sooner rather than later. However, if we enter marriage – or any vocation -- with the desire to serve the good of the other(s), we will find deep happiness, meaning, dignity, fulfillment, and salvation through it. As Jesus taught, “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Readers who wish to probe this truth within a spirituality and theology of marriage may want to temporarily skip Chapter One (on the scriptural basis and history of marriage) to read Chapters Two and Three. These Chapters will help readers prepare for marriage as well as enhance marriages with the Church’s spiritual wisdom blended with insights from contemporary psychology and philosophy.

## Chapter One

### Marriage as a Sacrament

[Back to top](#)

We will examine the sacramentality of marriage in the same way as the other sacraments—in three parts:

1. Marriage in the Old and New Testament
2. The Development of the Theology of Marriage in the Patristic Era and Middle Ages
3. The Theology and Practice of the Sacrament of Matrimony Today

### I.

#### Marriage in the Old and New Testament

[Back to top](#)

Some Reform theologians have contended that marriage is not a Sacrament instituted by Christ because it was not recognized to be a Sacrament by the Catholic Church until the Council of Verona in 1184. True enough—but the reason for this, as we shall see, is that the Catholic Church did not have a formal definition of “sacrament” until that time. The general definition of “sacrament,” as noted in the previous volume, is an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

## I.A. How Jesus Made Marriage a Sacrament

After defining a sacrament, the medieval church recognized that the three ministerial offices to which Jesus had commissioned the Apostles were Sacraments—the commemoration of the Holy Eucharist, Baptism and Reconciliation (Penance). It was also clear from the Acts of the Apostles and the Letter of James that the Spirit of Jesus through the discernment of the Apostles had instituted three other Sacraments—the Sacrament of Confirmation (through the laying on of hands—see Volume 10, Chapter Two), the Sacrament of Holy Orders (through the laying on of hands – see Volume 10, Chapter Five), and the Sacrament of the Sick (through anointing with oil -- James 5:14-15 – see Volume 10, Chapter Four). As noted in the previous volume, there is ample Scriptural evidence for these six sacraments.

Yet, marriage does not seem to fit into a sacrament by direct commissioning of Jesus or by the apostolic discernment of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, unlike the other six Sacraments, marriage was not a ministerial office practiced by the Apostles or presbyters in the Apostolic Church. So why did the medieval Church declare it to be a Sacrament?

The Church discerned that Jesus had elevated the marriage commitment to the level of a sacrament (an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace) by His words in the Gospels:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. *What therefore God has joined together*, let not man put asunder.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but *from the beginning* it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matt 19:2-9)<sup>1</sup>

Jesus’ declaration that “God has joined the man and woman together” reveals His conviction that marriage is a spiritual/divine reality. This spiritual/divine reality was God’s original intention “from the beginning.” Here Jesus harkens back to Genesis 2:21-24,<sup>2</sup> interpreting God’s intention to be a divine blessing not only for Adam, but also for Eve and the relationship

<sup>1</sup> The Markan version of this passage (MK10:1-12) includes an additional verse for the Gentile Church which was not necessary for the Jewish Church: “and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (MK10:12)

<sup>2</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (2Gen 21-24)

between them. The Medieval Church recognized in these words, Jesus' teaching that the marriage covenant was an outward visible sign of a divine and sacred reality – which is truly a spiritual grace.

This interpretation of Mark10/Matthew19 is borne out in 1Cor7:13-14:

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.

In this passage St Paul recognizes a grace – an agency of sanctification—in the marriage union. Some of Paul's readers are worried that they will be defiled by being married to an unbeliever, but Paul assures them that their belief, the willingness of the pagan partner to stay in the marriage, and the marital union itself will “sanctify” (“*hegiastai*”) them. Not only that, but the marital union will also sanctify their children. Though there is difference of opinion on the interpretation of “*hegiastai*”, it would be a real stretch to interpret Paul's meaning as precluding a sanctifying power of the marital union—for both the pagan partner and the children. In view of this, the Medieval Church had good scriptural grounds for including marriage among the seven accepted sacraments. In the view of Saint Paul, marriage really is an inward spiritual grace (leading toward sanctification) conveyed through an outward visible sign.

Before considering additional verses from 1 Cor 7 and Ephesians 5, we will want to back up for a moment and discuss the notion of marriage in Israel prior to the time of Jesus. This will enable us to appreciate how Jesus elevated the reality of marriage from a predominantly secular view of marriage (contracted not by the bride and groom, but by their families) in the Old Testament<sup>3</sup> to a divine and indissoluble covenant (a sacred reality filled with spiritual grace).

### **I.B. Marriage in Israel Before Jesus**

As noted above, marriage in Israel was not a religious or public covenant, but a private contract between families. As Viviano explains:

At first there was no contract, polygamy was common, divorce was easy and informal. Then, with the spread of writing, a juridification took place, There was a written marital contract and also at times a written bill of divorcement, as a protection for the woman to assure another man of her freedom to remarry.<sup>4</sup>

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., there is a movement toward monogamy as an ideal of marriage, but it was not imposed on the people of Israel by law. Genesis 2:21-24 implies that monogamy is an ideal, but does not mandate it, and Genesis 4 implies that polygamy was part of the deterioration of

<sup>3</sup> “marriage in Israel was neither a religious or a public concern: it was a private contract , and it is this conception which leaves little room for it in Hebrew Law, which deals only with exceptional cases. The contracting parties were not the bride and groom but the families, i.e., the fathers...”

See John McKenzie, 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible* pp 548.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Viviano , 1990 “The Gospel according to Matthew” the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* p.642-643

humanity, but does not indicate its sinfulness. Likewise Wisdom literature recommended monogamy as an ideal (see Prov 5:15; 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10; Sir 9:1; 26:1-4). After the exile (538 B.C.), polygamy was less practiced and seems to have disappeared by the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

In addition to the move from polygamy to monogamy, Israel developed its practice on divorce. Throughout Israel's history, divorce was easily obtained for a large number of potential offenses. The husband was able to initiate a divorce action against his wife, but not vice versa. The Torah required a husband to give his divorced wife a certificate of divorce so that she would be free to remarry another man (Deut. 24:1). There were few objections to this practice of divorce in Israel prior to the time of Jesus, but notable among the objections is the prophet Malachi (writing after the exile -- 538 B.C.) who rebuked The Israelites for leaving the wives of their youth (Mal. 2:14-15). Ben Sira also expresses reservations about easy divorce (Sir. 7:26). Despite these objections, the practice of divorce continued until the time of Jesus where some rabbinical schools of fairly easy divorce (e.g., Hillel permitted divorce for almost any cause including a wife not being able to cook well). However, other rabbinical schools (e.g., Shammai) were more strict, permitting divorce only for adultery.<sup>5</sup> This is clearly the context of the question posed to Jesus by the scribes in Matthew 19. (See the discussion below).

The major prophets use marriage to analogize the relationship between God and his people (see Hos. 2; Is. 54:4; 62:4; & Jer. 2:2; 3:20). In these passages, God is portrayed as a faithful husband who tries to win back the affections of his unfaithful bride (Israel). Though these verses are more about the relationship between God and Israel they show that marriage had developed beyond being a contract between families for the perpetuation of the family names through progeny. Marriage is now also viewed through the lens of affection and romantic love. This theme is also found in Wisdom literature, particularly the whole book of the Song of Solomon as well as passages from Proverbs (5:15ff; 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10ff) and Sirach (9:1; 26:1-4). These comparisons of the behavior of God and Israel to the conduct of bride and groom do not indicate a belief in Israel that marriage was a *religious* or *public* contract. It still remained a private contract among the bride and groom and their families – though the purpose of marriage was widened to include matters of affection and romance—as well as progeny and familial perpetuation.

### **I.C Marriage According to Jesus**

Five major topics, which affect the theology of marriage in the Catholic Church will be addressed in this section:

1. Jesus and the sacramentality of marriage.
2. Jesus and the indissolubility of marriage.
3. The exception of “unchastity” to marital indissolubility.
4. The comparison of marriage to Jesus' covenant with the Church.
5. Jesus' preference for perpetual chastity over marriage.

<sup>5</sup> See John McKenzie, 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible* p 201

### I.C.1

#### Jesus and the Sacramentality of Marriage

In view of the above, we cannot conclude to the sacramental character of marriage prior to the time of Jesus. However, when Jesus comes on the scene, He changes the idea and reality of marriage in four respects:

1. He asserts that marriage is “*God* joining together husband and wife,” and not merely a joining by mutual consent and consent of the families.
2. Thus, He declares marriage to be a *religious* covenant, and not merely a private contract between bride and groom and their families.
3. He declares that the original intent of God (in His interpretation of Gen. 2:24) was to make marriage monogamous and indissoluble (“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”).
4. Therefore, divorce is an aberration of the divine will and a frustration of a divine covenant (“*What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*” Mt. 19:6—See also Mt. 5:31-32).

These four characteristics are precisely what transform marriage into a sacrament.

Clearly when Jesus declares, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder,” He means that marriage is the result of a divine action. It might be objected that just because Jesus declared marriage to be a result of a divine action does not mean that He intended it to convey an inward spiritual grace to the individuals and the relationship itself (making it a sacrament). This interpretation of God “joining together” (“*sunezeuxen*”) is a misunderstanding of Jesus’ intention. Jesus does not mean here that God was involved in the marriage in the time of joining, but ceased to be involved after that time. Rather, He means that when God joins a couple together He becomes an integral part of the covenant into which the couple has entered, and continues to join it until one of the partners dies. The idea of God’s action initiating something and then letting it go is foreign to the Semitic mentality. When God acts to create or acts providentially, He sees the action through to its proper end. Furthermore, God’s continuous involvement in the covenant of marriage is not static, but dynamic—it is not impersonal, but personal. The idea that God could be impersonally involved in his action (like a natural cause in contemporary science) is again, alien to the ancient Semitic mind.

Inasmuch as God is continuously, personally and dynamically involved in the marriage covenant, He will not simply stand back and do nothing—He is going to fill the marriage covenant with the richness of His goodness, love and providential action. Evidently, theologians at the Council of Verona (1184) intuited at least part of Jesus’ meaning when they defined “sacrament” and declared that marriage was one of the seven sacraments. Contemporary scholarship on the first century Semitic mind (and Jesus’ intention within that context) justifies that declaration.

### I.C.2

#### Jesus and the Indissolubility of the Marriage Covenant

When Jesus declared marriage to be a covenant reality in which God is continuously involved, He had to make another stipulation to prevent the frustration of the divine intention and action within this sacred covenant. He therefore declared the marriage covenant to be

indissoluble—not susceptible of divorce (see Mt. 5:31-32 and 19:2-9). This teaching was difficult for His Jewish audience to accept—given a long history of easy divorce—and so the Pharisees approached him to ask why He held this position when Moses clearly allowed divorce and a certificate of divorce (see Deut. 24:1 and Matthew 19: 2-9). Jesus declares that Moses—not God—did this because of the peoples’ hardness of heart.

This gives rise to the question of whether Jesus thought that the era of “hardness of heart” was over. Did He think that people would no longer have callousness of heart leading to problems within marriage? Presuming that Jesus recognized the continuation of human selfishness, we must infer that He was calling us to a new ideal for both ourselves and marriage. He did so because He believed that the current practice of marriage (with its easy divorce) was an undermining of His Father’s grace and covenant, which in its turn undermined the couple, their family, and their potential to edify and positively influence the Church and the world.

So what is this new ideal for individuals and marriage? Jesus is implicitly asking those who recognize the sanctity of marriage, and commit themselves to one another before God, to do this with the intention, resolve, discipline, and prayer necessary to make this sacred commitment indissoluble and permanent. He has no illusions about this being easy for any couple. Yet, if a couple embarks on marriage with the intention to make it permanent and indissoluble-- to bring God into their covenant as well as the fruit of their faith (virtue, prayer, and support of the church) -- then this sacred covenant that will become the vehicle for generative love, mutual support, children, and the building block of the church and society will have an excellent chance to perdure and flourish, because it will be graced by God’s love and providence. By calling married couples to this high ideal Jesus wants them to build the internal resolve, discipline, and faith to carry it out. With this foundation, His Father can infuse it with the grace to make it flourish—not to make it easy, but to give it the grace to support the couple, their children, the friends they will touch, and the Church they will build.

It might be asked, “If Jesus is trying to establish a high ideal for marriage, then why did He assert that divorce was tantamount to a grave moral failing – adultery (Mt. 19: 9)?” Calling the couple to a high ideal produces resolve, discipline, hope, and faith – but connecting divorce with adultery induces fear or dread. The fact is, Jesus did *not* assert that divorce is tantamount to adultery, but rather that divorce *followed by marriage of another* is tantamount to adultery. For Jesus, remarriage after unjustified divorce is a betrayal of the original spouse who has a right to believe that the marriage bond will perdure to the end of their earthly lives. Jesus declares further that it is not only the divorced partner, who has a right to believe this, but also God because God intends that every marriage entered into by capable and free partners endure until the end of earthly life. Thus, Jesus has three reasons for establishing the indissolubility of marriage (in contrast to the history of Israel):

1. He wants the couple to intend the indissolubility of their marriage from the beginning so that they will build the resolve, discipline, and faith to commit themselves to this ideal.
2. To protect the rights of each partner to have a permanent marriage throughout their earthly lives .
3. To respect the intention and action of God who joins into the permanent marriage covenant, blessing it with His grace and love.

These three elements turn on the perpetuity (until death) of the marriage commitment. Jesus apparently believes that only by insisting on the indissolubility of the marriage bond will marriage – the sacred covenant of family and highest fidelity – have a chance to be the communal power to build families, church, culture, and society. Without this tremendous graced power – arising out of the intention of permanence – the communal power of intimate human communion and family would not be able to support and edify the couple themselves, their children, the Church, the culture, and the society.

It may be thought that Jesus – as a Semite – would not think in terms of the communal power arising out of the marriage bond – or communal power supporting children, family, church, and culture. On the surface, this would be true because Jesus did not think in Greek philosophical terms and certainly not in contemporary sociological ones. However, Jesus has a very keen sense of communal power in His notion of love – particularly as it manifests itself in the family. A proper understanding of the Parable of the Prodigal Son requires an appreciation of the depth of the Father's love, its transformative power, its place within Hebrew society, and the importance of fidelity (of both the Father and the Son in bringing it to life).

The importance of the family for the good of its members – and as a building block of the clan and the tribe within Hebrew society -- cannot be underestimated.<sup>6</sup> Blood kinship is one of the strongest social forces in Israel, second only to the familial covenant relationship that God has with His people. We must presume that Jesus was not only aware of this power of family and familial love, but immersed in it, and that this informed His views on the importance, sacredness, and permanence of the marital covenant for the couple, the children, and the society of Israel. We also cannot underestimate the importance of Jesus' own family – including His heavenly Father – in His sense of the power (love and goodness) of the family and the marital covenant upon which it is founded.

Jesus not only intended the family to be important for its members and the society of Israel. He intended to replace the temple in Jerusalem with the temple of His own risen body – that is to make His risen body the foundation of a *universal* temple – a universal Church – lasting until the end of time, and into the eternity of His kingdom. He identified Himself with the stone rejected by the builders that would become the cornerstone of the new universal Church (Mt. 21: 42) which would become the temple of His body (Jn. 2:19-21 and Mt. 26:61) – see the discussion in Volume 6, Chapter Two, Section I. Thus, as the society of Israel (signified by the temple in Jerusalem) was replaced by the universal Church in Jesus' own body, the importance of family was transferred from being a building block of Israel to a building block of the universal Church – as well as every culture which that Church supports and edifies.

Inasmuch as Jesus intended that indissolubility would support the graced covenant of marriage, and further intended that the graced covenant of marriage would support the couple, their children, the Church, and the society (through the Church), we may suppose that these good ends were part of His intention for requiring indissolubility in the marital covenant.

<sup>6</sup> See John McKenzie 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 273.

## I.C.3

**The Exception of “Unchastity” to Marital Indissolubility**

The critical passage in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 – “except for unchastity (*porneia*)” is commonly held to be a Matthean redaction, for it is not found in either Mark or Luke where Jesus speaks of the indissolubility of marriage.<sup>7</sup> We must first investigate what this exception means, and then determine whether it is consistent with Jesus’ intention.

The Greek term translated as unchastity is *porneia*. This is a difficult term to translate accurately because it is not the technical term for adultery (“*moicheia*”). “*Porneia*” can have a variety of meanings – sexual immorality, adultery, incest (marriage within forbidden degrees of kinship), prostitution, and sexual relations before marriage. It may also mean all of these offenses. Scholars differ on the interpretation of “*porneia*” in Mt. 5:32 and 19:9 – some preferring the highly restrictive sense of incest alone<sup>8</sup> and some a much broader sense – e.g. all forms of sexual immorality.<sup>9</sup>

The more restrictive sense of “incest” is to be preferred for the following reason. Most scholars believe that Jesus’ intention (as communicated by both Mark and Q) was that marriage is absolutely indissoluble – that is that divorce is not permissible under any circumstances if the marriage was validly contracted. It is difficult to believe that Matthew would have made an addition that would have undermined the true meaning of Jesus. Therefore, we should prefer an interpretation that would not do this.

So what did Matthew have in mind by adding this exception, if he did not intend to undermine Jesus’ original meaning? Matthew was thoroughly familiar with rabbinical law and interpretations. There was a widely known rabbinical view that an incestuous marriage between partners with forbidden degrees of kinship could not be validly contracted.<sup>10</sup> Since Matthew was concerned to articulate Jesus’ legal teaching on divorce for Jewish Christians and potential scribal converts, he added this rabbinical nuance to the original words of Jesus. It should be noted that this “rabbinical nuance” is not a true exception to Jesus’ absolute prohibition of divorce in marriages that have been validly contracted; for the Matthean “exception,” according to this interpretation indicates only that a marriage between incestuous partners has been *invalidly contracted*. In other words, a couple who is within forbidden degrees of kinship cannot validly contract marriage, and if a marriage is not validly contracted, then there is no need for divorce. The marriage never existed in the first place.

Therefore, the so-called Matthean exception does not run counter to the absolute prohibition of divorce in Mark and Q – and thus, does not run counter to Jesus’ original declaration and intention. Instead of being an exception to the prohibition of divorce, it is a specification of what constitutes a valid marriage. Incestuous relationships do not meet the conditions for valid

<sup>7</sup> See Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew” in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, pp. 642-643.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew” in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 643.

<sup>9</sup> See William Luck 1987 *Divorce and Remarriage* <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-teachings-jesus-divorce-matthew-531-32a>.

<sup>10</sup> See Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew,” p. 643.

marriage, and so there can be no marriage between such couples. There is no need for a divorce because a marriage did not exist in the first place.

Matthew's specification of a condition for a valid marriage is an important legal nuance which the Church took quite seriously throughout the centuries. The Church articulated several other conditions needed to validly contract (and freely consent to) "marriage." These conditions are given below in Section III.

#### I.C.4

#### The Comparison of Marriage to Jesus' Covenant with the Church

The Pauline author in the Letter to the Ephesians analogizes the relationship between Christ and His Church to the ideal for marriage:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph. 5:22-33).

This passage presumes the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish perspective that men are head of the household, with wives being subject to them. This characterized the thinking of many cultures in the Middle East during Jesus' time, and continued for almost 2,000 years around the world until the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century – when widespread education of women, women's suffrage, and women's engagement in labor and commerce became more pronounced. Thus this teaching cannot be applied in the same way today as it was 2,000 years ago. Today there is a veritable equivalence in men's and women's education, autonomy, interaction within culture and politics, and the ability to contribute to household income and stability that was not present in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The Pauline author here is not declaring a *doctrine* about wives being submissive to their husbands, but only giving *practical* advice about a social discipline primarily derived from the surrounding culture. Since women's roles in the family, society, and culture have changed significantly, the practical advice offered by the Pauline author should be modified to accommodate the new realities and expectations of the day.

We must now ask the question, "Is there anything of *doctrinal* significance that the Pauline author is saying here – or is it all *practical discipline* conditioned by the cultural norms of his

time?” There is -- the author’s conviction about complete commitment and self-sacrifice needed for marriage. The Pauline author not only wants to reinforce Christ’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, but wants to add the dimension of complete commitment and self-sacrifice that will be necessary for the marriage covenant to be permanent.

He uses the image of the perfect covenant relationship between Christ and the Church to analogize the ideal covenant between a man and his wife. He notes that Christ is completely and unequivocally devoted to the Church which is His body, and is willing to sacrifice anything for her. Harkening back to the Genesis story, particularly its conclusion – “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (see Eph. 5:31 and Gen. 2:24). The “profound mystery” of which the author writes is that God has created human beings so manifestly in His own image that He has destined them to live a completely committed relationship tantamount to that between Christ and His Church.<sup>11</sup>

The author does not present the total commitment and self-sacrifice of marriage in the language of a requirement, but rather as a calling to one of the highest dignities given to human beings made in the image and likeness of God. God called us to the supreme dignity of unconditional love – which is perfectly manifest in unconditional commitment and self-sacrifice. By using the analogy of the perfect self-sacrificial commitment between Christ and His Church, the author hopes to present an ideal of marital love that expresses the divine nature and our highest calling. When He asks wives to be submissive to their husbands, and husbands to love wives as their own bodies, He is not simply giving an instruction; He is revealing the divine dignity to which married individuals and their union are called – the unconditional love of Christ for His body, the Church.

This theology still stands – as relevant today as when it was written – calling every married couple to the fullness of their individual and united dignity and destiny through the grace of God who joins them together in the sacrament of their vows to one another. It is a shame that so many contemporary people focus on the anachronistic cultural discipline expressed by the author because it distracts them from the profound and mysterious calling that at once describes the ideal of marriage and one of the highest callings of human beings made in the image and likeness of God.

### **I.C.5**

#### **Jesus’ Encouragement of Perpetual Chastity over Marriage**

There can be little doubt that Jesus elevated the dignity and calling of marriage to its highest level in the history of humankind, and His teaching remains unsurpassed to this day. In view of this, it might seem strange that after assigning such an exceptional and supernatural status to marriage that he would speak of perpetual chastity (celibacy) as something even greater. Yet this is precisely what He did.

In Matthew 19:10-12 – immediately after Jesus’ prohibition of divorce – His disciples question him about whether it is better not to marry -- o which Jesus responds that perpetual

<sup>11</sup> See Paul Kobelski 1990 the Letter to the Ephesians” in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 890.

chastity (celibacy) – i.e. “choosing to be a eunuch for the kingdom of God” – is a great grace, implying that if one has been given the grace, it is to be preferred to marriage:

The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry ." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."

After Jesus' prohibition of divorce, the disciples are concerned about the difficulties of marriage and conclude that it might not be beneficial for men to marry. Jesus moves away from the idea that one should avoid marriage because of its difficulties, and shifts the rationale to those who have been given a special grace by God to live a life of perpetual chastity (celibacy). Apparently, Jesus does not think that this grace is given to the majority of people, and so He teaches that “*only*” those who have the grace of celibacy should pursue it. As we shall see below, Saint Paul reinforces this teaching.

The idea of voluntary celibacy was somewhat foreign to two out of the three major sects in Israel at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees held that God's declaration to “be fruitful and multiply” was a key meaning of life, and a veritable divine mandate, so the idea of celibacy would not have been viewed as positive from either a divine or secular perspective. However, the Essenes – the third major sect (though a minority compared with the size of the Pharisees) – lived in a tight community where celibacy was mandated and justified by their major inspiration – the teacher of righteousness. Their rationale for living a celibate life was to avoid the temptations of the flesh and the complexities of community life that would have come with the introduction of women and wives. Though Jesus was familiar with the Essenes and their rationale, He was not in agreement with that rationale. As he explains, His rationale for celibacy is to attend to the urgent needs of the kingdom of God – a kingdom He brought to the world.<sup>12</sup> He wanted disciples who would be completely devoted to the service of that kingdom for the salvation of humanity. This same view is expressed in Matthew 8:21-22.

Jesus indicates that perpetual chastity is not something that can be willed – it is a grace of God – “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given” (Mt. 19:10). Since perpetual celibacy is a grace of God, it does not indicate greater virtue on the part of the person who receives this grace, because virtue is an individually chosen habit. It is enhanced by grace but it is built upon the free choice of the virtuous person. Nevertheless we might say that it is virtuous when a person gratefully receives this grace, and completely dedicates his or her life to the urgent demands of the kingdom. Thus, the virtue of celibacy does not arise out of being given a special grace from God, but rather in accepting the grace for the purpose of dedicating oneself completely to building the kingdom. Married people who do not receive the grace of celibacy can be similarly virtuous by devoting themselves to the urgent demands of their spouses, children, workplace, and church community. Each has a distinct call, a distinct grace for that call, and a distinct virtue in faithfully responding to it.

<sup>12</sup> See Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* p. 662.

Since God provides the grace for perpetual celibacy, it is necessary for every prospective celibate to discern whether he or she has this grace – or, if not, whether it would be better to marry. If one truly is given this grace, it may indicate that God is calling them to give themselves to the urgent demands of the kingdom – perhaps as a priest, religious, deacon, or lay minister. Though Jesus lays the foundation for these offices, in the commissioning of His apostles and disciples, the formal distinctions and charisms appropriate to each were defined slightly later by the apostolic Church (see Volume 10, Chapter Five). In any case, the call to celibacy is not necessarily a call to priestly office or the religious life, and so this call would also have to be discerned by a candidate and his or her spiritual director.

Jesus' declaration about the preferential option for celibacy reveals His perspective about earthly life – it is for the purpose of choosing and attaining the heavenly kingdom – and to help others do the same. Marriage is not an end in itself -- it too is at the service of attaining divine eternal life. Indeed, Jesus apparently held that marriage will not exist in heaven as it does in earthly life, because all of us will reach a level of angelic transformation in which the satisfaction of carnal desire will no longer be an issue: “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Mt. 22: 30).

From the above, it seems evident that Jesus has a preference for perpetual celibacy over marriage – if the Church discerns that God has given a person the grace for this vocation. He did so not for reasons of asceticism, additional virtue, or avoidance of temptations of the flesh, but rather God's call of particular individuals to commit themselves totally to the urgent demands of the kingdom of God. Saint Paul reinforces this theme, but develops the preference for perpetual chastity in a slightly different direction – the avoidance of worldly concerns to devote oneself to holiness and apostolic service. In 1 Cor. 7, he sets out some guidelines to help Christians discern whether celibacy or marriage is to be preferred. His underlying assumption is that the grace and call of celibacy will be evident from the disposition of one's carnal desires, call to service within the Church, and one's current marital status. It is important to note that the grace of celibacy – though linked to the urgent demands of building the kingdom – was not formally linked to particular ministerial offices in the Church – e.g. apostle, prophet, and later, bishop, priest, or deacon. Celibacy was not a requirement for these offices until the fourth and fifth centuries (see below).

Let us now return to 1 Cor. 7 and examine three critical passages:

1. *1Cor. 7:1-11.*

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as

I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) -- and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

In this passage, Saint Paul reinforces three primary teachings of Jesus:

- The prohibition of divorce and remarriage – “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) -- and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (7:10-11).
- Celibacy is a grace from God – as well as marriage – “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind [the grace of celibacy] and one of another [the grace of marriage]” (7:7).
- Celibacy is preferred over marriage if one can maintain self-control – “I wish that all were as I myself am [celibate]... to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do” (7:7-8).

In 7:12-16, Paul gives his opinion concerning Christians who are married to unbelievers. This involved a large group of married couples within the Pauline community who married as non-Christians, after which one of the spouses converted to Christianity. He indicates that remaining married to unbelievers is to be preferred if the unbelieving spouse wants to remain married, because this honors the marital commitment and provides an avenue through which the believing spouse can convert and/or save the unbelieving one. However, he does permit separation if the unbelieving spouse prefers not to remain married to the Christian one.

## 2. *1Cor. 7:25-28.*

Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.

In this passage Saint Paul gives part of his rationale for preferring celibacy over marriage:

- Paul considers his present time to be one of distress coming from religious and political ostracization and persecution – in view of which single-mindedness (instead of the divided attention produced by marriage) would help believers.
- To spare couples worldly troubles which would be obviated through celibacy.

Paul clearly indicates that this is not a command of the Lord (Jesus), but only his personal discernment as one who is trustworthy. He is careful not to imply that married people separate or feel any pressure to separate. He is also clear that those having a need for marriage (for the sake of self-control) be free to marry – without pressure to the contrary.

### 3. *1Cor. 7:32-40*

The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry--it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.

In this passage, St. Paul completes his rationale for preferring celibacy to marriage. In the above passages he stresses the freedom to handle religious and political ostracization and persecution during the time of distress, as well as sparing couples the cares and troubles of the world. Using this as a basis, he now focuses on Jesus' rationale for celibacy—to devote oneself completely to the urgent needs of building the Kingdom (“the affairs of God”). He then adds an additional motive for celibacy that is not mentioned by Jesus—to devote oneself to the pursuit of holiness. As noted above, the Essene community stressed this rationale for celibacy, but Jesus did not explicitly do so. Paul apparently believes that if a person is capable of self-control in carnal passions he will be greatly assisted by celibacy in the pursuit of holiness because he will not be distracted from these concerns by the affairs of the world and pleasing a spouse. So for St. Paul, celibacy is a *grace of freedom* to devote oneself to the pursuit of both *interior* holiness and *exterior* building of the Kingdom.

St. Paul presumes that grace builds on nature; so if a person is not capable of controlling his carnal desires, it is a clear sign that God is not calling him to the grace of celibacy. This might be viewed as an implicit reference to God's call to celibacy, but not an explicit one. In contrast to this, Jesus explicitly declares that celibacy is a call from God (“not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given” -- Mt. 19:10).

Paul concludes that celibate life is better than marriage (“he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.”) Does this mean that celibate people *are* better than married people? No—Paul says that celibate people *do* better—not that they *are* better. Why so? Because they are undistracted by the concerns of spouses and the world in their pursuit of interior holiness and building the Kingdom. Yet this complete devotion to holiness and

the Kingdom does not mean that the celibate is better than a married person, because if God does not give a person the call—the grace of freedom from carnal desire—then that person cannot be held accountable for what God did not give him. He is equally valued and loved by God according to the state of life to which God has called him.

Before drawing some conclusions, we will want to examine a brief history of priestly celibacy within the Catholic Church. Let us start with the Apostles themselves. Obviously, Saint Peter was still married after being chosen by Jesus to be an apostle, for he had a mother-in-law (see Mt. 8:14). Saint Paul implies in 1 Cor. 9: 2-6, that many – if not most -- of the apostles and presbyters were married:

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

The critical part of the passage – (1 Cor. 9:5) clearly indicates not only that most of the apostles and presbyters have wives, but that the Church is responsible for taking care of them – “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”

There was no change in this practice – the Apostles’, Bishops’ and Presbyters’ freedom to marry-- throughout the first, second, and third centuries. However, in the fourth century the expectation of celibacy on the part of bishops and priests had evolved. The Council of Elvira (305 A.D.)<sup>13</sup> and the Council of Carthage (390 A.D.) declared an expectation of celibacy for Bishops and Priests, but made exceptions for those who were already married – though they required continence prior to the celebration of the Eucharist. The Council of Carthage indicated the following:

*It is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the [Levites](#), i.e. those who are in the service of the divine sacraments, observe perfect continence, so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the Apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us also endeavour to keep... It pleases us all that bishop, priest and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from conjugal intercourse with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity.<sup>14</sup>*

As implied in the above passage, bishops and priests were still marrying at the time of the Council of Carthage (390 A.D.), and so the lesser discipline of maintaining continence during

<sup>13</sup> See Council of Elvira – Canon 33 – “It is decided that marriage be altogether prohibited to bishops, priests, and deacons, or to all clerics placed in the ministry, and that they keep away from their wives and not beget children; whoever does not do this, shall be deprived of the honor of the clerical office.”

<sup>14</sup> Council of Carthage – Canon 3.

marriage was imposed. However, by the time of Saint Leo the Great (440-461 A.D.), the canonical requirement for celibacy seems to have been accepted and solidified.<sup>15</sup>

Since that time, clerical celibacy has been a requirement for Holy Orders within the Catholic Church with only two exceptions:

- A married priest with valid Orders in, say, the Anglican Church who chooses to enter priesthood in (and is accepted by) the Catholic Church
- A deacon who is married before deaconate ordination

A married man whose wife dies and who is young enough to enter the seminary, is also eligible for priestly ordination in the Catholic Church even if he has children.

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about Jesus' and St. Paul's preference for celibacy over marriage:

1. Jesus explicitly states and St. Paul implies that celibacy is a call from God which entails a grace of enough freedom from carnal desire to devote oneself completely to the urgent needs of building the Kingdom of God.
2. St. Paul adds that this call, grace, and freedom also enables the celibate to devote himself to interior purification in holiness and prayer.
3. Since celibacy is a call and grace from God, celibates cannot be considered better persons than married persons. However, if a person receives the call, grace and freedom to refrain from carnal desires, he *does* better if he pursues the celibate life (to devote himself completely to building the Kingdom and pursuing interior holiness) than if he pursues marriage.
4. Though Jesus and St. Paul preferred celibacy to marriage if God calls a person to this, it was not a requirement for apostles, bishops, presbyters (priests), and deacons in the first four centuries of the Church. The fourth century saw a strong expectation of celibacy and the fifth century saw its solidification into a real, practical requirement.

This requirement has proved to be very positive throughout the centuries for the reasons to which Jesus and St. Paul alluded – the freedom to devote oneself completely to the affairs of the Kingdom of God (rather than the affairs of marriage and the world) and the freedom to devote oneself completely to interior purification in prayer and holiness. When bishops and priests seize upon this freedom and throw themselves into the exterior pursuits of the kingdom and the interior pursuits of holiness, it has led to tremendous progress in missionary activity, evangelization, theological and philosophical development, prayer and religious life, interior building of the Community, and self-sacrificial witness to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom (even unto martyrdom).

<sup>15</sup> H. Thurston, (1908). Celibacy of the Clergy. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03481a.htm>.

## II. Marriage from the New Testament to the Modern Age

[Back to top](#)

Our return to the subject of marriage is not unrelated to the preference for celibacy recommended by Jesus and St. Paul. Despite the fact that many bishops and priests were married throughout the first four centuries, many men and women took seriously the call of God to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. Justin Martyr (writing between 147-161AD) indicates how common the practice was by noting the large numbers of men and women over 60 and 70 years old who remained perpetually celibate throughout their lives.<sup>16</sup> There can be little doubt that most of the Early Church Fathers through St. Augustine were convinced of the efficacy of celibacy for the sake of holiness and the Kingdom. Nevertheless, they maintained the implicit sacramentality (see above Section I.A), the grace, and the call to holiness and perfection that can occur through the Sacrament of Marriage. St. Jerome was accused of disrespecting marriage (in favor of celibacy) by an adversary, Jovinianus, to which he responded:

Marriage is *honorable* among all, and the bed undefiled. We have read God's first command, Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth;" but while we *honor* marriage we prefer virginity which is the offspring of marriage. Will *silver* cease to be silver, if gold is more precious than silver?<sup>17</sup>

Jerome's two-fold mention of the honorability of marriage, its origin in God's command, and his analogy to "silver" clearly indicates the goodness and grace intrinsic to marriage as he notes, the preference of virginity (to those who are given this call and grace) does not make marriage any less honorable and grace-filled than it has from God's command and Jesus' word.

St. Augustine advanced the theology of marriage and explicitly declared it to be sacramental in his book *On the Good of Marriage* (410AD). He declares that there are three intrinsic goods in marriage arising out of the couple's intention and God's participation within the covenant:

*Fidelity* – which demonstrates the grace and goodness of the commitment itself *Children* – including the goodness of children themselves, the mutual love shared between parents and children, and the bond of family arising out of the nurturing of and education of children.

*Sacrament* – which Augustine believes arises out of Jesus' declaration of indissolubility and God's participation in the marriage covenant.

There can be no doubt that Augustine's view of the sacramentality of marriage influenced the theology of marriage throughout the Middle Ages, and influenced its selection as one of the

<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr *First Apology* BK1, Section 15

<sup>17</sup> Jerome Against Jovinianus, Book 1, ([www.newadvent.org/fathers/30091.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/30091.htm)), italics mine

seven sacraments by the Council of Verona in 1184AD. Prior to this formal declaration, marriage was considered to be a sacrament by many influential bishops and theologians, such as Isidore of Seville.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the Patristic and early Medieval Period, marriage was seen as a divinely-blessed, grace-filled covenant in accordance with the words of Jesus (“what *God* has joined together, let no man put asunder”, Mt 19:6-- see interpretation in Section I.A. above). As noted above, St. Augustine and Isidore of Seville viewed it explicitly as sacramental. Nevertheless, the church did not take upon itself the responsibility to regulate marriages. Thus, there was no formal ritual for a marriage during this period<sup>19</sup>—but there is mention of marriages being performed before bishops and priests.<sup>20</sup> Though this practice was encouraged by some spiritual writers, formal consent to marriage in a church before clergy was not required. The perpetual divine covenant to one another into which a couple enters occurs through the intentions and words of the couple themselves. Marriage is the one sacrament that is not initiated through the mediation of a bishop, priest, or deacon.<sup>21</sup> However, since the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, the Church required that sacramental marriages be *witnessed* by an ordained clergyman—and be held within a Catholic church. The couple initiates the sacrament through their intention and formal consent—while the ordained clergyman only witnesses it for the purpose of validity.

From the time of Isidore of Seville (the last acknowledged Church Father) marriage was implicitly considered to be sacramental – mostly because of the enormous prestige of St. Augustine and his explicit declaration of it (followed by Isidore). Yet there was no need to declare formally the sacramentality of marriage until the Church faced the heresy of the Cathars who held that marriage and procreation were evil. Since the heresy began to gain popular footing, the Council of Verona condemned the heresy of Catharism and formally declared marriage to be one of the seven select sacraments. After that time, the Church formally acknowledged the sacramentality of marriage in three subsequent Councils in the Middle Ages:

1. Fourth Lateran Council--1215,(Canons 50-52)which also prohibited clandestine marriages
2. Second Council of Lyon (1274AD)
3. Council of Florence (1439 AD)

<sup>18</sup> See Paul Haffner 1995, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Gracewing Publishing 1995 ISBN 978-0-85244476-4), P. 203

<sup>19</sup> Philip L. Reynolds and John Witte (eds.2007)*To Have and to Hold* (Cambridge University Press) p. 98

<sup>20</sup> For example, Tertullian indicates that some marriages were performed before priests—see *ibid.* Note also that St. Ignatius of Antioch implies that some couples sought permission of the Bishop for marriage—but this does not appear to have been common practice. “But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust.” St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp*, Chapter5, [www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-polycarp-longer.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-polycarp-longer.html),

<sup>21</sup> Though the ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, priest or deacon, lay persons may baptize an unbaptized person who is in danger of death. Conditional baptism may also be administered by lay people to infants whose health is jeopardized.

In general, Church hierarchy and theologians leading up to the Council of Trent not only viewed marriage as a sacrament, but also a vital instrument of sanctification, a conduit of grace, and a valid path to salvation. Marriage was seen not only as a means of propagating the species and building the church, but also as a blessed union eliciting the highest level of commitment and love from the couple. To the degree the couple extends this love to one another God sanctifies it, and it moves beyond itself to the greater community and church.

New problems arose during the Protestant Reformation. Not only did the Reformers deny the sacramentality of marriage, they also implied that the Catholic Church degraded marriage in favor of celibacy. Furthermore, they derided the Catholic Church for not controlling the problem of clandestine marriages which gave rise to many abuses and had grown in number. For example, some people entered into so many clandestine marriages, that Ecclesiastical Courts were faced with determining which one was the first to establish validity.

It fell to the Council of Trent to respond to all these criticisms. It resolved the first problem—the denial of the sacramentality of marriage—by bluntly responding to the Reformers the implicit sacramentality of marriage since the time of Jesus, and the explicit articulation of its sacramentality by St. Augustine, other theologians, and four previous Church Councils (Verona, IV Lateran, II Lyons, and Florence):

“If anyone says that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law, instituted by Christ the Lord, but has been devised by men in the Church and does not confer grace, let him be anathema.”<sup>22</sup>

In another decree (Session 24, 1563) the Council reasserted Jesus’ and St. Paul’s teaching that virginity is to be preferred to marriage when God gives the grace (and therefore the call) to be celibate – “It is more blessed to remain virgin or celibate than to be joined in marriage.” It did so by condemning the Reformers’ contention that the married state is to be placed above the state of virginity. The condemnation challenged the seeming contradiction of the Protestant tradition that held to the superiority of marriage while denying its sacramentality. In contrast, the Church offered a doctrine more consistent with the teaching of Jesus--that marriage is supernatural (and therefore sacramental) and that virginity is to be preferred to respond to the urgent needs of the Kingdom. Given Christ’s declaration of God’s participation in the marriage covenant and the indissolubility of marriage, it is difficult to deny that Jesus held to the supernatural (and therefore the sacramental) character of marriage. Furthermore, Jesus’ (and St. Paul’s) declaration of preference for virginity over marriage is explicit in the New Testament scriptures. Hence, the Catholic interpretation of the sacramentality of marriage and the preference for virginity at the Council of Trent is well-grounded and justified by scripture.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Trent, Canon 1 on Matrimony

In response to the problem of clandestine marriages, the Council passed one of its last decrees, formalizing the ritual celebration of the Sacrament. At the time of the Council, all that was necessary for a couple to contract indissoluble marriage was to say (in the present tense), “I marry you.” The Church tried to register marriages, but it was not obligatory. As noted above, the abuses of clandestine marriages at the time of the Reformation were prolific, and the Church while admitting their validity (if freely entered into and permanently promised) disliked them. In order to restore the respectability of the sacrament, respond to the Reformers’ criticisms, and respect the public nature of the sacrament, the Council of Trent had to regulate it, assure proper recording of valid marriages, and formalize its ritual.<sup>23</sup>

In its decree “*Tametsi*” (Session 24, Chapter 1 -- 1563) the Council required that valid marriages be performed in front of a priest with at least two witnesses. Previously, the Fourth Lateran Council had only declared clandestine marriages illicit,<sup>24</sup> but valid unless there was some other impediment. *Tametsi* also required that marriages be registered in the Church and regulated the times at which marriages could be performed.<sup>25</sup>

Since the Council did not want to proliferate the number of invalid marriages by promulgating the decree worldwide, it restricted promulgation only to certain countries which limited its effectiveness. However, in 1907, Pope Pius X issued a decree for world-wide promulgation to regulate the Church’s canon law on marriage called “*Ne Temere*.” In addition to universally promulgating the regulation that marriages be performed by a priest and have two witnesses, *Ne Temere* also required that the witnessing priest be a member of the parish church (or if a bishop, the bishop of the local diocese) in which the marriage is to occur. Another priest may be delegated to witness the marriage by the parish priest or local bishop.

*Ne Temere* allowed the Church (even parish priests) to impose conditions for mixed marriages to be valid. The most common of which was the requirement that children of mixed marriages be brought up and educated in the Catholic Church. This imposition of conditions on non-Catholic parties was resisted by certain state governments in Europe, but was common practice throughout the Church. Today, the Church has made some modifications to *Ne Temere*. The most important modification concerns impositions on the non-Catholic party in mixed marriages. Currently, no such conditions are imposed on the non-Catholic party, but Catholic parties are required to declare their intention of continuing to practice the Catholic faith and to do all in their power to share their faith with the children born of the marriage by having them baptized and raised as Catholics. Recently, Pope Francis has made several modifications to Church

<sup>23</sup> D. MacCulloch 2004, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (New York: Penguin) p540.

<sup>24</sup> In Catholic canon law, “validity” refers to whether a sacrament has effect, but “licitness” refers to whether a sacrament is performed properly. Some Church rules regulate validity, and if these rules are violated, the sacrament is invalid and has no effect. Other rules are necessary only for licitness – to be properly performed. Violation of these rules does not affect the efficaciousness of the sacrament, but can incur other penalties for its improper celebration (“valid, but illicit”). Thus, after the Fourth Lateran Council, clandestine marriages were valid but illicit because of a violation of form, but after *Tametsi* at the Council of Trent, clandestine marriages were declared to be invalid – non-effectual and non-sacramental.

<sup>25</sup> See decrees of the Council of Trent – Session 24 – *Tametsi*, J. Waterworth, trans. and ed. (<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct24.html>).

procedures concerning valid marriages and annulments, and these are taken up in Chapter Four below.

### **III.**

## **The Sacrament of Marriage Today**

[Back to top](#)

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* takes up the sacrament of marriage in Sections 1601 – 1666. In 1601, the *Catechism* declares:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

A thorough explanation of this definition of marriage is given in Sections I and II above. We now proceed to a fuller explanation of the Church's view of marriage. We will defer until Chapter Two the discussion of the Church's theology of love, sexuality, exclusivity, indissolubility, the marriage covenant and the contribution of children—and defer until Chapter Three discussion of the attitudes, habits and commitments that maintain and strengthen the marriage bond amidst the stages of intimacy, personality differences, difficult challenges, conflicts, and even insult and betrayal. This section will be devoted to three areas of practice and intention in marriage:

- A. The celebration of marriage.
- B. Matrimonial consent (and mixed marriages).
- C. The effects of the Sacrament.

### **III.A**

## **The Celebration of Marriage**

Though the normal celebration of marriage is in the context of the Eucharistic Liturgy, it can occur outside of it. If it occurs within the Eucharistic Celebration, the exchange of vows and rings takes place after the Liturgy of the Word, the blessing (epiclesis - sealing the Sacrament in the Holy Spirit) after the Our Father, and the final blessing, after the Communion Rite. If the Sacrament takes place outside of the Eucharistic celebration, its four parts are sequentially celebrated as follows:

1. Introduction and Liturgy of the Word (and Homily)
2. The declaration of three intentions, the exchange of vows, and the exchange of rings
3. The Our Father, a nuptial blessing (epiclesis)
4. Final Blessing and Announcement of the newly married couple

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church “the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before

the Church (Section 1623).” Marriage is the only sacrament that is not conferred by an ordained minister (priest, bishop or deacon). The couple confers the sacrament upon themselves by the declaration of their intention and consent to one another. Though this was considered sufficient for a valid marriage prior to 1907, the proliferation and abuse of clandestine marriages compelled the Church to require three additional elements for the validity of the sacrament—the consent is to be given before an ordained minister (usually a priest), before two witnesses, and with the consent of the local parish priest where the marriage is to be registered (see above Section II, Pope Pius X’s universal declaration *Ne Temere*).

The blessing of the priest (the nuptial blessing) confers grace and seals the marriage with the Holy Spirit (the epiclesis). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

In the epiclesis of this sacrament the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church. The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity. (Section 1624)

Within this general framework, there are many options for couples to choose for celebration of the Marriage Sacrament and the Mass – options for the Liturgy of the Word (all readings), for the exchange of vows, the exchange of rings, the Eucharistic Prayer, the Nuptial Blessing, and the Final Blessing. Local parishes will have a book, such as *Together for Life*<sup>26</sup>, that explains these options. Once the couple has made their selection they need only inform their local parish priest—and inform the music minister of music selections, and the parish wedding coordinator of other choices—such as positioning of kneelers (or absence of them), Unity candles, flowers, positioning of the bridal party, etc.

Couples will want to visit their local parish priest at least six months before the marriage ceremony is to take place so to begin the process of formal preparation. This would include:

1. A pre-nuptial investigation with the local priest
2. Obtaining any needed dispensations for mixed marriages or disparity of cult
3. To obtain marriage preparation either from marriage classes or an Engaged Encounter
4. Procuring “freedom to marry” letters
5. Securing church facilities and coordinating the ceremony with the priest, wedding coordinator and music ministers

### **III.B**

#### **The Consent of Marriage (and Mixed Marriages)**

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent; "to be free" means: - not being under constraint;- not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law. (Section 1625)

<sup>26</sup> Joseph M. Champlin & Peter A. Jarret C.S.C. 2016 *Together for Life: Revised with the Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, (Notre Dame, IN; Ave Maria Press)

In the case of mixed marriages-- where one of the parties is not a Catholic, but a baptized Christian--permission must be obtained from the ecclesiastical authority for the marriage to be licit. If permission were not obtained, the marriage would still be valid, but improperly performed. However, in the case of disparity of cult—where one of the parties is not baptized—then an explicit dispensation from this impediment is required for the marriage to be *valid*. If this dispensation is not obtained, then the marriage is invalid, and in the eyes of the Church, not sacramental.

If the above conditions are met— both parties are baptized, or permission has been obtained for a non-Catholic baptized party, or an explicit dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult obtained for a non-baptized party—the two other conditions must be met to have valid marital consent:

1. Both parties must be free to marry.
2. Both parties must knowingly and freely intend and consent to be the spouse of the other for a lifetime.

Let us examine the former condition—that both parties are free to marry. As noted above, this means that couples are free from natural or ecclesiastical impediments before marriage. Some of these impediments include:

- Being too closely related within the family (called degrees of consanguinity) according to Canon law marriages within direct lines on consanguinity and within four degrees of collateral consanguinity are not valid -- parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, great grandparent and great grandchild, brother and sister, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew, and first cousins.
- One of the parties was married in the Catholic Church previously, and this marriage was not annulled. (See Chapter Four below.)
- One of the parties is incapable of intending a lifetime commitment to the other party for psychological reasons, profound immaturity, serious addiction, or profound ignorance (lack of preparation which should be averted by the standard requirements for marriage preparation).
- One of the parties explicitly withholds consummation of the marriage after the marriage ceremony.
- One of the parties is unbaptized, and no explicit dispensation from this impediment is obtained.
- The marriage is not witnessed by a priest or sanctioned by the Church. In such cases, the marriage is considered to be invalid (Canon 1108). Additionally, if a marriage is performed in a non-Catholic setting (such as a home or a club) without a priest and a dispensation from canonical form, the marriage is also invalid.

If the above impediments are not present, then the only remaining condition for valid consent is that each partner knowingly and freely intend to commit themselves in a marriage covenant for a lifetime at the time they make their public declaration before a priest -- “I, XXX, take you, YYY, to be my wife/husband.”

If both parties are capable of making a free commitment, have no natural or ecclesiastical impediments (as noted above) and fully intend (without reservation) to give themselves in marriage for the rest of their lives, then they are validly, exclusively, and indissolubly married. Through this free consent, then each partner confers the sacrament on the other, at which point God blesses the marriage, sanctifies it, and fills it with His grace. The priest then blesses it (through the Nuptial Blessing) sealing it with the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The third impediment mentioned above—one of the parties is incapable of knowingly and freely intending a lifetime marital commitment because of psychological problems or profound immaturity—is difficult to judge. Though the Church tries to obtain letters certifying this freedom, factors might later be revealed (after the marriage ceremony) showing that such capacity was not present. This would make the marriage eligible for annulment after its dissolution. Pope Francis has broadened some of these criteria of “incapacity” in recent documents—and has also shortened the process for obtaining annulments (due to lack of free consent) – see Chapter Four below.

### **III.C The Effects of the Sacrament**

In the sacrament of marriage, Christ strengthens the covenant love of the spouses, reinforcing them in their commitment, their ability to handle challenges, to seek the salvation of the other, to sacrifice themselves for the other, to grow in love for one another, and to raise and educate their children in authentic love and faith. These are real graces in which the company, peace, guidance, security, protection, and inspiration of the Holy Spirit can be experienced individually and collectively as couples try to meet the challenges through their faith in Jesus Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says it this way:

Christ dwells with [the married couple], gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. (Section 1642)

Married couples who take their sacramental life and prayer life seriously will palpably sense the Lord's presence, reassurance, peace, inspiration, and guidance individually and collectively. They will also have an increased sense of satisfaction in their marriage, hope in salvation, resilience in times of challenge, and determination to be faithful to their spouses throughout their lifetime. They will, no doubt, have similar challenges to couples who are less serious about their sacramental and prayer lives, but the way they meet those challenges, the collective love they have for their children, and the desire to remain faithful are significantly increased. These findings are confirmed by four recent large studies at seven universities-- the Florida State University, University of Georgia, Bowling Green State University, Auburn University, East Carolina University, University of North Texas and University of Calgary.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> David Briggs 2015 “5 Ways Faith Contributes to Strong Marriages, New Studies Suggest” in *Huffington Post* (February 08, 2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/5-ways-faith-contributes\\_b\\_6294716](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/5-ways-faith-contributes_b_6294716)

In general, the four studies confirm that following five religious practices leads to more satisfying, intimate, resilient and enduring marriages:

1. Praying with and for your partner correlates with more satisfying and committed relationships (Florida State University and University of Georgia studies).<sup>28</sup>
2. Spiritual intimacy enables couples to resolve conflicts more positively and quickly and to handle the challenges of parenting (Bowling Green State University).<sup>29</sup>
3. Belief in the sacredness of marriage leads to an increase in marital satisfaction and compassionate love (Auburn University and East Carolina University).<sup>30</sup>
4. The ability to turn to spiritual and religious resources (giving rise to a sense of forgiveness, peace, hope, and transcendence) increases marital quality and the capacity to deal with struggles and conflicts (University of North Texas).<sup>31</sup>
5. Individuals who are religiously motivated in choosing a spouse and practice their religion after marriage are far less likely to cheat or be unfaithful (University of Calgary).<sup>32</sup>

The well-known philosopher-theologian and Church father, Tertullian, sums up the joy and depth that comes from Christ and the Holy Spirit to the marriage covenant when a couple remains committed to their sacramental and spiritual life:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.<sup>33</sup>

## Chapter Two

### A Contemporary Theology of Sexuality, Love, and Marriage

[Back to top](#)

Two excellent references elaborating the theology of marriage are Saint John Paul's encyclical letter *Familiaris Consortio* and various sections of the Church's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (Sections 47 – 52). We might briefly sum up the major points made by these and other important documents about the significance, effects, and graces of the sacrament of marriage in three parts:

1. The Exclusive and Indissoluble Commitment of *Eros* (Section I).
2. Marital love and the intentions of common cause and transforming weakness (Section II.A-II.B).
3. Marital love and openness to children (Section II.C).

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*. ("To my wife"—two letters) 2,8,6-7: *Patrologia Latina* 1,1412-1413; cf. *FC* 13.

## I. The Exclusive & Indissoluble Commitment of *Eros*

[Back to top](#)

C.S. Lewis distinguishes four kinds of love in his classic work *The Four Loves*. These are described in detail and related to four levels of love in Volume 16 (Chapter Three). In brief, the four kinds of love are:

1. *Storgē* – a *feeling* of affection
2. *Philia* – friendships based on mutual care and commitment
3. *Eros* – which in the narrow sense refers to romantic or sexual love, but in the broader sense to the exclusive, complete, reciprocal commitment of a man and woman to one another through conjugal union for the sake of mutual support and the generation of children and family.
4. *Agapē* – the unselfish and self-sacrificial love oriented solely toward the good of the other which stands at the foundation of forgiveness, compassion for the marginalized, and complete gift of self for the other. This love describes the essence of Jesus and His Father and is the ideal we are called to by Jesus.

Though *storgē* (affection), *philia* (reciprocally committed friends), and *agapē* (self-sacrificial love for the good of the other) are integral and even essential to marriage, marriage has the unique feature of including *eros* which is not a part of any other vocation within Christianity. For the Christian Church (and C.S. Lewis) romantic and sexual love goes far beyond romance and sexuality, because they are not ends in themselves. They support and solidify a higher end of love, personhood, and family. As Lewis implies, romantic and sexual love are at the service of the highest level of “human to human” commitment – that brings the highest level of “human to human” love to its earthly fulfillment. When entered into appropriately, it necessarily includes self-sacrificial love aimed solely at the good of the spouse, the children, and the family unit.

Lewis understood well that the ideal of *eros* must be more than *storgē* – feelings of affection – and more than the feelings of romance – even intense romance. It must be built upon the foundation of friendship – that is upon an ever-deepening reciprocal commitment of two people to each other which brings trust, care, support, happiness, dignity, and fulfillment that would not otherwise be possible without this commitment. Friendships can grow, but they must do so reciprocally. Thus, if one person commits more of his time, energy, future, and self to another, but that other does not reciprocate, then the friendship will not grow in trust, care, support, happiness, dignity, and fulfillment. However, if the increased commitment is reciprocated, the friendship will grow in these ways.

Back to Lewis – *eros* (in the broader sense of highest, exclusive, reciprocal love) builds on *philia* (friendship). When a man and woman become attracted romantically to each other, the natural course for this romance is not to jump immediately to sexual expression, but to grow in friendship – reciprocal commitment and love – which in the context of romance finds its expression first in deep care, intimacy, tenderness, generativity, and understanding which awakens the desire to support the other in their need (instead of being disappointed or angered by weakness) and to seek out ways of contributing to the other (level 3 happiness) and helping the other toward

salvation (level 4 happiness). Within this high level of commitment and friendship, romance seeks its proper end – the highest level of human commitment, intimacy, and mutual care that will be necessary for raising children and maintaining a high level of familial care and bondedness – that is, a caring home.

So what is wrong with leaping from romance to sexual expression without developing this commitment and bondedness of friendship? It short-circuits the development of the friendship. It gives the mistaken impression that the libidinal and erotic feelings of union are the true end of romance and the union to which it calls us. Instead of focusing on developing friendship – developing our level of care, support, intimacy, understanding, forgiveness, and common cause through mutual commitment – the premature leap to sexuality focuses us on the continuance of libidinal and erotic passions as ends in themselves. Though this short circuiting can be more pronounced in some couples than in others, it tends to affect all romantic relationships to a significant degree.

This does not mean that romantic courtships getting off to a false start – a premature foray into sexual expression – cannot be redirected toward developing the commitment or friendship. But if this is to happen, then sexual expression cannot be the primary focus of the relationship – with the “other stuff” falling to a secondary or tertiary place – which it will frequently do because of the intensity of passion intrinsic to sexual expression. At some juncture, a courting couple who wants to grow in commitment, friendship, intimacy, understanding, and common cause, has to refrain from sexual expression until the other more important (but sometimes less exciting) dimensions of highest friendship and commitment can be developed according to their natural progression. The idea that living together before marriage will be helpful is, in most cases, quite deceptive. The couple should be hyperaware of what is *not* being developed while the focus is on sexual passion. The intensity of passion frequently obscures the subtlety of intimacy, generativity, understanding, and affectionate care that will be required to sustain an exclusive, highly reciprocal commitment, raise children, and create a loving home when, as they say, “passions inevitably die down.”

The wisdom of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church – founded on the above ideals of love – advise strongly to reserve the high manifestation of passion in sexual expression for the time when the commitment has developed adequately and the intention to declare it the highest and exclusive commitment has been made public. In so doing, the couple makes certain that all of the subtlety exciting work of developing a relationship is not short circuited by the intense passion of sexual expression, and also allows the intense expression of sexual passion to reinforce and support their well-developed commitment in intimacy, generativity, understanding, and common cause. Though contemporary pop culture can ridicule such traditional wisdom about romantic love, it has no real grounds for so doing, because that traditional wisdom, properly carried out in courtship and marriage, results in high-level, long-lasting, generative families that have interior strength, self-sacrificial contribution, and the salvation of all parties as their objective. Several statistical studies show this to be the case (see Volume 17, Chapter Two, Sections IV.A and IV.B).

Christian wisdom does not reject premature sexual expression for reasons of prudishness or an insensitive imposition of rules on couples who are “in love.” It does not do so for motives of repression of sexual desire or a feigned moral high ground (“I am so shocked you could think of

that,” or “I would never...”). Christian wisdom is built upon the solid foundation of Christian love which at its highest level is expressed as *agapē* (self-sacrificial love for the good of the other) and sees in *eros* the needed passionate support to make the highest level of “human to human” commitment come alive for the sake of the couple, their family, and ultimately, their salvation. Every other mean motive attributed to the Christian theology of marriage is an oversimplified caricature of a wisdom which deserves far more respect.

We move to another related question. Why must romantic love be within an exclusive relationship – with one person only? Once again, we return to the end or objective of sexual love. Can it be an end in itself? Or is its proper end to support and ground the highest level of friendship and “human to human” commitment? It is quite clear what happens when sexual “love” becomes an end in itself. The more separated it is from the high level of commitment which it is called to reinforce, the more it results in an “objectification” or “thingification” of the other – the other as mere “physical body” or “mere cause of physical arousal” or mere “instrument of physical pleasure.” Divorcing sexuality from genuine commitment to the good of others, de-humanizes and de-spiritualizes them. It implicitly says that we care more about the arousal, pleasure, and ego-satisfaction they bring to us than about them in their individual dignity, lovability, goodness, and transcendence.

All human beings are remarkably sensitive – we know when we are really cared about and cared for – and know when we are really being used for the pleasure and ego-gratification of others. Some might object that level 1 and level 2 people are content with being mere instruments of pleasure and ego-gratification because that brings *them* ego-gratification and pleasure. As will be explained in Volume 13, this is only partially true. Though part of their psychic framework is content with being sought after as an object of arousal, pleasure, and ego-gratification, there are higher levels of psyche (arising out of empathy, conscience, and spiritual-numinous awareness) that are not content with this reduction of self to an “it” and reduction of the relationship to “I-it.” These higher levels of psyche are actually hurt and demoralized by such degradation.

Even the most popular individuals realize implicitly that it is one thing to be “hot” (sought after as desirable or beautiful) but another thing to be a “uniquely good, lovable, and transcendental mystery worthy of the highest levels of care and commitment from human beings and God.” Though some may protest that they have no such higher levels of psyche, it may do well for them to look at themselves over the course of time – are they developing callouses toward real intimacy – a hardness of heart and soul? Do they have increasing feelings of interior emptiness and loneliness both on a human and cosmic level (see Volume 13 Chapter Four)? Are they beginning to question whether they lived up to their fullest potential, dignity, meaning, and fulfillment – both now and into the future – even an eternal future? These are but a few signs of their emerging – though repressed – higher levels of psyche that are trying to make themselves known before it’s too late.

In sum, when sexual love is viewed as an end in itself, it short-circuits the proper development of intimacy, generativity, and committed friendship necessary for long-lasting relationship and family – instead of helping it. Moreover, it dehumanizes and despiritualizes the person who is reduced from the recipient of committed care and support to a mere object of arousal, pleasure, and ego-gratification. No matter how much one might like being sought after as

such an object, it is not enough – not nearly enough to fulfill our higher levels of psyche. Indeed, we receive the hurtful message that we are not worthy of our highest dignity and fulfillment – but only the instrument of another’s pleasure.

We now return to the question about why *eros* must be exclusive – with one person only. If the natural end of *eros* is to support the highest level of friendship – the highest level of commitment, of self and future to the care, support, and salvation of another for the purpose of raising children destined for eternal salvation, than *eros* (romantic and sexual expression) is meant to support that highest level of committed love in which children deserve to be raised – the kind of commitment that will give rise to a truly loving home destined for our eternal home. Evidently, sexual expression gives rise to children – and given the above articulation of Christian wisdom -- sexual expression is meant to support the highest level of committed human love which leads naturally to a loving home for those children. In this context alone, *eros* reaches its functional fulfillment (procreation) and its ideal fulfillment (a loving home through the highest form of committed love) which is, so to speak, a perfect marriage.

At this juncture, the answer to our question is mere logic. If *eros* is meant to support the highest level of commitment giving rise to a loving home, then it must be exclusive – with one person only. After all, how many “highest level of commitments” can you have? How many “first priority” commitments can you have? If the marital commitment is the first priority of human commitments, there can be no other priority of equal importance – logically. Every other commitment must be second or third when compared with the first priority.

The reason why the marital commitment is called a “vow” instead of a “promise” is not only because of the religious character of a Catholic marriage, but also because it reflects the indissolubility intrinsic to the highest commitment of self for the good of the other and the family. This commitment enables each person to trust that there will be no abrogation of the relationship -- even under the most challenging circumstances. This *solemn* trust on the part of both parties is absolutely necessary if they are to change their identities, purpose, and lives completely. Yet this is precisely what a loving home and family require. For such a home and family cannot be grounded in autonomy (“me first”) -- it must be given over to mutuality and reciprocity. Similarly, a loving home and family cannot be grounded in domination – but only in submissiveness, listening, and solicitude. Again, a loving home and family cannot be grounded in the expectation of *being* gratified and fulfilled alone – it must anticipate receiving gratification and fulfillment through gratifying and fulfilling spouse and children. Again, a loving home and family cannot be grounded in keeping one’s time, priorities, and happiness for oneself – it requires subordinating “my time” to “our time,” “my priorities” to “our priorities,” and “my happiness” to “our happiness.”

All of these radical changes in identity, meaning, and fulfillment require radical *trust* – a conviction grounded not just in a guarantee, but in a *solemn* guarantee before God, family, friends, and the public. The solemnity of this vow that grounds each person’s radical trust creates the necessary *freedom* to make the radical changes needed to transform two “me’s” into an indissoluble “us” – which is the ideal ground of a loving home and family. Yes – there will be many other requirements for this loving home and family -- such as daily sacrifices, honesty, charity, forgiveness, faith, and God’s grace working through it all – but all of these are dependent upon the radical trust needed to change one’s identity, meaning, and life – a radical trust which is

dependent on the solemnity of the marriage vow. If this is understood by each party from the beginning, a loving home and family have a solid foundation “built on rock” which can survive the buffeting of winds, rain, and every form of challenge; but without the *solemn* intention of highest commitment, indissolubility, and exclusivity, the marriage is “built on sand,” and in today’s world with its ever-challenging surrogates for highest, exclusive, and indissoluble love, it is almost doomed to failure. The solemnity of the marriage vow is freedom for the other to commit and love completely – to give up the “me” for the “us”, and to create a new relationship which will become the loving home needed to protect, nurture, educate, and raise children who will in turn be capable of virtue, committed love, and faith.

A violation of the marriage vow – such as infidelity – or an abrogation of it in divorce is so hurtful and demoralizing, that it can literally ruin the other spouse and undermine the identity and stability of the children. For this reason, the Church insists at the inception of marriage on what Jesus declared long ago – the pure intention and solemn vow of complete fidelity, indissolubility and exclusivity to the other party. This requires adequate preparation before marriage so that the kind of love and the solemnity of the vow are completely understood—for without such understanding, the intention of indissolubility and exclusivity is meaningless.

## II.

### Three Additional Intentions for a Good Marriage

[Back to top](#)

The intention of fidelity, exclusivity, and indissolubility is the primary intention needed for marriage, but there are other intentions that are also needed if sacramental marriage is to be successful and blessed as Christ conceived it. As noted above, the solemn vow of exclusivity and indissolubility enables each partner to have the radical trust and freedom to relinquish the “me” in favor of the “us.” This is what creates a new reality – a new unity and relationship. There are three other intentions that can focus a couple’s vision and conduct on attitudes supportive of exclusivity and indissolubility:

1. The intention to have a *common* good-- *common* cause—to which individual goods or causes are subordinated.
2. To intend to deepen their understanding, toleration, forgiveness, respect, friendship, and commitment through their weaknesses and collective challenges.
3. To intend the creation of a family by openness to children and the requisite covenant love needed to support them and to educate them in the Catholic faith.

Let us consider each of these intentions in the next three subsections.

### II.A

#### The Intention Toward Common Cause

With respect to common cause, it is not enough that the couple *become* a new reality; they must act like one. Sometimes couples believe that being in love is oriented toward the other partner alone. Though intimate, affectionate, generative, understanding and forgiving love are absolutely essential to marriage, it is not enough; for such a marriage would only be inward

looking, yet we must remember that love always goes beyond itself—not just one partner’s love for the other partner, but the two partners’ united love for the people beyond and around them. A loving couple is not meant to serve the other person alone but their united love is meant to serve the people around them. Just as each individual must seek the good of the other, so also the union itself—united love of the couple—must seek the good of others beyond itself.

Christian wisdom has consistently held that an exclusively inward looking marital love is nothing more than another pool of Narcissus. Recall that Narcissus was so enamored by his reflection in the pool that he fell into the pool and drowned. The same thing occurs with the couple that looks into one another’s eyes and is so enamored by the “just us” that they see no purpose beyond themselves. They simply isolate their purpose in one another’s finitude – and “drown.” “Just us” is “just wrong”, and is doomed to failure.

The union arising out of marital love must go beyond itself—first and foremost to the children of the marriage, then to ideals that a couple can and want to fulfill together, e.g. religion (participation in a church or prayer), cultural, social and political ideals (e.g. attempts to influence the culture or politics in a positive direction), service or educational ideals (helping the poor, assisting in the school, etc.). So long as a couple finds common cause in their children, their family and friends, their religion, and the greater community, their union will flourish – much like an individual who flourishes by doing the good beyond himself.

This does not mean that a couple should not do things independently of one another. Each partner still has an autonomous life – with different friends, different job responsibilities, and even different causes or ideals they intend to support. Yet, autonomous activity alone is not enough, for the union a couple constitutes through their mutual love must also serve a positive purpose beyond itself. Naturally, children are the primary common good and common cause of any marital union. But, there are many other contexts in which a couple can participate in and serve the greater community through their union with one another. The more they invest their common effort and idealism in children, friends, relatives, community service, religion, religious service, etc, the more their union will grow in strength, for as Christ intimated long ago, the one who dies to himself will find himself and be raised anew. Therefore it is incumbent upon the couple not only to find autonomous ways of serving a good beyond themselves, but also united ways—even including their children—serving a good beyond the family.

## **II.B**

### **The Intention to Transform Weakness & Challenge into Stronger Covenant Love**

Let us proceed to the second intention—the commitment to grow in intimacy, understanding, forgiveness and respect through one another’s weakness and through collective challenges. Engaged couples should be aware of the fact that growth in intimate relationships is by no means steady and unhindered. Even if a couple has agreed on important potentially conflictual issues before the marriage (such as religious practice, spending, finances, the raising of children, etc) relationships go through stages of decompression, disinterest, and even resentments for typical conduct (see below Chapter Three). This means that both parties will likely experience a range of negative emotions that become expressed when there are stresses within the

relationship, in the workplace and from children, weaknesses, “the same old thing,” and silent resentments. The best marriages make provision for these natural decompressions, stresses, weaknesses, and their resultant emotional negativity. Ironically, if handled well, these negative influences on the marriage can lead to growth in intimacy, understanding, compassionate love, and marital love (eros).

The following three-fold plan of action can transform these “negatives” into long-term “positives”

- (A) Realism and Planning
- (B) Prayer and Grace
- (C) Understanding and Forgiveness (through Grace)

(A) *Realism and Planning*. The first step in what might be called “transformational love” is to give up naïve assumptions, such as, “I never thought xxx could happen!” or “I never bargained for this!” or “I thought God would work everything out perfectly”. These and similar thoughts have absolutely no basis in any relationship in reality. Their presumption by either party – or the couples themselves—can only lead to disappointment and dashed expectations. Yes—we want to enter a marriage hoping for the best and expecting high standards of ourselves and our spouse, but we cannot build a psychological expectation of perfection on the part of the other—or ourselves. Such expectations lead in the beginning to subtle irritation, then frustration, then to blatant anger, and then some form of rejection.

A more successful strategy is to hope for the best and make a realistic plan of action when things do not go as well as might be expected. Plan ahead of time *not* to move into “silent resentment mode.” Agree as a couple before the marriage on how you want to *charitably communicate* points of disagreement, irritation, and frustration where the offended party will have to give as much to the remedy as the offender. Resolve ahead of time to make backup plans for how to live through difficult times in the relationship in a non-ideal, but workable way. Above all, plan to engage in the next two steps – prayer and forgiveness. Louis Pasteur observed that “chance favors the prepared mind”—not only chance, but patience and benevolence within deeply committed relationships.

(B) *Prayer and Grace*. Individual faith - -and the grace that results from it—are integral to dealing with the deep emotional hurts that can occur in romantic marital relationships. Shared faith is even more powerful in patiently contending with insensitivity, frustration, hurt feelings and resentments. The deeper one’s love and commitment, the more deeply insensitivity, being ignored, being taken for granted, being marginalized, and being insulted will be felt. As noted above, realism and planning help to mitigate these negative feelings, but we cannot underestimate how powerful individual prayer—and particularly shared prayer—can be in finding a solution to a problem. Shared prayer – “Lord, help us to understand and respect one another more...” -- can bring a problem to light while calling us to *authenticity before God* at the time of prayer.

It truly amazes me how praying about a problem with a person helps me to be honest in my own imaginative conception of the problem, honest about my role in it, understanding and forgiving of the other in his/her weakness, and revealing of my hidden hypocrisies in

communicating my side of the problem. By praying about a difficulty or problem, we invite God into our individual conscience as well as the collective ethos in the relationship. God's presence (and grace), calls us to a higher level of honesty, authenticity, respect for the other, and forgiveness of the other which is precisely the call of Jesus in the Beatitudes.

In this moment of shared grace, a couple may take the opportunity to write some of the things they need to help the relationship move forward. This must be a two-sided *charitable* exercise – in which there is dialogue about each point that each partner brings up. The objective would be to find some way of accommodating a needed change so that it is not overly burdensome to one of the parties or require a complete change in personality or nature. When the couple is finished communicating about these changes, it is helpful to conclude with a prayer asking the Lord for the resolve to succeed in accommodating them. Including this petition in nightly shared prayer over the course of several weeks helps to make it a reality.

(C) *Understanding and Forgiveness.* As might be expected, prayer and shared faith are integral to understanding and forgiveness. Prayer not only calls us to greater authenticity, but also to Jesus' precepts of refraining from negative judgement, profoundly respecting the other, and forgiving the other from the heart "seventy times seven times". It is easy to jump to judgement when one is tired, irritated, or "fed up." Caught up in the emotion of the moment, our imagination begins to work overtime with remarkable creativity. We want to justify our impatience or anger, and so we prepare a set of statements that sounds like the concluding speech of a prosecuting attorney at a criminal trial. Somehow we conceive of ourselves as an innocent offended party, and the other as an aggressive criminal. Furthermore, the characterization of the offensive actions seems to originate and proceed from the offending party alone. I would not mention this so bluntly if I hadn't done it so many times myself. I want to excuse myself for the negative conduct I am about to display.

The best part about faith—particularly shared faith—is that it becomes increasingly hard to believe my skewed story when my heart is open to the Lord. Somehow the parable of the ungrateful servant keeps creeping into my prayer. After being forgiven thousands of times for greater offenses by the Lord I am throttling my fellow servant by saying "pay me what you owe!" It's not that this parable makes me feel fearful—it really does not—because I believe in God's unconditional love for me. Rather, it makes me feel like a complete hypocrite before the perfectly authentic and loving Lord. This implicit call to "authenticity" has been indispensable in every deep friendship I have experienced. I have to stop, question my motive before the Lord, and re-align myself to the reality around me. This tends to dispel the irritation and negative emotion—as well as the mythologizing of the other's negative traits. Once done, I can get about doing the hard spiritual work of understanding, excusing, and forgiving.

Understanding, putting ourselves in the other's shoes, is much easier to accomplish when we know we are loved by God—and so is the other. When we recognize God's benevolent gaze upon us, it is difficult to blind ourselves to the Good News in the other (see Volume 13). As we allow the unique goodness, lovability and mystery of the other to penetrate our consciousness, appreciation, respect and compassion begin to naturally arise in our psyche. When this occurs, we must seize the opportunity to put ourselves into the other's shoes—to look upon the other with the

kind of love with which the Lord looks upon us. At this juncture, seeing the other through the compassionate eyes of Christ, we will want to make an intentional act of forgiveness.

Forgiveness should be distinguished from forgetting. The former can be done immediately by simply using the prayer, “Lord, You are the just judge—You take care of it, or him, or her.” When we let an offense go—by putting it into the Lord’s hands and then praying for the offending party—we let go of the just penalty we might want to exact in vengeance upon the other. We give that just penalty to the Lord trusting that He will take care of the needed nuances of heart that are beyond our power. As I pray this prayer, I notice a freedom and peace coming over me which becomes the first step to forgetting. I have told generations of classes that “forgetting takes at least six months longer than forgiving—and if the offense is great, up to several years longer!” How true this is, but truer still is the fact that failure to forgive the other will result in the complete incapacity to forget. Indeed, the opposite will occur – vengeance will beget vengeance, and violence will beget violence, until the unforgiven and unforgotten offense drives us and the other to madness. Thus we must do everything in our power to see the Lord’s love for us and the other, to look benevolently at the other through His eyes, and to make the all-important prayer that begins the process of forgiveness that begins “Lord, You are the just judge—You take care of it.” Slowly but surely, our grip will loosen – we will no longer have to hold onto anger in indignation of the offense which has seared into our memory—and we can begin the natural process of forgetting through continual forgiveness and prayer for the offender.

One final point should be made about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the intention to let go of the just penalty for an unjust offense into the Lord’s hands, but this does not mean we have to endure continual abuse without seeking remediation or defending ourselves. In Christian theology, we have every right to protect ourselves and to seek a path to better conduct in the future. We can be sure Christ wants us to communicate about better ways to be respectful and understanding within the relationship—and to make certain that we are not continuously abused.

So where does forgiveness come in? It affects the way we redress intolerable issues or offenses. What Christ asks us to do is to seek redressing of and protection from unjust actions, but “not” with anger, hatred, and vengeance at the core of our being. Nothing good will come of that. Rather, we must seek redressing and protection with peace, understanding, and compassion – though seek it persistently, diligently, and if need be, with *hard love*, if the offending party is not willing to listen. The Lord is not against us requesting love and understanding—or redressing intolerable offenses and repeated conduct, but rather anger, hatred, and vengeance in the heart—all of which are interrelated (see Mt.5: 21-22). Since this is only achievable through Grace, our second step of bringing God, prayer, and grace into the picture is absolutely essential.

We return now to our original point, namely, that when we make a firm resolve to understand and forgive one another from the heart “seventy times seven times”, weaknesses, stresses, insensitivity, insults, and challenges of every kind can actually *help* us to grow in intimacy, compassion, and relational bonding rather than undermining them. As noted above, the best way of achieving this understanding and forgiveness is to prepare ahead of time to be realistic, to formulate backup plans, to be prayerful, to ask the other and to share prayer, and to allow God into the process of forgiveness, “Lord, You are the just judge—You take care of it”. No doubt

this three-step plan requires discipline and diligence, but in the end it will not only save marriages but help them to achieve their highest fulfillment in love and in Heaven.

## II.C

### The Intention Toward Children and Family

The third intention for a sound Catholic marriage is openness to children and family. In his remarkably insightful encyclical letter *Familiaris Consortio*, St. John Paul expresses how children and the covenant of family bring *eros*—exclusive indissoluble conjugal love – to its fruition.

In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal "knowledge" which makes them "one flesh," does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother.<sup>34</sup>

Children and family raise the dignity of marriage to a supreme height by the creation of three new loving and transcendent realities:

1. The generation of children whose transcendent and eternal nature will be brought to fruition by God's creation of their unique trans-physical soul.
2. The creation of a familial bond and home that will bring the parent's and children's love to heightened fulfillment.
3. The creation of a family dynamic capable of influencing the heart, spirit, and inner dynamic of the community, culture and society, which will in turn, give humane, moral, and transcendent direction to the culture and society

## II.C.1

### The Generation of Children and the Creation of Family

The objective of conjugal love, from a natural-biological point of view, is procreation. This procreative act goes far beyond a merely biological or animalic activity, for it brings a transcendent and eternal soul into existence through God's creative act. Parents provide the occasion for the creation of this transcendent soul not only by creating a body to which the soul will be united, but also a loving, spiritual covenant in which the child's spirit will be awakened and fed by faith, religion, love, moral goodness, wisdom, and education.

Recall from Volume 2, that God's creation of a unique, transcendental soul not only gives rise to the capacity for human self-consciousness to live eternally beyond the death of the body, but also a gift of five kinds of transcendental awareness and desire – the desire for perfect truth, love, goodness-justice, beauty, and home – a profoundly spiritual awareness and yearning that

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* in Vatican website, ([www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio)), Section 14

finds its culmination not only in the perfection of these attributes, but in communion with the unconditionally loving Trinity themselves. There can be no higher calling in human life than this – except perhaps the actual care and guidance of souls toward their fulfillment in God. Parents have both roles – being the instruments through which God creates a soul (or souls) as well as the ground of a faithful family through which that soul can be guided to eternal life.

## II.C.2

### The Creation of Familial Bonding and Loving Home for the Children

The immense dignity of the parental vocation does not eclipse the dignity of the married vocation addressed above – they complement one another. Though a single parent can raise a child well, the ideal for the child is to have the love, support, faith, and guidance of both parents – individually and collectively so that they may benefit from the distinct contributions and the unitive love coming from the couple. This underlies Jesus’ admonition to intend marriage indissolubly.

Evidently, this ideal parental contribution may not occur—partially because of negative challenges along life’s way – such as unanticipated stresses and difficulties that seriously undermine the individuals or the relationship – or endangerment of the children (arising out of drugs, alcohol, or unforeseen psychological disorders). However, when mitigating factors can be managed through faith, charity, and the four cardinal virtues (see Volume 16), God’s Will is that we continue to solemnly intend the indissolubility of the marriage for the sake of the couple, the relationship, and above all the children. If we do this, the children will be the beneficiaries of the spouses’ unity, stability, and synergistic and complementary action – as well as their spiritual life, moral principles, wisdom, and education. If divorce or death of a spouse should occur, spouses must do their best to assure that the children see the dignity of the other spouse and learn the common principles of their parents – despite their separated condition.

The vocation of parenthood is not only one of the highest possible meanings of life which brings the union of marriage to its fulfillment and highest dignity – children themselves also enhance the lives of their parents as well as the marital union itself. We do not have to look very far to see how much the love of children means to the identity, dignity, and meaning of the parents – children impart these kinds of meaning and fulfillment to their parents on a daily basis by simply expressing natural affection and need. Yes -- temper tantrums, bad behavior, and life’s discouragements punctuate the parent-child relationship, but the bond of love between generative parents and their children is so strong that parents naturally transform these challenges into occasions of self-sacrificial love (*agapē*). This seems to happen almost universally even in families that are severely challenged by environmental and economic stresses. This natural bond—this natural manifestation of self-sacrificial love—is most often undermined when parents are cruel, unloving, or uncaring – or when children have severe psychological difficulties brought on by physical challenges (brain and nervous system disorders), severe trauma, inherited addictions from parents, physiological problems arising out of maturation, friendships with unstable or troubled children, or an absence of hope (from lack of religion and significant friendships). The challenges, emotions, independence, mischievousness, and tensions of adolescence are generally overcome if parents remain patient, loving and firm in guidance, and supportive in dignity, love and faith. When parents remain steady and committed to their children,

children will eventually return their love – in gifts of appreciation, faithfulness, love, meaning in life, and when they are older, physical and psychological support. This loving and life-giving relationship will endure throughout eternity – complemented by the divine parental love of the Trinity.

As noted above, the family is a reflection of the Holy Trinity itself. Recall from above, that the Trinity’s love is not complete when the Father loves the Son and the Son, receiving the love of the Father, loves Him in return. They form a union with one another—and this loving union must go beyond itself just as the love of both individuals must go beyond themselves. Thus when the union between the parents moves beyond itself to the good of the children, it replicates the union between the Father and the Son moving beyond itself to the Holy Spirit.

Yet, familial love does not end there. When children receive this unitive love from their parents, they return love to their parents in a way that makes their *parents’* love and bondedness come alive and solidify. This is very similar to the fourth loving procession of the Holy Trinity. The Spirit does not simply receive the love of the Father and Son—He returns His love to the Father and Son which completes (fulfills) their love for one another.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the family—imitating the Trinity—manifests the highest and most complete manifestation of interpersonal human love.

### II.C.3

#### **The Creation of the Heart, Spirit, and Inter-dynamic of Community, Culture, and Society**

The family goes beyond the creation of transcendent life, and beyond bringing human interpersonal personhood to its highest manifestation and fulfillment. It is also the social unit that constitutes community, culture, and society. These four dynamic social realities—family, community, culture, and society—must be differentiated from merely political units of group interaction—such as cities and states. Political units of organization *extrinsically* govern citizens—who accept the governing *authority* of the city or state (commonly called “the social contract”). We accept such governmental authority for the sake of civil order, protection from external enemies, protection from criminals, and the production of needed social goods (e.g. bridges, roads, and water reservoirs that cannot be purchased by single individuals or small organizations). However, notice that governments or states do not impart a dynamic ethos grounding interpersonal support, camaraderie, common cause, and “spirit” (the human capacity for self-awareness, self-transcendence and idealistic aspiration). However, families, communities, cultures, and societies, *do* impart these intangible manifestations of our individual and collective spirit, our interpersonal personhood, and our mutual commitment to one another’s good. Our full social nature cannot be brought to fruition by the mere external governance of a city or a state—although we need such governance for order, protection, and social goods. We need much more than extrinsic relatedness; our interpersonal nature requires and seeks mutual support, some sense

<sup>35</sup> There is an important difference between the Holy Trinity and the interpersonal relationship within a family. The love of the parents creates the embodiment of the child through which God *creates* the child’s soul. In contrast, the Holy Spirit is not created by the love of the Father and the Son—He is naturally generated from the one unrestricted power and nature of God from all eternity—just as the Father and the Son. We do not know *how* this eternal generation of the three persons occurs from the one unrestricted power–nature of God; we only know *that* it can occur through this unrestricted power because there is no limit to what can be timelessly generated through an unrestricted power timelessly existing through itself. See the metaphysical proof of God --Volume One (Chapter Two, Section II).

of friendship or camaraderie, shared principles and ideals, and shared transcendental ideals (often expressed in religion). We need an *intrinsic* ethos—a felt and thought interior dynamic that can animate and edify our interpersonal personhood, social bondedness, transcendental nature, and societal action.

Though this shared interior, spiritual, idealistic, and interpersonal ethos is intangible, it is very real—creating a group dynamic that can call us to the heights of human nature—or to the depths of human depravity. It all depends on what the ethos is. If the ethos is high-minded, committed to moral principles, social peace and contribution, does not undermine the ideals of familial, interpersonal, and transcendental love, then it will call us to a culture of universal intrinsic human dignity, the common good, and increasing beneficence. However, if the ethos does not have the *heart*, or *spirit* to embrace high-mindedness, interpersonal respect and friendship (neighborliness), and our highest moral and transcendental ideals, then it is likely to call us *downward*—to a culture and society that will ultimately undermine human dignity, common cause, beneficence and hope. Such cultures tend to implode—by promoting egocentricity, self-idolatry, autonomy (rather than interpersonal welfare), and stoic indifference (rather than neighborliness).

How do we build an ethos with the *heart* and *spirit* that will incorporate not only high ideals but also friendship, neighborliness, shared beneficence, transcendental aspirations, and hope? Though political organizations – such as cities or states-- can try to inspire these qualities *extrinsically*, they are completely incapable of imparting this dynamic *interiorly* and *directly*. So how can we build an ethos with the heart and spirit capable of intrinsically and dynamically imparting this social dynamic? I would maintain that it has always fallen to, and will always fall to the most intimate and powerful “heart and spirit creating” and “ethos creating” interpersonal unit within society—namely *the family*.

As noted above, cities, states, and governments do not create heart, spirit, and interiorly loving or transcendental dynamics—they govern from without. Furthermore, as sociological and cultural studies reveal, societies do not create heart, spirit, and interiorly loving and transcendental dynamics—they inherit these qualities from smaller interpersonal associations, such as communities and families. Additionally, since cultures are not interpersonal associations (like communities and societies) but only “manifestors” or “expressors” of the interior ethos of communities and societies, they too do not create the heart, spirit, and interiorly loving and transcendental dynamics of communities or societies.

So what *is* the origin of this interpersonal and communal dynamic—the heart, spirit, and interiorly loving and transcendental dynamic of a beneficent ethos within society? If societies are built on communities, and communities built on families—the most intimate, powerful and originative force of heart, spirit, and interiorly loving and transcendental dynamics—then I would submit that family is the foundation for a good community and society. Furthermore, if cities, states, and governments have no heart or spirit—but are only premised on the extrinsic authoritative relationships of needed political power—then good societies are the foundation of a good state—not vice versa. No constitution, no set of extrinsic, legal, prescriptions or proscriptions, no set of legal and administrative statutes will ever lead to heart, spirit, and an interiorly loving and transcendental dynamic -- it can only do what mere written prescriptions can do—extrinsically regulate through extrinsic political power. Thus, if we are to have a good society

animating a good state or government, then it will have to be built on good families animating good communities. Thus, families are not only the means through which eternal souls are brought into the world and the means through which interpersonal love is brought to completion and fulfillment (like the Holy Trinity) they are also the building blocks—the heart and spirit—the loving and transcendental dynamic-- of community and society that internally regulate the administration of power by governments and the state.

So how do families act as this fundamental building block of community, society, and the good state? They are the natural place in which heart and spirit arise. “Heart”—empathy, concern, and care for others —arises not just out of the soul’s powers or capacities, but out of parental love itself. When children are appreciated and loved – we can see their capacity for empathy and care coming into being—not just in the smile on their face or their desire to be in friendship and community with others, but also in their desire to share and to sympathize with others in need. The parents’ love does not go into a black hole never to re-emerge. When it is apprehended, it gives dignity, meaning, and fulfillment which orients the child back toward the parent in empathy—not only in expressions of need or want for more, but also in wanting to give back—through sharing or by the little sayings like “Mommy, I love you.” The more that parents express their love for the child, the more that capacity for empathy and “heart” develops.

Something similar happens with respect to “spirit”—the capacity for transcendence, self-transcendence, and high aspirations. As noted in Volume 2, the human soul comes into the world with the capacity to survive bodily death, five transcendental desires for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty and home—the capacity for spiritual life, symbolic expression, conceptual articulation, virtue and moral reasoning. Parents have the capacity to bring all of these powers of their children’s soul to a high state of functionality which will ultimately determine the meaning, dignity, identity, and destiny of their children.

To the extent that parents neglect the intrinsic power of their children’s souls, they let these powers remain in dormancy, which not only negatively affects their children’s meaning, identity, dignity, and destiny (hope) but also their children’s happiness. For example, if parents do not meet their children’s spiritual/religious needs, they not only leave those powers dormant, but can expect their children when they reach adolescence to have higher rates of suicide, depression, meaninglessness, impulse aggressivity, substance abuse, and familial tensions.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, they can expect to find that their children’s ethical development, as well as their capacity to act ethically in particular situations—will also be negatively affected.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, if parents do not model virtue and high ideals, they can expect their children to move toward the lowest

<sup>36</sup> These correlations have been shown by an extensive study carried out by Dervic Kanita and ten other psychiatrists published for the Journal of the American Psychiatric Association. See Dervic Kanita, Oquendo M, Grunebaum M, Ellis S, Burke A, Mann JJ, 2004. “Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt.” In *American Journal of Psychiatry* (Vol. 161, No. 12). pp 2303-2308. <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=177228>.

<sup>37</sup> See Parboteeah KP, Hoegl M, Cullen JB, 2008 “Ethics and Religion: An Empirical Test of a Multidimensional Model” in *Journal of Business Ethics* 2008 (Vol. 80) pp 387-398; see also Josephson Institute: Center for Youth Ethics. Honesty and Integrity “The Ethics of American Youth: 2012” in News Release from Josephson Center of Ethics November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012, ([https://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard/2012/installment\\_report-card\\_honesty-integrity.html](https://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard/2012/installment_report-card_honesty-integrity.html))

modeled standard.<sup>38</sup> Finally, a parental emphasis on competitiveness over empathy and contribution will lead to a lack of empathy on the part of their children.<sup>39</sup>

The message is clear, if parents want their children to be happy and fulfilled, to have optimal meaning, dignity, and sense of destiny, and to develop the powers of their soul and spirit so that they will be leaders in their own families, community, culture and society, they will want to awaken in and model for their children a capacity for spiritual depth, self-transcendence, participation in religion, moral virtue, and empathy for others (independent of their competitiveness, intelligence and talents). If they do this, they will fulfill the third objective of family—to create heart, spirit, and the interior loving and transcendental dynamics that will animate communities, cultures, and societies.

Are there other ways in which parents and families can awaken and edify communities and societies? Yes—they do this naturally by associating first with community organizations involving the whole family. The three most prevalent organizations for the whole family are churches, schools, and community organizations dedicated to family participation (e.g. boy scouts, girl scouts, sports leagues and service organizations). Church is first and foremost a place of community worship but it is also a place of education and socialization around religion. Parents associate with other parents and children associate with children through this socialization. The stronger and more nuanced the heart, spirit, and interior dynamic of the family the more of these qualities they bring to the church community—and so they naturally build and enhance that community. The same thing holds true for schools and community organizations (e.g. boy scouts) - the stronger the heart, spirit, and ideals within these families, the more they fill their local schools and community organizations with these dynamic qualities. Good families can't help themselves—they inspire heart and spirit in local organizations, which calls other families to stronger virtues, self-transcendence, self-communication, religious practice and self-possession. When they do this, they are building community.

Inasmuch as local community organizations participate in higher forms of community, good families also build those higher forms of community. For example, parish churches belong to dioceses, and dioceses belong to a larger church (e.g. the Catholic Church). Schools also belong to school districts (under superintendents) which in turn belong to statewide organizations. Similarly, the local boy scout/girl scout troop belongs to the statewide group which in turn belongs to the national organization. Though the capacity to awaken and build heart, spirit and ideals within community weakens as one moves up the hierarchy from families to local community organizations to national ones, they nevertheless can have an important effect. Many strong families will give rise to a strong parish or school, and many strong parishes or schools will

<sup>38</sup> Darcia Narvaez, a psychologist at the University of Notre Dame sees the same decline in conscience from the vantage point of the diminishment of moral valuation within culture. See:

Darcia Narvaez “The Decline of Children and the Moral Sense” *Psychology Today*, August 15, 2010. As noted in Volume 6, a recent comprehensive study using the methods of Cornwall and others shows that religious affiliation increases individuals’ unwillingness to be unethical.

<sup>39</sup> A report in *Scientific American* reveals a decline in empathy among young people which affects the degree to which we adhere to conscience. See:

Jamil Zaki “What Me Care? Young are less Empathetic” in *Scientific American* Jan/Feb 2011. (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-me-care/?page=1>).

animate a diocese or school system with their strong interior dynamic. Conversely many weak families will weaken a local parish or school, and many weak parishes or schools will weaken the diocese or school system. These dioceses or school systems will not have a strong interior dynamic toward a positive ethos, and will likely have a weak sense of heart, spirit, and ideals.

The same holds true for societies. The stronger the heart, spirit and interior dynamic of its large organizations (such as dioceses and school systems), the stronger will be the culture of the larger society. If the media and the educational establishment support this dynamic, there will be a very strong sense of transcendental meaning and dignity, neighborliness and collegiality, co-responsibility for children and families, and a strong commitment to empathy, conscience, high ideals, self-sacrifice, and common cause (*esprit de corps*) within societal culture. When a nation has this kind of strong heart, spirit, and collective ideals, no challenge or suffering—not even the Great Depression or the Second World War can bring it down. It rises from these challenges with strength and righteous self-sacrifice to preserve not only the government and the nation but also the culture and the society that animate it. It becomes as Brokaw called it “the Greatest Generation”.<sup>40</sup>

## II.D Conclusion

What can be said by way of conclusion about the true character and dignity of family and the marital union that constitutes it? A marriage open to children and a strong family dynamic is one of the highest callings to which human beings can aspire. The creation of life, destined for transcendence and eternity, the creation of an interior dynamic in which parents and children bring one another’s love to completion and fulfillment (like the Holy Trinity), and the creation of strong heart, spirit, and an interior loving and transcendental dynamic that animates local community organizations, communities, and the society itself is a vocation of immense positive contribution for the spouses, children, community, society, and above all, the Church and the Kingdom of God. This is the call, dignity, and meaning of marriage and family which St. John Paul hoped to animate in his encyclical letter *Familiaris Consortio*. He did this with a sense of urgency, because he realized that the breakdown of the family, the loss of covenant love within marriage, and the reduction of *eros* (romantic-sexual love) to mere self-gratification and narcissism would be the end of high-minded culture itself—which would lead ultimately to literally billions of people living beneath themselves—haunted by an increasing sense of meaninglessness, depression, malaise, aggression, substance abuse, and familial tension. This dissolution of family, culture and society—anchored in the negativity of egocentricity, self-objectification, domination of others, and self-idolatry—might well be the end of heart, spirit, and an interior loving and transcendental dynamic within human community—a state which seems to meet all of the conditions of self and societal destruction.

<sup>40</sup> These qualities led precisely to what Tom Brokaw called “the greatest generation.” See Tom Brokaw 2001 *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House). Brokaw holds that America’s greatness arose out of the adversity of WWII. This occurred because of America’s strong religious affiliations, family dynamic, commitment to neighborliness, and its ethical principles and ideals which were used by thought leaders across America’s entire demographic spectrum. He further showed that the very positive American ethos prepared the generation of the Great Depression and the Second World War. He further shows how these qualities allowed American society to interpret its collective suffering in terms of righteous self-sacrifice – it was “the right thing to do.”

I do not want to end on such a negative note, so I will take the same path of St. John Paul, and reiterate his call to the ideal of marriage and family. This may best be done by repeating the four major intentions of every couple who wishes to enter into a Catholic marriage:

1. To solemnly vow complete exclusivity and indissolubility to their spouses to make possible the trust and self-sacrifice necessary to transform two “me’s” into an “us.”
2. To intend a *common* good-- *common* cause—to which individual goods or causes are subordinated.
3. To intend a deepening of their friendship and intimate marital love by seeking greater understanding, toleration, forgiveness, and respect through their weaknesses and collective challenges.
4. To intend the creation of a family through children they will raise through covenant love and the Catholic faith.

## Chapter Three

### Decisions, Expectations, Attitudes, and Habits that Foster Sound Marriages

[Back to top](#)

Though most engaged couples will participate in pre-Cana or pre-marriage instruction – or an engaged encounter – it might be helpful for them to consider reflectively the points made below -- individually and together – before and during their marriage. Many marital problems can be avoided and even transformed when couples have appropriate expectations and attitudes, and have discussed and settled on fundamental decisions about married life. Most of the recommendations given below have come from excellent psychological, philosophical, and theological studies, and stood the test of time. The discussion will be divided into two parts:

1. Decisions and Expectations before Marriage
2. Daily Attitudes and Habits that Foster Sound Marriages

#### I.

### Decisions and Expectations before Marriage

[Back to top](#)

There are five critical areas which couples must discuss before marriage. As will be shown, these five areas require decisions, strategies, and agreements that will perdure throughout the marriage. Couples need not agree on everything in these areas, but the more agreement they have, the less tension there will be in the relationship. If there are differences, then strategies must be worked out to accommodate them maturely and productively. When this occurs, a relationship can grow stronger. Some differences will almost always present major challenges to the relationship – such as differences in fundamental purpose in life, faith commitments, and the raising of children (see Sections I.B-C). However, other differences such as differences in personality, skills, and abilities, can strengthen the relationship when they are maturely and productively accommodated. The five critical areas of discussion and decision are as follows:

1. Background on the stages of intimacy and relationship development.
2. Decisions about meaning in life – materialistic/ego-comparative versus contributive/transcendent.
3. Decisions about faith life and children.
4. Awareness of the others' personality – dealing with differences.
5. Decisions about finances, spending, and saving.

### I.A

#### **Background on the Stages of Intimacy and Relationship Development**

There are many excellent studies on the stages of intimacy and relationship development that are helpful to couples embarking on and involved in marriage. The studies of John Gottman,<sup>41</sup> Phoebe Prosky,<sup>42</sup> and Sharon Brehm, et al.<sup>43</sup> are summarized by Paul David in a very accessible way.<sup>44</sup> The following is only a brief synopsis of his summary – and so it would be helpful for couples to consult the full article available online.

David outlines four stages of intimacy – though couples need not go through all four. They could move directly from 1 to 4 – or from 1 to 2 to 4. The major objective is for couples to recognize that the first stage will not last long after marriage, and if couples have some major differences, they will have to move to the fourth stage of intimacy in order for those differences to become complementary and fruitful instead of frustrating and destructive. If some accommodation is not made to deal with major differences, it is probable that they will be ultimately destructive. We will first list the four stages, and then explain what couples might expect to find when they move beyond the first stage of romance and fusion:

Stage I: Infatuation & Fusion

Stage II: Conflict & Power Struggle

Stage III: Adjustment & Consolidation

Stage IV: Maturation & Differentiation

Growth in intimacy does not mean ignoring difference or individual autonomy – for they are bound to emerge in any healthy relationship where one spouse does not dominate or eclipse the other. Inasmuch as there is no perfect unity among different individuals with some sense of autonomy, self-esteem, and actualization, the best any couple can hope for is complementarity – a bond of mutual support among different individuals. As we shall see, complementarity is not inferior to perfect unity, for it brings together the strengths of both spouses, makes up for what is underdeveloped or lacking in each, and calls both spouses to grow in their areas of underdevelopment. Thus, differences can lead to greater relational strength and individual growth. The problem is how to accommodate these differences in a mature and productive way before they

<sup>41</sup> John Gottman 2001, *The Relationship Cure*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press; and 1999 *The Marriage Clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

<sup>42</sup> Phoebe Prosky 1991 Marital Life. *Family Therapy*, 18(2) pp. 129-143.

<sup>43</sup> Sharon Brehm, R. Miller, D. Perlman, S. Campbell, 2002 *Intimate Relationships* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>44</sup> Paul David 2015 “Stages of Development in Intimate Relationships” (<http://pauldavidphd.com/wp-content/uploads/Stages-of-Intimacy.pdf>).

undermine the relationship. The irony is -- the very differences that can strengthen individuals in relationships are likely to undermine them if couples do not know how to deal with them. As noted above “Chance favors the prepared mind,” and nothing could be truer than couples moving out of the first stage of infatuation into the recognition of differences and autonomy. If conflict (the second stage) becomes virtually insoluble, accommodation and complementarity will never get off the ground. The above studies give important advice about how to shorten the second and third stages so that conflict will not become insoluble. They also indicate how the fourth stage can be fostered and perpetuated.

Before explaining these stages, it is important to remember that some differences can be insurmountable regardless of couples’ attempts to accommodate them. These differences stand at the very heart of individuals – their purpose in life, identity, ideals, principles, fulfillment, and sense of ultimate dignity and destiny – as well as their hopes and aspirations for their children. We will address four areas that touch upon these fundamental dimensions of meaning, dignity, and fulfillment, which seem to require some agreement between both spouses from the time of their engagement throughout their marriage (see below Sections I.B – I.D).

In the first stage, infatuation & fusion, most couples ignore differences – even significant ones – in the height of romance and passion. David quoting Patricia Love states it as follows:

A powerful neurochemical and psychological transformation of the lovers where they experience a kind of altered state of consciousness characterized by increased positive attitude, energy, concentration, and feelings of euphoria with one another.<sup>45</sup>

Though this powerful neurochemical and psychological state of mind draws the couple together, leading them to a desire for more permanent and intimate commitment, it has the drawback of overpowering the differences between them which will become more important as the relationship develops.<sup>46</sup> The altered state of mind produced by infatuation suspends important critical functions, and the couple ignores important differences, potential points of conflict, and even their own autonomy. They believe they have found a soulmate with whom they can fuse forever.

Unfortunately this mistaken belief will become evident as the altered state of mind diminishes over the course of time. David, again referring to Patricia Love, estimates that the average time of diminishment of romantic feelings is about six months – though the process might take longer.<sup>47</sup> As the altered state of consciousness diminishes, couples gradually become more aware of their differences –and the desire for autonomy.

This re-discovery of self and the differences between self and partner create a challenge to which the couple must adapt – “how will they accommodate their need for autonomy as well as relevant differences within their continued relationship?” There are only three options:

<sup>45</sup> See Paul David 2015, “Stages of Development in Intimate Relationships,” p. 3. Quoting Patricia Love 2001, *The Truth about Love* (New York, NY: Fireside).

<sup>46</sup> See Paul David 2015 “Stages of Development” p.4.

<sup>47</sup> See Ibid

1. Discontinue the relationship immediately.
2. Move productively to the fourth stage – maturation and differentiation.
3. Transition to the second stage – conflict & power struggle.

The third stage is not an option at this juncture since it is an adjustment to the excesses of the second stage.

Some couples who become discouraged with the decline of infatuation's altered state of mind can become hypercritical of the differences between themselves and their partner. They might suspect that the partner is trying to take over their identity and "enslave them." As a result, they not only decompress in their relationship, but rush to its termination. They might breathe a sigh of relief that they have regained their freedom and are no longer subject to dealing with seemingly intolerable differences. Unfortunately, in many cases, this rash action leads to the premature termination of a relationship that might otherwise have stood the test of time. As noted above, some differences can be meaningfully accommodated leading to a strong complementary relationship while other ones, if allowed to continue, will almost always lead to breakup (see below Section I.B – I.C – differences of meaning/identity and faith/children).

Let us consider the second option – moving to the fourth stage. The couple need not terminate their relationship if their differences are accommodatable. If the couple is willing to maturely work on meeting three conditions, they can move into the fourth stage – a high degree of intimacy, generativity, and commitment – straight away:

1. The difference must be accommodatable (e.g. differences of personality, skillset and habits/routines), but not differences which may be insoluble if agreement is not found (differences in fundamental meaning/identity and those concerning children and their faith).
2. Couples must be willing to surrender part of their autonomy (but not all of their autonomy) for the good of the relationship – to transform two "me's" into an "us."
3. The partners must maturely decide on how *they* will accommodate their partners' differences (but not how their partner must accommodate their differences) – explained in the fourth stage below.

The third option – if a couple does not terminate or move to the fourth stage, is to move into the second stage of intimacy which is explained immediately below.

The second stage *conflict & power struggle* – will almost always occur if a couple does not terminate a relationship or move to the fourth stage. As the couple's desire for autonomy strengthens, and their differences become more apparent, their fusion is viewed more as a liability than as an asset (as in the first stage). This gives rise to each partner viewing the other and the relationships itself with less optimism. If no way is found to accommodate autonomy and differences, pessimism will overtake the relationship leading to its termination. Furthermore, the couple will find ways to accentuate their autonomy – raising their voices, reacting to the other with excessive negativity, giving the worst (instead of the better) interpretation of words and actions, and telling the partner what he or she has to do to make the relationship better. All of these tendencies exacerbate conflict and struggle without alleviating them.

Some couples who are very similar do not experience the same degree of conflict & power struggle as those who have comparatively more differences. Nevertheless, they too will have to accommodate one another's autonomy. Even though they are quite similar, they will still desire to have autonomous desires and a private worldview that cannot be fused with their partner's. If this is not partially accommodated, they too will feel stifled and "enslaved" by the other or the relationship.

So what kinds of feelings will occur as a couple enters into this second stage? First, there will be considerable fear and anxiety that the romantic relationship they had cherished so much is coming to an end. David notes that this generally results in the couple frantically trying to reconstitute the infatuated relationship – despite the fact that differences and the desire for partial autonomy have already emerged.<sup>48</sup> This strategy will almost always be met with disappointment, for the old flame cannot be rekindled on the basis of its former unrealism and naiveté.

When attempts to rekindle the flame are unsuccessful, the couple will become increasingly more defensive – blaming the other for problems in the relationship and growing progressively in pessimism. They will notice that their attempts to make *their partner* change to accommodate the relationship is also unsuccessful, at which point they have two options:

1. Continue down the same road trying to make the partner change, or
2. Recognizing that the only person they can change is themselves.

If they go down the first road – trying to make the other change – separation will be inevitable because it will be met with more frustration, lack of success, and conflict. Alternatively, they can learn something from their failure to change their partner. They can come to the insight that the only person they can change is themselves. If *both* partners come to this realization, and they are willing to make the sacrifice to change themselves and accommodate the *other's* differences for the sake of the relationship, then they will likely proceed to the third stage of intimacy.

In the third stage – adjustment & consolidation – the couple chooses to change themselves for the sake of the relationship. This generally takes the form of allowing the other person to be "who they are" without requiring a significant change. Additionally, each partner chooses to subordinate and accentuate certain attributes for the sake of the relationship. As David notes, this tends to make the relationship into a bipolar one in which each partner accentuates their strengths and deemphasizes their weaknesses. This kind of relationship does not necessarily end in termination, but it will have its trials, because each partner – and the relationship itself – will be in a state of dependence and neediness – a sort of "hyper co-dependent relationship."<sup>49</sup>

In this kind of relationship, each partner must be hyper-vigilant to fulfill their requirements within the relationship – otherwise it will fail amidst considerable disappointment and frustration. This puts considerable pressure on each party to live up to their requirements all the time. Furthermore, it can make each party grow even weaker in the areas for which they are not responsible. This heightens the neediness and co-dependence within the relationship. The difficulty with this heightened neediness and co-dependency is that any failure by either party will be viewed

<sup>48</sup> See Ibid p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> See Ibid pp. 6-7.

critically and hurtfully by the other party – “They don’t care enough about this relationship to make it work – and they obviously don’t care about me.”

Though the relationship can survive, it is always treading on the brink of hurt feelings, the undoing of complementarity, and greater co-dependency. A much better strategy is to have a complementary relationship in which each partner accentuates their strengths, agrees to learn from the other, and to strengthen their abilities where there is weakness or deficit. This tones down neediness and co-dependency within the relationship, while allowing both parties to grow in maturity and self-sufficiency.

In the Fourth Stage, each partner chooses to “understudy” the other’s strengths--particularly where there is weakness or deficiency within themselves. This opens the door to the completion of relationship development which Paul David describes as follows:

Couples who choose to move on to Stage IV of the relationship begin to value their individual differences, learn the other's point of view, and integrate the complementary elements of their partner into their own functioning. When a difference causes conflict for these couples, each partner attempts to identify the fear it generates in him or her, with the purpose of better understanding individual weaknesses. Each partner attempts to understand the importance of the other person's position in order to learn more about the other's world. Blaming the other person becomes out of bounds in disputes, and the acceptance of a high degree of personal responsibility in their conflicts replaces it.<sup>50</sup>

When the couple consciously chooses to move into the Fourth Stage—whether they do so directly from the First Stage or pass through the Second and Third Stages—the relationship can enjoy a high degree of success throughout a lifetime, because differences can be accommodated and turned into strengths for both individuals and the relationship. These kinds of relationships have the following qualities:

1. There is a high degree of complementarity (mutual strengthening) amid differences.
2. Each partner believes and feels that their autonomy and individuality is respected within the relationship--hence they do not feel subsumed or enslaved by the other, but freely choose to give themselves to the other and the relationship.
3. This complementarity amidst difference and autonomy allows each partner to have both an individual life and a relational one, enabling them to find common cause without becoming subsumed or enslaved to it.
4. Differences are honored and respected within the relationship—and when difference produces conflict, each partner tries to understand *the other's* point of view.
5. Blaming another for conflict within the relationship is out of bounds—and each partner finds ways of changing *themselves* and their participation in the relationship to avoid future conflict. If both parties are willing to change themselves for the sake of the relationship, most differences (except for fundamental identity differences—and differences with respect to children and their faith) can be accommodated.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid pp.7-8

6. Each partner agrees not to allow themselves to become completely dependent within the relationship—thus forcing the other partner to constantly make up for weaknesses and deficiencies. Instead, they agree to understudy the other's strengths so that each partner can be relieved of the need to carry one pole of the relationship on a continuous basis.

When these six factors are in place—even imperfectly—the relationship will not only have the foundation for a lifetime of growth and success, but will also be an ideal foundation of a loving home for the children, as well as a place where faith and grace can flourish.

We have noted many times throughout the Big Book that grace builds on nature—and this is particularly true for marriages if the natural foundation of a marital relationship is weak, conflictual, and overly needy, the couple's attention—and faith-life—will be directed toward these negative conditions. However, if the foundation is strong and non-conflictual (amidst differences and reasonable autonomy) then the couple can focus individually and collectively on building the relationship, their faith, their common cause, and the lives of the children. This covers the central objectives of the marriage covenant – mutual strengthening, one another's salvation, the raising and salvation of children, and common cause for the community, the church, the culture, and society.

### **I.B**

#### **Decisions About Meaning in Life**

It was noted several times above that there are two individual decisions or commitments where difference will lead to perpetual and insoluble conflict: those concerning meaning in life and those concerned with children and their faith. Let us consider the first in this section, and the second in the next section (I.C)

In Volume 13 we will discuss the four levels of happiness, and I would suggest that couples moving toward marriage re-read this section after reading the whole of Volume 13, because it is of paramount importance that couples be on the same level of happiness-meaning-identity. I will give a brief overview of a fundamental difference in happiness- meaning-identity that will almost always lead to irresolvable conflict if a partner on a lower level does not raise him/herself up to the higher level of their partner.

In brief, happiness- meaning-identity can form a hierarchy—where the higher levels are more pervasive, enduring and deep while the lower levels are more immediately gratifying, surface apparent and intense. As explained in Volume 13, these levels of happiness- meaning-identity have been worked out by generations of philosophers, theologians, psychologists and social-scientists since the time of Plato and Aristotle to the present.

**Level One**—Physical, material happiness and meaning-- comes from one's embodiment, physical desires, and central nervous system. When one eats a good bowl of linguine, satisfies other physical desires, is well-clothed, and has many possessions, they are happy and find meaning on this most basic level. Yet, human beings have much higher desires, cognitive faculties, dignity, and purpose in life than what Level One satisfactions can deliver. The satisfaction of physical desires or the acquisition of “creature comforts” is not very pervasive—that is, they do not do very

much good beyond themselves. Furthermore, they do not endure—that is, the feelings and fulfillment they produce are short-lived. Finally they are not deep—that is, they do not engage us at the highest level of our psychological and cognitive faculties—our creativity, learning, thinking abilities, moral reasoning powers, empathy-care-love, and our spiritual capacity. Yes, they are intense, immediately gratifying and surface apparent—which means they bring on immediate and intense feelings of satisfaction—but they lack almost everything else that can lead to meaning in life, good for the world, loving relationships, meaningful friendships, ultimate satisfaction and eternal destiny. We might say that these satisfactions, though enjoyable, are quite limited and short-lived.

**Level Two** – Ego-comparative happiness- meaning-identity is the most dominant level within U.S. and Western European nations. It is so strong in the U.S. that children who are only 14 years old are already in the process of fully orienting their lives toward it. This kind of happiness comes from obtaining a comparative advantage over another—or shifting the locus of control over to myself—producing ego-fulfillment.<sup>51</sup> The subconscious screen through which a Level Two psyche views the world is through the questions “Who’s achieving more or less?” “Who’s more or less intelligent?” “Who is more/less beautiful?” “Who is more or less gifted or talented?” “Who has more or less status?” “Who has more/less control?” “Who is more/less popular?” “Who has more/less power?” “Who is a winner and who is a loser?” Notice that all of these questions concern comparisons of myself to others on the basis of *objective* abilities—not principles, ideals, love, contribution, ultimate significance, or faith. They do not elucidate *who* one is, but only *what* one is. Notice also that the answers to these questions attempt to shift the locus of control to myself—so that one is aggrandized, superior, and in a dominant position.

Since comparative advantage can lead to such powerful feelings of satisfaction-- particularly in this culture—and since this level of meaning can lead to such destructive feelings and undermine relationships, it is important to understand how this Level functions and why it cannot provide ultimate meaning in life or relationships. In Volume 13 we explain how Level Two meaning and identity—when it becomes our dominant view of happiness and success-- can lead to the following destructive emotions—jealousy, inferiority, depression, emptiness, fear of failure, fear of loss of esteem, superiority, self-pity, ego-sensitivity, ego-rage, and contempt of inferiors. When one is caught up in this range of emotions, profound fear, anxiety, and hubris dominate the personality, and generative relationships are likely to be severely undermined or impossible.

Level Two is not all bad—indeed it has a very appropriate place in human meaning and identity; for when one has some ego-comparative advantage, it leads to self-esteem, ego-strength, self- efficacy and the desire to work hard to develop one’s strengths. It can also provide the basis for making a living and contributing effectively to society. So what is the problem? When Level Two meaning-identity becomes so important that it eclipses empathy, contribution, conscience, faith, spiritual life, and ultimate dignity and destiny, it becomes an end in itself. This is the point at which the above-mentioned attributes arise with great force—undermining the self as well as relationships with others. Unfortunately, this level of meaning-identity is probably dominant for about two-thirds of our culture. The only way out of this negative state of mind (leading to the

<sup>51</sup> Note that “ego” in Latin means “I”—so “ego-fulfillment” is essentially fulfillment of self. When it becomes dominant or even absolute, it is narcissistic.

destruction of self and others) is to move out of Level Two dominance into Level Three and/or Level Four dominance—explained below.

Level Three—Contributive—empathetic happiness- meaning-identity—arises out of two essential faculties for interpersonal life—empathy and conscience. These are explained in detail in Volume 13, so for the moment suffice it to say that the American Psychiatric Association states that the lack of these two faculties results in a socio-path or a psycho-path. To the extent that we allow these remarkable faculties to hold sway within our lives, we move away from psychopathology and sociopathology to progressively greater concern for others, care about others, and love of other (from empathy) as well as concern for the good, avoidance of evil, and ethical decisions. When both faculties are in a high degree of efficacy, we might say that we are contributive, loving, ethical, and self-sacrificial so that we might do optimum good beyond ourselves.

Virtually no one is born into the world a psychopath or sociopath because everyone has an operative sense of empathy and conscience. Even children with severely limited cognitive ability, have keen senses of empathy and conscience as well as spiritual awareness and faith. Most children want to share with others and care about others—particularly if those others show respect and care for them.

Why then do some people lose their sense of empathy and conscience—becoming criminal – or eclipse their empathy and conscience to accommodate a complete focus on Levels One and Two? Aside from those who have been profoundly unloved or abused as children, some people make continuous *free* choices contrary to empathy and conscience. As we move from childhood to adolescence, we become more preoccupied with self—it is a perfectly normal stage of life. Furthermore, we taste the benefits of Level One and Level Two, and we enjoy them – that is perfectly natural as well. Yet at some point Level One and Level Two procurement and enjoyment will come into conflict with the beckoning of empathy and conscience. If we repeatedly choose Level One and Level Two satisfaction to the exclusion of the pull of conscience and empathy, we will gradually eclipse their influence. If we do this enough times, we give ourselves over to Level One and Level Two satisfaction, and to the life of negative emotions, self -aggrandizement, and the undermining of relationships. If we continue to do this, we eclipse our conscience and empathy all together, at which point we can become criminal.

Fortunately, the contrary is also true—if we respond to the pull of empathy and conscience and we seek to make a contribution to others and the world, we can define our whole lives in terms of it. Living a life of contribution and empathy fills us with a sense that our lives are making an optimal positive difference to the world which makes us happy. This kind of happiness does not feel like ego-comparative happiness, but rather has the upward sense and spirit of being life for the world. This kind of happiness can become addictive, and we can give our whole life over to it. If we do, we will have a very solid identity on which to build friendships—and of course marriages.

Yet, we do not live for Level Three alone, we also have five transcendental desires grounded in five kinds of transcendental awareness—the awareness of perfect truth, perfect love, perfect goodness-justice, perfect beauty and perfect home. In addition to these kinds of transcendental awareness, we have an awareness of what Rudolf Otto calls the numinous, sacred,

mysterious, fascinating, inviting, overwhelming “wholly Other.” When this interior experience is publicly thematized—generally within the world’s religions—we call the subject who produces this experience “God” “the Creator” “the Holy One”, the “Numen” and/or “the Spirit.” As noted earlier in this volume, if we ignore our transcendental desires and the invitation coming from this spiritual agency—if we ignore our transcendental nature—we will experience significantly higher levels of depression, meaninglessness, malaise, impulse-aggressivity, suicide attempts, substance abuse and familial tensions.<sup>52</sup> Yet, before we reach this state, we receive many hints that we are ignoring a fundamental part of ourselves. I call these clues of our ignored transcendent nature “cosmic loneliness”, “cosmic emptiness”, “cosmic alienation” and “cosmic guilt” (see Volume 13, Chapter Five).

As has been shown in Volumes 1 and 2, there is considerable evidence from physics, metaphysics, medicine (near death experiences), and the philosophy of mind that point to the high likelihood (based on objective scientific evidence) of a unique, unrestricted Creator of all else that is. This Creator has the perfect transcendental attributes that we seek as our ultimate satisfaction: perfect truth, perfect love, perfect goodness-justice, perfect beauty, and perfect home. The evidence from our interior lives shows that we will never be ultimately satisfied outside of a relationship with this supreme deity or creator. St Augustine phrased it this way—speaking to God—“for Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”<sup>53</sup> For St Augustine, if we pursue a relationship with this Supreme Deity- Creator as our highest meaning and purpose in life we will orient ourselves toward our highest transcendental and eternal destiny in Him. Moreover, we will have the advantage of receiving His grace as well as His intersubjective presence. This will not only alleviate our feelings of cosmic emptiness, loneliness, alienation and guilt, it will also guide our empathy and conscience (Level Three) to its highest expression and fulfillment (see how transcendence and grace bring self-sacrificial love, *agapē* — to fruition in Volume 16, Chapter Three, Sections III.D - III.F).

Now let us return to the topic of marriage. With the above basic understanding of the four levels of happiness-meaning-identity, we can make five observations about relationships that will lead to successful or challenging marriages:

1. Two individuals with dominant Level One–Two identities will have great difficulty in maintaining a long-term relationship and a supportive and successful marriage. The focus of dominant Level One-Two Identity is on the self, material acquisition, and ego-comparative advantage. Anyone who knows two dominant Level One-Two individuals—or has worked under them—can imagine how their self-focus and ego-competitiveness can create a challenging atmosphere for complementarity and common cause. Going to such a couple’s house for dinner leads almost immediately to a sense of exclusion, alienation, and competitiveness with the couple.
2. Two individuals with dominant Level Three identities have a very good chance for an enduring, supportive, and successful marriage. However, if both individuals completely ignore their transcendental-spiritual identity, they can expect to feel bouts of cosmic

<sup>52</sup> See Kanita Dervic 2004 “Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt.”

<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine *Confessions* Bk1, Ch1.

emptiness, loneliness, alienation and guilt. Moreover, these feelings (arising out of unfulfilled transcendental desires) can lead to significantly higher rates of the negative effects of non-religious affiliation noted by Kanita Dervic – depression, meaninglessness, impulse-aggressivity, substance abuse, familial tension, and even suicidal thoughts.<sup>54</sup> These negative feelings and unfulfilled desires however, need not be overwhelming, and many, if not most Level Three couples will be able to maintain a supportive marriage.

3. Two Level Three-Four individuals—those whose dominant identity is grounded in *both* contributive- empathetic- ethical meaning as well as transcendental-spiritual meaning—are very likely to have an enduring, supportive, and successful marriage oriented toward ultimate dignity and destiny through God’s Providence and Eternal Salvation. If these individuals are able to develop intimate, complementary relationships that can maturely accommodate differences through self-accountability, they will create an exceptionally loving home for children who will likewise feel secure about their lovability, esteemability and eternal salvation. This is the ideal of a Catholic marriage. What does this mean for couples contemplating marriage? Three subsidiary observations:
  - a. A Level Three-Four individual should seek out another Level Three-Four individual to marry (see the problem of mixed levels of identity below in #4-#5).
  - b. Level Three-Four individuals should seek to develop their contributive-empathetic-ethical identity as well as their transcendental-spiritual identity (see Volumes 13 & 18-20). The deeper and stronger this dual identity, the deeper and stronger will be the marriage, the loving home developed in the marriage, and the children arising out the marriage.
  - c. Individuals who share their thoughts, beliefs, intuitions, and feelings about their Level Three-Four identity and use this communication as a ground for their common cause, will also produce tremendous fruit *beyond* the marriage, loving home, and children. They will have a transformative effect on churches, communities, and societies (see Chapter Two).

If a Level Three-Four individual marries a Level One-Two individual, it is likely to result in irresolvable conflict, if the Level One-Two individual does not rise up to the identity of the Level Three-Four individual. As noted in Section I.A above, this *essential* difference in world view, principles, dignity, fulfillment, ideals, and destiny are virtually unresolvable in the long term because they are not mere differences of talent, personality, taste, preferred activities, and style – but rather differences as to what makes life worth living. If a couple cannot agree on this fundamental question, they will have two different objectives or ends for their lives and the relationship. Conflictual and contradictory objectives tend to negate and undermine one another. Sometimes a Level Three-Four individual will suppress higher level meaning and identity in order to preserve a relationship with a Level One-Two individual. Though the relationship might endure, the Level Three-Four person will have little common cause and support from his or her partner. Indeed, the Level One-Two individual may ridicule or demean the Level Three-Four individual’s higher meaning and identity. This is a rough road for the higher level individual, but not an impossible one for the relationship. In brief, it is best to marry someone on your own Level—bearing in mind

<sup>54</sup> See Kanita Dervic 2004 “Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt.”

that two Level Three-Four partners will have the above-mentioned advantages over two Level Three partners and especially over two Level One-Two partners (or a mixture). . Sometimes partners who are in the heights of infatuation-fusion believe that they can change an individual whose meaning-identity is lower than their own and make the relationship into an enduring, supportive, and successful marriage. Unfortunately, this view of “changing the partner” is frequently incorrect, making the marriage difficult to manage. Without self-motivation, pressure from a partner to move to a higher identity is likely to be counter-productive. Imagine a person who has a dominant ego-comparative identity being pressured to move to a Level Three-Four identity. If they are ego-comparative, they are likely to resist any such attempt with great vigor precisely because they want to protect and maintain their ego and their comparative-advantage. Therefore, if a movement from Level One-Two to Level Three-Four is to occur, it will have to come from the individuals themselves. This could happen if the pain and negative emotions of a dominant Level Two identity (described above) become intense, and the partner seeks solace from Level Three and/or Level Four identity modeled by the partner. However, one should not count on this, because many Level One-Two individuals will frequently choose to remain in an extreme negative emotional condition (causing pain to others) than make a move toward a new identity they have not embraced as meaningful and good.

4. If a Level Three-Four individual marries a Level Three individual, the marriage can be enduring, supportive and successful, but the Level Three-Four individual will have to recognize that they will not be able to share their transcendental-spiritual awareness desires and fulfillment with their partner. Furthermore their partner will be unfulfilled on a transcendental-spiritual level with the negative feelings and conditions mentioned above. There is also a distinct possibility of tension in raising the children, because one parent will be promoting religious affiliation while the other one not, which will likely undermine the children’s religious formation. Thus, if a Level Three-Four individual wants to marry a dominant Level Three individual, it is best to agree ahead of time on how the children are to be raised and how religion is to be treated and respected within the family.

I consider the above observations about meaning- identity and marriage to be of paramount importance. It would behoove any couple anticipating a Catholic marriage to consider them thoughtfully before being swept into infatuation-fusion—and certainly before embarking on marriage.

## **I.C**

### **Decisions about Children and Their Faith**

We have already explained the importance of children in building a generative marriage and a loving home (see Chapter Two, Section II.C). Couples who are experiencing severe conflict, but who have children, will generally not project their hostility to one another toward their children. They will continue to love them with undiminished intensity. Indeed, the disposition of the children often becomes the central point of a divorce agreement (explained below). Given this high degree of bonding with the children and given the negative effects of divorce upon them, it is incumbent upon couples anticipating marriage to be certain of compatibility before the marriage (see above Sections I.A – I.B) and to have a solemn intention to remain married for the children’s sake (see above Chapter Two, Section II.C). Evidently, this does not always occur. Many couples

do not make it far into the second stage of intimacy before differences produce unresolvable conflicts. Moreover, many Level One-Two couples choose to marry, and many Level Three-Four individuals choose to marry a Level One-Two partner. This may well lead to eventual separation and divorce which will for a time negatively affect the children. So it is incumbent on couples to lay the proper groundwork of relationship (see above Sections I.A – I.B) before marriage and throughout its initial years.

In view of the above, it is clear that decisions about marriage can affect the children – and the reverse is also true – decisions about children can affect the marriage. Four decisions are of particular importance:

1. Are both partners open to children?
2. If so, will they put a limit on the number of children they will accept.
3. Are both partners willing to raise the children in the Catholic faith?
4. If one of the partners is not Catholic, will he or she enthusiastically support raising the children in the faith?

It may seem strange to raise the first question about both partners being open to children in a Catholic marriage. After all, as noted above, it is one of the conditions for marriage in the Catholic Church. The answer is – there is “willingness to have children” and “*real* willingness to have children.” Some couples view openness to children in terms of openness to the *possibility* of having children which allows for an indefinite period of “considering the possibility.” From the vantage point of Catholic pastoral practice, this has two drawbacks:

1. It does not bring the *reality* of children into the intention of marriage (and the vows of marriage).
2. It could cause an irresolvable conflictual difference among the spouses, because one spouse might *really* desire and intend children, while the other one might not.

With respect to the first point, the Church has stated its ideal for marriage, and has declared that one of the two main objectives of marriage is the generation of new unique transcendent and eternal offspring – as well as creating a covenant of mutual, faith-filled, and intimate support for one another. The generation of children not only leads to new transcendent and eternal life, it also supports and reinforces the marriage bond. This occurs when children reflect their love back to the parents (which is similar to the Holy Spirit reflecting His love back to the union of the Father and Son in the Trinity – see above Chapter Two, Section II.C). Furthermore, when parents build a loving home to accommodate the needs, education, formation, and innocent love of children, they too are supported by the loving home and atmosphere they create for their children. Christmas in a household with children is filled with a warmth, excitement, and faith that frequently is not present in families without children. The needs of children literally pull parents out of themselves into a life of self-sacrifice, care, and compassion which also transforms *their* relationship. Furthermore, families with children naturally link to other families with children which produces strong communal bonds within the local Church, local community, and local culture (see Chapter Two, Section II.C).

We might sum up by saying that most of the time, families with children have increased levels of care, self-sacrifice, compassion, faith, intimacy, excitement, and relational bonds. Yes – the parents might be more weary and worried than couples who are not parents, but they are filled

with a sense of love, excitement, self-sacrifice, and faith directed at their children that spills over into the intimacy, love, and bondedness of their relationship. This positive effect depends on two conditions being met by the couple at the inception of their marriage – namely, *real* willingness to have children – as well as at least the Level Three generativity – if not Level Four generativity needed for a loving, caring, self-sacrificial, and grace-filled response to those children. When both conditions are in place children will be viewed as a true blessing which will enable couples to overcome fears about inconvenience, change of lifestyle, and decrease of financial resources (the way children are sadly portrayed by much of the secular culture).

The second problem coming from unwillingness to be open to children concerns differences between the spouses. Men and women often have different intuitions, thoughts, and feelings about children prior to pregnancy, during pregnancy, and during the child's formative years. Though one cannot make a hard and fast generalization about these differences, three differences manifest themselves fairly frequently:

1. Though some women are opposed to children for reasons of career and lifestyle, most want children and view them as an important positive dimension of their life's purpose and future. In contrast, more men are likely to be opposed to children (because of changes in lifestyle and finances) than women, though most men are open to children.
2. Before and during pregnancy, men may not feel as strong a paternal instinct as women feel a maternal instinct. However, after a child is born, many men catch up gradually and some catch up quickly – not only taking an interest in protecting the child, but planning for his or her future. As a child grows in cognitive, emotional, and discursive responsiveness, most men take an increased interest in the child and his or her future.
3. Though many women may fear the additional responsibilities and changes in lifestyle coming from children, they tend to overcome these fears before and throughout pregnancy. Fathers tend to have more unresolved fear and negative concerns about children until they experience a child's dependence and love.

Why are these three points significant? If a woman, prior to and during pregnancy, is likely to view children more positively, with a high level of maternal concern, and with more manageable fear than her husband, then children could present a significant conflictual difference between the husband and wife, if the husband does not dispose himself to accepting children as a blessing prior to the first child's birth. Indeed some husbands may insist on having no children or only one child if their fears and negative concerns are significant.

How does this affect the Church's declaration that couples be open to children in their marriage? The Church is confident that when a Level Three and/or Level Four couple marry with the intention of indissolubility, exclusivity, mutual support for one another, and concern for each other's salvation, then they will generate and raise good children who will bless them individually and collectively. The Church is certain that God will help them raise their children -- and help the children into His heavenly kingdom, if they choose to cooperate with His word and grace. If this is correct, then children will bless the marriage of such a couple thousands upon thousands of times – with joy, love, excitement, and faith throughout the stages of life's way.

Evidently, there is always the possibility that a child will have problems, moments of ingratitude, bad conduct, and bad attitude – and even abandon parental values and religion; but parents must trust that God's intention is to save their children as He intends to save them. Thus,

when Catholic parents open themselves in marriage to God's blessing of children, they must do so not only with trust in their own intentions, but with radical trust in God through fervent prayer. Additionally, they must do their best to teach their children the importance of faith, as well as Catholic doctrine.

If recent statistics are correct, then parents do not have to do very much to assure that their children will attend Church at least irregularly – and appropriate the majority of their principles and values. What is the critical condition for this transmission of religion and ethics from parents to children? In a phrase, the *father's* regular attendance at Church (along with the mother). If fathers attend Church regularly and disclose to their children the importance of faith, there is a 75% chance that the children will do likewise.<sup>55</sup> However if fathers do not attend church, then only 2% of their children will attend regularly, and 60% will not attend after leaving the family. When one thinks about it, this is not too high a bar for parents who want their children to share their religion, values, and Level Three-Level Four meaning and identity.

Let us now summarize. If a married couple has a dominant Level Three-Level Four meaning-identity, if they are *really* open to children in their marriage, and if both spouses attend church regularly, then they have a high likelihood of generating children who will not only mirror them in values, but also be destined for God's eternal salvation. Furthermore, these children will have an immensely powerful influence on each parent – as well as on the parent's bonding within the marriage. They will also contribute powerfully to the loving home which will become central to the endurance, happiness, supportiveness, and success of the marriage. This is why the Church is so insistent on openness to children within a marriage.

If a couple is not open to children, they will not only lose the privilege of generating transcendent and eternal offspring, but also the children's immense contributions to their marriage, their loving home, and their happiness and fulfillment. Furthermore, if one spouse (most likely the wife) is *really* open to children but the other spouse (most likely the husband) is not, then there is an increased probability of conflict arising out of this significant difference within the marriage. This conflict can cause secret resentment and "payback" as well as combativeness within the marriage.

<sup>55</sup> The following statistics from the Swiss demographic survey of 2000 were summarized by Robbie Low. "The religious practice of the father of the family, above all, determines the future attendance at or absence from church of the children. If both father and mother attend regularly, 33 percent of their children will end up as regular churchgoers, and 41 percent will end up attending irregularly. Only a quarter of their children will end up not practicing at all. If the father is irregular and mother regular, only 3 percent of the children will subsequently become regulars themselves, while a further 59 percent will become irregulars. Thirty-eight percent will be lost. If the father is non-practicing and mother regular, only 2 percent of children will become regular worshippers, and 37 percent will attend irregularly. Over 60 percent of their children will be lost completely to the church." See Robbie Low 2003 "The Truth about Men & Church" in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, June 2003 (<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v#ixzz4RjWtmadF>). See also Volume 2 of *Population Studies No. 31, The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States*, edited by Werner Haug et al. published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January 2000.

There is one other element about which the couple must find agreement — the *number* of children they want to raise. The Church has taught quite clearly that every sexual act be open to procreation, but this does not mean that the couple cannot engage in family planning—only that they cannot engage in artificial birth control. Why?

This teaching has two rationales. The first was elucidated in detail above (Chapter Two, Section II.C.)—namely, the good of children in themselves, to support the parents’ marital relationship, and to call forth a loving home which extends beyond the family to Church, community, and culture. The second rationale was discussed with respect to the nature of *eros*—romantic and sexual love (in Chapter Two, Section I). In brief, the Church—following Jesus—teaches that the sexual act seals and reinforces a complete gift of self—an unconditional covenant love—between two spouses. This complete gift of self includes the generation and raising of children as a natural integral part of that gift and covenant. Hence, blocking the possibility of children within the sexual act frustrates the very nature of the total gift of self and unconditional covenant love that it is intended to seal. If a couple can’t have children, that does not frustrate the nature of the sexual act, because it is still open to children as an integral part of the unconditional covenant love it seals. However, blocking the possibility of children within the sexual act does frustrate its nature as complete gift of self and unconditional covenant love.

As will be seen, natural family planning remains open to the possibility of procreation, and so the Catholic Church allows it to be used to engage in responsible family planning. Before giving a brief description of natural family planning it might be helpful to look at some recent statements from Pope Francis, the Second Vatican Council, St. John Paul II, and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops.

Let us first turn to the recent statements of Pope Francis. After making several strong statements about the Church’s proscription of artificial birth control, Pope Francis added that Catholics have an obligation to engage in responsible parenthood by using means that are open to procreation (i.e., natural family planning—described below). He indicated further that couples discuss “responsible parenthood” with their pastors if it is to include a dimension of family planning.

He formally restated this teaching in his recent post-synodal teaching *Amoris Laetitia*. Suiting St. John Paul’s teaching on “responsible parenthood,” he notes:

... Saint John Paul II rightly explained that responsible parenthood does not mean “unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities, as well as their own situation and legitimate desires”.<sup>56</sup>

Later in the encyclical, he speaks about the need for both parents to consult their conscience before God and to consider the demands of the times, the dignity of each partner, and the capacity to

<sup>56</sup>Pope Francis 2015 *Amoris Laetitia*, Section 167

([http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf)).

See also, St. John Paul II Letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization on Population and Development (18 March 1994): *Insegnamenti* XVII/1 (1994), 750-751.

responsibly raise children within the context of “being generous in bestowing life”. Relying on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council,<sup>57</sup> he notes:

The pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life. “In accord with the personal and fully human character of conjugal love, family planning fittingly takes place as the result of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect for times and consideration of the dignity of the partner. In this sense, the teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 1014) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14; 2835) ought to be taken up anew, in order to counter a mentality that is often hostile to life... Decisions involving responsible parenthood presupposes the formation of conscience, which is ‘the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There each one is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of the heart’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, Section 16). The more the couple tries to listen in conscience to God and His commandments (cf. Rom 2:15), and is accompanied spiritually, the more their decision will be profoundly free of subjective caprice and accommodation to prevailing social mores”.<sup>58</sup>

For Pope Francis, then, responsible family planning is an integral part of the fulfillment of the conditions of complete gift of self and unconditional covenant love when being open to procreation in every sexual act. “Responsible family planning” includes formation of conscience (by means of the Churches teaching), responsible dialogue between the spouses, and a proper consideration of what they can responsibly do within their social and financial situation.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has reiterated the Church’s prohibition of artificial birth control (in *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio*), while indicating that responsible family planning is permissible. The Conference goes on to say *how* family planning can be legitimately implemented—namely through Natural Family Planning which is by nature open to procreation:

God designed marriage as an "intimate partnership of life and love" (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48). In God's design, marriage is a unique union of one man with one woman "for the whole of life" (see Canon 1055, *The Code of Canon Law*). Marriage is oriented to the good of the spouses and to the creation and nurture of new human life (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48). Making decisions therefore, about when and how many children to have in marriage is a sacred responsibility that God has entrusted to husband and wife. This is the foundation of what the Church calls, "Responsible Parenthood"--the call to discern God's will for your marriage

<sup>57</sup> Pope Francis sites the following quotation from *Gaudium et Spes* to reinforce his position on responsible family planning in Section 222 of *Amoris Laetitia*: “The clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council still holds: “[The couple] will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God”. (Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 50)

<sup>58</sup> Pope Francis 2015 *Amoris Laetitia* Section 222 ([http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf)).

while respecting His design for life and love.

The Catholic Church supports the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) because they respect God's design for married love. In fact, NFP represents the only authentic approach to family planning available to husbands and wives because these methods can be used to both attempt or avoid pregnancy.<sup>59</sup>

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops, in line with the teaching with the Second Vatican Council, St. John Paul II, and Pope Francis, reiterates that responsible family planning (“responsible parenthood”) is a *sacred* responsibility that should be carried out by the couple in dialogue with the Lord through their formed consciences. The Conference further indicates that after the couple has decided how many children to have and when to have them, they should implement their mutual decision through a method that is open to procreation—namely, natural family planning. Using a definition of “NFP” from their document *Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry*, they note:

Natural Family Planning is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy.

NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife.<sup>60</sup>

This document is a good on-line reference guide not only for standards of family planning, but also the theology of natural family planning. There are many other excellent on-line references explaining the methods and theology of natural family planning that go far beyond what this limited explanation can do. See, for example:

- Natural Family Planning International, Inc free downloadable manual – ([www.nfpandmore.org/](http://www.nfpandmore.org/)).
- The Couple to Couple League: Natural Family Planning—free on-line class (donations accepted) – ([www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)). The couple to couple League also offers live classes and self-paced classes.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website – click on “Find an NFP class”—([www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/find-an-nfp-class.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/find-an-nfp-class.cfm)).

<sup>59</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2014-2015 “Declaration on Natural Family Planning” (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/>).

<sup>60</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2010 *Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry*, (Wash, D.C.: USCCB Inc. ) p23 ([www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/diocesan-ministry/upload/2010-Standards-PDF](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/diocesan-ministry/upload/2010-Standards-PDF)).

Natural family planning has a deeply loving and beautiful theology behind it that married couples will want to learn to enhance their respect and covenant love for one another, and to connect more deeply with the Lord in their marriage and family. The above resources explain this theology as well as several excellent books.<sup>61</sup> I recommend that couples study these resources – and the theology intrinsic to them-- together. It will enhance every element of their marriage from intimacy to generativity and to prayer.

## I.D

### Communication Between Different Personality Types

One of the more common tools used in today's "for-profit" organizations to enhance communication and synergistic teams is an individual personality inventory. This helps co-workers to better understand and communicate with one another, and managers to build a cross-functional team with a wide variety of skills. Given the effectiveness of these tools within a corporate environment, we must suppose that they will have even greater effectiveness within relationships that will last for a lifetime. Some marriage preparation classes and pre-Cana retreats utilize personality typing already, but some do not. I would recommend that couples make this an integral part of their marriage preparation regardless of whether this component is integrated into their marriage preparation classes. The time investment is relatively small but the "payoff" in communication, common cause, and joint working dynamic can be substantial. The Meyers-Briggs Personality inventory is an easily accessible and usable inventory that can be apprehended on both simple and deeper comprehensive levels. Online resources for the Meyers-Briggs inventory are:

- Humanmetrics Inc – free on-line 64 question test with scoring – ([www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp](http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp)).
- NERIS Analytics Limited – free on-line 100 question personality test with scoring— ([www.16personalities.com/isfj-personality](http://www.16personalities.com/isfj-personality)).
- Truity Psychometrics LLC- free on-line 44 question personality inventory with scoring – ([www.truity.com/test/type-finder-research-edition](http://www.truity.com/test/type-finder-research-edition)).

There are other on-line resources that differentiate personality types within particular environments. These resources are not generally free of charge but can be purchased online.

The Meyers-Briggs Personality Inventory consists of four major dual categorizations that range from a high of one dual factor to a high in the other dual factor. It may be briefly explained as follows:

1. Extrovert (E) vs Introvert (I)
2. Sensate (S) vs Intuitive (N)
3. Thinker (T) vs Feeler (F)
4. Judger (J) vs Perceiver (P)

<sup>61</sup> Toni Weschler, Mph 2007 *Taking Charge of Your Fertility* (New York, HarperCollins). Mary Lee Barron, PhD. 2009 *Natural Family Planning, a Catholic Approach* (Missouri, Ligouri Publications). Couple to Couple League 2007 *The Art of Natural Family Planning* (Cincinnati: Couple to Couple League International, Inc.)

These terms have precise technical meanings within the Meyers-Briggs type inventory, and they can vary considerably from their meaning in common parlance. Therefore, knowledge of your and your spouse's personality depends on knowledge of those technical meanings. The following brief explanations are quite superficial and readers will want to study some of the above on-line resources or one of the many good books on this subject<sup>62</sup> to get a complete picture of each type within the four Meyers-Briggs (M-B) categories.

With respect to Extroversion vs. Introversion, the common-parlance definition is only partially applicable. Extroversion means more than preference to be with others and Introversion means more than preference to be by oneself. It really refers to whether one is outwardly focused or inwardly focused as a primary tendency or proclivity. Since *extroverts* are primarily outwardly focused, they tend to receive energy from other people – cognitive and emotional energy. Hence they prefer to think out loud with others—and when they do their creativity and thought development is energized. The more extroverted they are (on the M-B scale) the more energized their creativity and thinking processes will be when they are speaking with others. However, they tend to lose creative and emotional energy when they are by themselves. As we shall see, they can make introverts highly uncomfortable, because they are likely to speak confidently about thoughts that are only partially nuanced and complete.

Introverts are inwardly focused. Therefore, their energy is depleted by being with other people, but enhanced when they are by themselves thinking through a particular question or problem. They would rather think all the way through the nuances and levels of a particular problem before speaking rather than talk about something that may not be sufficiently nuanced or complete. When extroverts are in a working relationship with introverts, they are frequently bewildered by the introverts' lack of emotional response or cognitive input – and so they write off the introvert as being unsocial or anti-social instead of giving them the time to think through a problem. This is but one of many misimpressions that can be avoided by a brief study of the M-B typology.

Let us now turn to the next category. This category assesses how we *prefer* to take in information. *Sensates* prefer a concrete fact to a whole of many parts and possibilities, thus they prefer limited empirical realities—more than conceptual, complex, holistic schemes or abstractions. They tend to focus on sensory details, practical applications, and are generally literal. Linguists, geographers, historians and operations officers, for example, are very likely to be *Sensates*.

*Intuitives* prefer to take in information comprehensively or globally. They are interested not only in a specific concrete reality but in how many concrete realities fit together, are intrinsically organized, or can be extrinsically organized. They prefer to concentrate on the whole before the parts – while the sensate concentrates on the parts before the whole. They are more interested in comprehensive schemas and “the big vision” than in the details or practical applications. When *Intuitives* learn a language, they prefer to learn the grammar along with the words – while *Sensates* are happy learning words and phrases without the grammar that brings them all together. Mathematicians, philosophers, physicists and chemists tend to be intuitive

<sup>62</sup> Some excellent books on the Meyers-Briggs books are: Isabel Briggs Myers 1980 *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black); Otto Kroeger & Janet Thuesen 1989 *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types That Determine How We Live, Love and Work* (New York: Dell Publishing)

thinkers (see “thinkers” below), while writers and literary critics tend to be intuitive feelers (see “feelers” below). The common element between these groups is their preference for the “whole” before the “parts”—whether the whole be described metaphorically, figuratively, or symbolically (the intuitive feeler) or quantitatively, conceptually, or causatively (the intuitive thinker).

Let us move to the third category—the Thinker vs Feeler. Before addressing the differentiation between these types, it is important to note that these terms do not refer to whether a person has a high IQ or high EQ or a low IQ or EQ. Intelligence quotient and emotional quotient are independent of these types as used in the M-B inventory. This M-B category refers to how people make decisions. For example, a “thinker” *prefers* to make decisions on the basis of logical, quantitative, and verified analysis and evidence, while a feeler prefers to process data and make decisions on the basis of feeling, inklings, and gut instinct. Thus a thinker tends to look first at objective realities, “cause and effect”, and “the numbers”—while the feeler tends to look at personal and interpersonal realities as well as their instinctive feelings about the way events are likely to turn out.

Thinkers can over-analyze, but are quite analytical and data-driven. Feelers can make remarkably good decisions based on a hunch, but are open to being “side-lined” by unforeseen problems or overly optimistic data or numbers. Thinkers might ignore feelings and interpersonal relationships in making a decision while feelers might ignore important data, numbers, or causal relationships. Thinkers may be generically described as impersonal, reasonable, level-headed, while feelers might be described as personable, warm, empathetic and harmonious. Both qualities are important in the workplace as well as in the family and community.

We may now proceed to the fourth and final category: Judger vs Perceiver. As in the above categories these concepts also diverge from their meanings in common parlance. In general this category does not address epistemological activities, but how one prefers to live one’s “outer” life. The “Judger” *prefers* to have clarity, planning, and closure to get matters fixed and settled as soon as possible. The “Perceiver”, in contrast, *prefers* to leave matters open as long as possible to entertain new possibilities and opportunities that are yet unrevealed. Thus they tend to push off deadlines—or if a deadline is fixed, to wait until the last minute to get a task done so that no unforeseen possibility or opportunity is missed. Judgers tend to be decisive, focused on time-tables, aware of rules, and fixed on closure (bringing a task to completion). Perceivers tend to put off decisions, to reflect on possibilities and opportunities, enjoy surprises, and treat rules and deadlines with flexibility and liberality. For example, watch how people read a menu at a restaurant. Do they take lots of time to study each “opportunity” with reflection—putting off the decision until the last moment, and even asking the waiter to make the decision for them—or do they look at the menu for two minutes, glance down at the menu items they usually prefer, make the decision, and wait with great mystification for the perceiver to make his long-awaited decision? Clearly the former is a perceiver and the latter a judger.

It is important to be cognizant of the differences between perceivers and judgers in the workplace and especially in the family, because accommodation will have to be made for proclivities that can literally drive the opposite type toward frustration and even anger. It does not take much imagination to hear refrains like “quit rushing me” or “why are you always so late?” or “can’t we wait for a few days to examine some other possibilities or opportunities” or “why can’t

you ever make a decision?” When there are extreme differences in this category—i.e., one spouse is a “high J” while another is a “high P”—accommodations should be made before the marriage for each type to let go of some of their preferences, and to give the other some leeway in their preferences so that complementarity can occur. Without this “give-and-take” resolvable differences will become irresolvable conflicts.

The same holds true for thinkers versus feelers. One can hear the refrains, “you hard-hearted bum” or “why don’t you make a logical decision for once?” or “our relationship is not a ‘head-trip’, you know” or “why don’t you just stick to the task at hand instead of pleasing every friend and acquaintance who comes along?” Again, the only way to resolve a conflict that will almost naturally occur between a “high T” and a “high F” is to give up some of one’s own preferences and to give leeway to the other’s preferences. Failure to do so will almost always lead to irresolvable conflict.

Readers can also imagine the conflicts that can occur between “high Extroverts” who want to be in a social situation and to think through their decisions out loud—and a high Introvert who simply wants to be left alone and at peace to think it through for oneself. The refrains are typical “why do you have to keep talking all the time?” or “don’t you have *anything* to say about this important situation?” or “just leave me alone so I can think” or “you never communicate about the most important things in our marriage”. Once again, sacrifice of preference and giving leeway to the other’s preferences are the only road to tranquility and an enduring relationship.

Finally, there can also be conflicts between Sensates and Intuitives. High Sensates have a strong sense of direction and location, while High Intuitives can get easily lost – even in one’s neighborhood. Intuitives will insist “just give me the big picture instead of all of these meaningless details” while Sensates insist “in your usual overly generic fashion you have failed to recognize that the ‘devil is in the details’.” Again, the solution is the same—making sacrifices of our preferences and giving leeway to the other’s preferences.

This is a brief outline of the differences in each category, but there are also differences in combinations of types. For example an “NT” will be quite different from an “NF” – the “NT” will probably prefer math, analytical science, and logic—while the “NF” will prefer literature, metaphor, and poetry. The same holds true for sensate thinkers and sensate feelers. As a matter of fact, since there are four combinations of two, there will be sixteen possibilities of full personality types—such as ENTJ, INTJ, ESTJ, ISTJ, etc. It is important for couples to take one of the above online personality tests and to look for two kinds of data:

1. What is your “whole type” vs your spouse’s “whole type”
2. Where are there significant differences between you and your spouse in any of the four categories? (e.g., a high E vs a high I or a high T vs a high F).

When there is little variance in any of the four categories between you and your spouse, conflicts will be easily resolved. However where there is significant difference, explicit accommodation and self-examination will have to be made to prevent ongoing conflict.

Though the whole type (ENTJ) gives a general picture of one’s preferences, a low score in each preferred type might make the whole type somewhat insignificant within the relationship,

because a low score indicates a low preference, which in turn means that the person is easily accommodatable. If one spouse has a high score in a particular type and the other has a low score of the opposite type (within one of the four categories), then some accommodation will have to be made.

In sum, I would recommend that spouses take one of the above on-line personality inventories, taking care to be as honest as possible. The problem with these inventories is that one can answer the questions in terms of “who one wants to be” or “who one thinks the spouse wants one to be” instead of answering in terms of “who one is.” If one answers the questions in the first two ways, the personality inventory is completely invalid and could actually do more harm than good (due to misimpressions, unanticipated behaviors, frustration and disappointment). However, if one really tries to answer each question as honestly as possible—i.e. what one’s preference really is—then these personality tests can be an invaluable tool in helping to avoid needless conflicts and to build an enduring, mature, intimate relationship. \*

## **I.E**

### **Other Decisions and Proclivities Before and During Marriage**

There are other attitudes and expectations that can cause serious conflict within marriage – the most prevalent of which is the expectation about lifestyle and attitudes concerning spending versus saving. Though differences in this attitude/expectation can cause significant difficulty among couples who are Level 1 and/or Level 2, its effects are considerably reduced among couples who are Level 3 and/or Level 4. As can be imagined, Level 1-2 couples consider lifestyle (directed toward status) and money to be of paramount importance in establishing life’s meaning and fulfillment. As such, if one partner is intent on saving while another is intent on spending, serious conflict is likely to arise, producing resentment and unhappiness. We can expect similar conflict if one partner prefers a high end car or a large house to prove status or self-worth while the other prefers monetary security to stave off rainy day challenges. Such potential conflicts can be averted by frank discussions and a willingness to sacrifice before marriage. However, it is difficult for Level 1-2 individuals to make those sacrifices over the long term – and so they will have to explicitly prioritize the marriage over their need to prove self-worth or to save money.

Alternatively, Level 3 and/or Level 4 couples – though they may have very different attitudes toward spending or saving -- are in a good position to have frank discussions and to make self-sacrificial commitments for the marriage and family over the long term. Though these couples may be contributive and/or transcendent in their orientation, they cannot neglect having frank and sincere discussions about saving, spending, priorities for spending, and ways of saving. Failure to do so can lead to resentments and ultimately, to an undermining of the relationship. Level 3 and/or Level 4 couples have the advantage of having a common ground for communication and sacrifice that Level 1 and/or Level 2 couples do not. As a result, they need only be conscientious about their communication and the explicitation of needed sacrifices in order to make the marriage relationship work.

## **I.F Conclusion**

Differences and conflicts are almost inevitable in marital relationships, but they can be significantly mitigated if couples stress the following five dimensions of relationship:

1. By understanding the stages of intimacy, each partner decides to make the sacrifices necessary to allow the other partner to move into the fourth stage of intimacy – which enables the relationship to become complementary, and each partner to become optimally efficacious and independent (see above I.A).
2. Each partner has chosen to be Level 3 and/or Level 4 (contributive and transcendent) – preferably both -- in their life's meaning and fulfillment. One or two partners who are Level 1 and/or Level 2, will generally lead to a sub-optimal relationship, conflicts within the marriage, and sub-optimal common cause within the marriage (see above Section I.B).
3. The Second Vatican Council, Saint John Paul II, and Pope Francis indicate that couples should be open to children, engage in responsible family planning before the marriage, and be open to natural family planning as a means of achieving their objectives for children in their marriage. They will want to agree on the ultimate objective for their children – particularly with respect to their salvation, their contributive purpose in life, and their education (see above Section I.C).
4. Couples will want to make recourse to one of the free personality inventories recommended above in Section I.D. If there is a wide variance between couples on the scale of extraversion versus introversion, sensate versus intuitive, thinker versus feeler, or judger versus perceiver, each partner should be prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to accommodate the other's personality, and to reference these wide differences in personality traits when disappointments, conflicts, and breakdowns in communication occur (see above Section I.D).
5. There are other attitudes and expectations that can lead to significant conflict within a relationship – the most important of which concerns spending, saving, and lifestyle. Level 3 and/or Level 4 couples can mitigate these conflicts by open communication and explicit sacrifices because they have a common ground for these activities (see above Section I.E).

## **II. Daily Attitudes and Habits that Foster Sound Marriages**

[\*\*Back to top\*\*](#)

The following attitudes and habits are grounded in Level 3 and/or Level 4 meaning and fulfillment in life. If both partners are Level 1 and/or Level 2, the following advice will probably be viewed as unimportant or unintelligible – and so acting upon it will be next to impossible. If one partner is Level 3/Level 4 while another is Level 1/Level 2, then having a relationship based on *mutual* or *reciprocal* generative love (produced by the following attitudes and habits) will be out of reach. Non-reciprocal generative love puts a tremendous burden on the generative partner who must deal with dashed expectations, additional responsibility toward the children, and the responsibility to be “the glue” of the relationship.

However, Level 3 and/or Level 4 couples will understand the essence of and need for these attitudes to allow generativity and intimacy to flourish within the relationship. To assure that this happens, couples should periodically assess these attitudes within themselves, and communicate with one another about their needs – and their resolutions to help meet the others’ needs.

In general Level 3 and Level 4 meaning and identity support six major attitudes or dispositions that help to foster joyful, deep, fulfilling and enduring marriages capable of withstanding significant challenges and conflicts, raising generative and faith-filled children, and leading to the salvation of family members:

1. Looking for the good news in the other (Section II.A)
2. Gratitude (Section II.B)
3. Humility (Section II.C)
4. Forgiveness and Healing (Section II.D)
5. Enduring Commitment (Section II.E)
6. Individual and Shared Prayer (Section II.F)

## II.A

### Looking for the Good News in the Other

Empathy is a necessary condition of care for others – and care for others, a necessary condition of love. By “love” here we are speaking at once of *philia* (friendship), *eros* (the highest form of friendship and commitment through which romance and sexuality are expressed), and *agapē* (the recognition of the intrinsic and unique goodness and lovability of the other that elicits the desire to sacrifice oneself for the other alone – irrespective of reciprocity or reward of any kind).

As noted above, marital relationships require all three kinds of love – *philia* which ultimately develops into the desire for highest friendship and commitment, *eros* (the romantic and sexual expression of that friendship and commitment oriented toward children), and *agapē* (sacrifice of self for the good of the other alone -- without expectation of reciprocity).

The state of consciousness and emotion necessary for these three kinds of love is care which is a direct result of empathy. When empathy occurs, an individual is in a state of unity with the other whereby doing the good for the other is just as easy, if not easier, than doing the good for oneself. So empathy – this strong feeling of attraction and being drawn to the other – this feeling of unity with the other – mitigates the more primitive desire for self-interest. Though empathy is a natural feeling – a very powerful one capable of mitigating self-interest – it must be awakened – and if care is to become one’s dominant state of consciousness, it must subsequently be chosen.

Viewed from a Maslowian perspective, the needs associated with survival and self-interest are lower on the need hierarchy than those associated with empathy and care. Thus, a child or a person who does not have certain fundamental needs met, will naturally make recourse to self-interest *before* making recourse to empathy and care. Frequently, empathy is awakened by good friendships, romantic relationships based on good friendships, and the raising of children. These friendships, relationships, and children awaken strong feelings of attraction to and unity with the

other – and if the lower needs on the hierarchy are adequately met, will mitigate the more primitive feelings of self-interest in favor of the other. However, these feelings alone cannot permanently mitigate feelings of self-interest if a person does not *choose* to prioritize the other over oneself. Feelings subside over time, and choice alone allows empathy to endure. So how do we extend empathy beyond good friendships, romantic relationships, and children? How might we extend empathy to total strangers? Most importantly for marriages, how do we choose empathy – so that its feelings will remain strong over the long term? In a single phrase, “we must look for the good news in the other.” In Volume 16 (Chapter Three), we will discuss this fundamental attitude at some length. For the moment, we will only consider one major problem – namely that the bad news in the other can be spontaneously riveting and quite strong, and when it is clearly in view, it will not only mitigate, but undermine our feelings of empathy. How can we get around this problem so that empathy can awaken our desire to look for the good news in the other and our choice to look for the good news in the other can reinforce and animate our feelings of empathy in the long term?

The answer is simple—we must shift our focus from the bad news to the good news in the other—and try to hold it there. This is not a matter of our exerting extra effort, but only of recognizing the good that is intrinsic to the other. There is good in everyone—even in criminals. Just ask any mother. Most of the time, we are not looking for the good news in “criminals”, but in good people—and when we bring it into focus—when we let it matter to us – let it occupy our consciousness—it contextualizes and frequently purifies the bad news. The problem is that the bad news is more immediately riveting than the good news. When we are irritated, insulted, frustrated or hurt, we cannot focus on anything else. We seem to fix our gaze on the pain and irritation—much like a person who sees a terribly gory site like a car accident and cannot take his eyes off it until he is about to faint.

In order to free ourselves from the bad news that holds a more immediate power over us, it is generally not enough to will ourselves out of it—“I’m going to stop obsessing on this person’s irritating features or insults right now—I really, really, really am...” As most people know, trying *not* to do something generally results in our obsessing on it even more! So, if we are to free ourselves from the bad news, we will have to focus on something else—the good news.

As it turns out, we cannot focus on *both* the good news and the bad news simultaneously. Try it for yourself when you are obsessing on the bad news—what is irritating, unkind, stupid or weak. Now try to focus on the little good things the other tries to do, their gratuitous acts of kindness (especially when we don’t deserve them), the great things they aspire to – their principles, ideals, and faith, as well as their delightful idiosyncrasies, their transcendental nature (their desire for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home), and even their uniquely benevolent glance—their eyes being the windows to their soul. Notice what happens as you bring the good news into closer focus—the bad news begins to fade into the background, and so also the aversion and hostility accompanying it.

Now notice the second step—as the good news proceeds to the foreground (and the bad news to the background), empathy—the feelings of natural attraction to and unity with the other – become stronger. Soon, a genuine unity with the other begins to form—a bond through which our minds and hearts are interrelated and even intertwined. All we need do now is *choose* to make

these feelings and this state of empathy endure—choose to make it prevail over the bad news. As you make this choice, notice that your care for the other increases—and so also the capacity for *philia*, *eros*, and *agapē* (as we have defined them above).

This five-fold process of moving from the good news to awakening empathy to choosing empathy to care for the other and ultimately to *agapē* (sacrificial good for the other alone) is quite natural if we allow the good news in the other to awaken empathy in us. It need not occur only with good friends or spouses—it can actually occur with strangers and even mortal enemies. Obviously, it is much harder to focus on the good news in a stranger or an enemy than on one's friend or spouse, but this is what Jesus asks us to do through the power of prayer and grace. We will take this up in more detail in Volume 16. For the moment, we will focus only on the power of this habit in marriage. If we know our spouse better than anyone, and we saw very attractive qualities in our spouse when we were married, then it should not be too difficult to re-focus on those qualities when we are fixated on the bad news.

As noted earlier, frustration, disagreements, and conflicts are a virtual inevitability in any friendship or close relationship. We can't be perfect all the time. We get preoccupied, stressed, tired, and sometimes overwhelmed, and when we do, we say things, do things, or fail to do things that cause frustration, irritation, hurt feelings, and anger. It is precisely on these occasions when we will want to make immediate recourse to the good news in the other. Even though we may be hurt or justifiably angry, we need not follow those feelings into resentment and conflict. All we need do is reawaken our feelings of empathy—attraction to and unity with the other—by focusing on the good news—past kindnesses, high aspirations, strengths, faith, unique goodness and lovability, delightful idiosyncrasies, etc. The goodness intrinsic to the other will naturally awaken our empathy (unless of course we are sociopaths) and the desire for *rapprochement*, forgiveness, and care for the other will soon return. Strangely, the other can become quite irresistible only moments after they were annoying, hurtful, or antagonistic.

Notice that the power of empathy is awakened by the goodness *in the other*—not by an act of will from within myself. We cannot empathize with and care for another person while continuing to focus on the bad news—it simply won't work. Try it for yourself. Pick a person toward whom you might be annoyed, and now focus on all their annoying traits. Then say to yourself, “but I'm going to love this unlovable person anyway because I'm a good Christian.” Now add some stoic Nietzschean resolve to the formula—“I will love him, because what does not kill me makes me stronger!” As you can see, you cannot force yourself to love a person you consider to be unlovable—and you cannot see the lovability in someone when you are focusing on the bad news. If we are looking for the bad news, our stoic resolve will only lead us into greater annoyance, irritation, anger, hurt, and resentment.

There is one final step in bringing care for the other and sacrificial love for the other back into reality after difficulty or conflict – *forgiveness*. As we will discuss in Volume 16, *agapē* is precisely the kind of love that animates genuine acts of forgiveness. In Section II.D below, we will address this virtue in detail. For the moment, suffice to say that forgiveness is an act of “letting go” of an offense to allow the process of forgetting and healing to occur. This is best done through prayer and grace. Relatively insignificant difficulties—such as irritations, frustrations, or minor insults rarely require an explicit act of forgiveness. It is generally enough to

refocus ourselves on the good news in the other after which the unique goodness and lovability of the other take hold, allowing forgetting and healing to occur. However if conflict or injury is significant, an explicit act of forgiveness is almost always required.

Up to now we have emphasized looking for the good news in the other to overcome difficulties and resolve conflict. However, it must be stressed that keeping focused on the good news in the other is good in *all* circumstances – in marriages, friendships, work relationships, community relationships, and total strangers. It is also good for all occasions within marriages, friendships, etc. Awakening and choosing empathy – feelings of attraction to and unity with others – is never a bad idea. It virtually always leads to an increased care for and bondedness with others. It is probably *the* most important ongoing attitude and habit of both partners for any successful marriage.

Let us now return to the discussion of difficulties and conflicts for a brief review of major steps. There are three critical intentions we will want to bear in mind:

1. When difficulties or conflicts arise, it is imperative to refocus ourselves from fixating on the bad news to focusing on the good news in the other.
2. As empathy is awakened – and our bond with the other is strengthened, we will want to make that empathy as permanent as possible so that care for the other and *agapē* (and sacrificial love for the other alone without expectation of reward) becomes natural and desirable.
3. When *agapē* becomes desirable, we will want to make a firm resolution to let go of the other's offense. This is best done by a prayer such as "Lord, you are the just judge – you take care of it."

If we make these three critical intentions into habits (i.e. virtues – see Volume 16), we will assuredly mitigate conflict before it becomes destructive to the other and the relationship. Moreover, it will initiate a healing process that will strengthen the relationship in generativity and intimacy.

One final point, it is always a good idea to reflect on the good news in the other when you are not in conflict – and have some time and space to be deeply contemplative while reflecting on your partner. Bringing these attributes before God in prayer can help to deepen them. This will prove quite helpful when inevitable conflicts arise, for you will not have to *think of* the good news in the midst of conflict (which is very difficult), but only refocus your viewpoint on good qualities you have already elucidated. This is a much more manageable task, which is much more likely to be successful.

## II.B Gratitude

There is a folk expression that runs like this, "I never knew a person who was ungrateful and happy – or a person who was grateful and unhappy" – never have truer words been spoken. When we are ungrateful or take everything for granted, our focus is not on what we have been given, or how we have been blessed, but rather on what we don't have and what we resent others for having. Ungratefulness almost invariably leads to jealousy, dissatisfaction, resentment, anger,

self-pity, and hatred. It moves our worldview – the screen through which we see reality – from positive to negative. Ungrateful people not only see themselves as “getting a bad deal,” but see others as “getting too good of a deal.” Thus, they are constrained to be dissatisfied with their lives, and jealous of other’s lives. They cannot bring themselves to compliment a strength or positive attribute in the other, but only how to “whittle the other down to size.”

Fortunately, gratitude has precisely the opposite effect. When we are grateful for what we have been given, jealousy, resentment, and wishing ill on another are kept at bay, and the more grateful we are, the more these destructive attitudes and emotions are rendered powerless. Instead, gratitude acknowledges blessing by others and God – and to the extent they are, they reveal how good life is and how much we are loved by God and others. Gratitude is central to the Psalms, to the spirituality of Jesus, and virtually every Christian saint. In His final contemplation of the Spiritual Exercises (“The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love”), Saint Ignatius Loyola gives a template of how to reflect on God’s gifts to us – from creation to redemption to the gift of the Holy Spirit manifest in our lives. As we reflect on these gifts in the spirit of gratitude, Ignatius hopes that we will recognize how much we have been blessed by God – that is, how much we have been loved by God. He hopes this will elicit from us a desire to love Him in return. In a way, gratitude leads to love, and then becomes inseparable from it. We might generalize by saying that those who are grateful – who are aware of the blessings of creation, redemption, family, friends, faith, and divine providence in life are almost destined to be aware of God’s and other’s love, and to love them in return. Those who live in gratitude will live in love, and that will lead to joy – eternal and unconditional joy.

Contemporary psychology and neuroscience also show the benefits of gratitude. Dr. Robert Emmons (UC Davis) addresses several major benefits of being grateful – among them – experiencing more positive emotions, feeling more alive, sleeping better, capacity to express more compassion and kindness, and having stronger immune systems.<sup>63</sup>

This general observation about gratitude is exceedingly important in relationships with spouses and children. Since these relationships are so close and intimate, ingratitude can do incalculable harm – and gratitude can do incalculable good. Though we might think that we can be too expressive of gratitude – that we are boring our spouses, children, and friends with daily expressions of thanksgiving – this is rarely the case. Even the most ungracious people willingly accept others’ gratitude if only because it builds their egos. Gracious people recognize sincere gratitude, and they accept it as an expression of friendship and love. Gratitude shows them that they are not taken for granted, that they are not a mere commodity or utility, but instead beloved – a person who is needed, valued, and cherished. This is overwhelmingly important in marriages – and ongoing ingratitude is almost always fatal. The same holds true for children. Though children have far more to be grateful for than parents because children are dependent on parents for almost everything, parents know far better the value of gratitude and how to express it than their children. Yet having one’s needs provided for is not the only reason to be grateful. Parents know well that they can be grateful for what children can offer – their moments of affection and especially their expressions of love – whether these be in simple smiles or hugs – or explicitly articulated. These expressions of love can fill parents with a tremendous sense of meaning, fulfillment, well-being, love, and joy. When parents express their affection and love for their children, and tell them how

<sup>63</sup> Robert Emmons 2008 *Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier* (New York: Mariner Books).

important the children are to their lives, children are likewise filled with a sense of worth, lovability, intrinsic goodness, and joy. Clearly, simple expressions of gratitude, which are expressions of love, are remarkably life-giving and empowering.

So how do we bring this incredibly life-giving force into our marital relationships and the lives of our children? As readers may by now suspect, a Level 3 and/or Level 4 meaning in life is paramount. Gratitude is focused on the person to whom one is grateful – the other and God. However, Level 1 and Level 2 identity are focused predominantly on the self. Thus, a Level 1 or Level 2 person will not only have difficulty being thankful, but also recognizing what to be thankful for and who to be thankful to – because they are not focusing on what they have, but on what they don't have. They are far more concerned about comparative **disadvantage** than on the benefits and goods that make their life sustainable. Furthermore, gratitude implies that we are “beholding” to another for their goodness or generosity – and this runs contrary to the self-sufficiency and autonomy needs of a Level 1/Level 2 person. Presuming that most readers are Level 3 and/or Level 4, I have but one suggestion – resist the temptations of Level 1 and Level 2, emphasize Level 3 and Level 4, and start making gratitude into a habit – not only in your family life, but also in your work life, community life, and religious life.

As noted earlier, Level 3 and/or Level 4 individuals are free to look for the good news in the other – whereas Level 1/Level 2 individuals are more inclined to focus on the bad news in the other which makes them look comparatively good. This freedom to focus on the good news in the other is of paramount importance, for when we see it, our natural feelings of empathy are awakened, and these feelings, in turn motivate us to thank the other. We want to give the other *the gift* of being thanked, being acknowledged, and being needed. When we are in a state of empathy, we are not worried about being “beholding” to another, but *pleased* to be affirming the other – even if this puts us at a comparative disadvantage. We might sum up by saying that Level 3 and/or Level 4 identity frees us to look for the good news in the other, and looking for the good news in the other frees us to be explicitly grateful to them. The moment we express it, the benefits to both individuals and the relationship (described above) become realized – and that makes all the difference – to bondedness in the relationship, mutual happiness, and to intimacy and generative love.

Level 4 identity affords one other benefit to the process of thanksgiving. When we are aware of how much we have been blessed by God, it frees us to recognize evermore deeply how much we have been blessed by others. When Jesus combined the first and second commandments of love – “Love the Lord your God...” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” – He implied that love of God leads to greater love of neighbor, and love of neighbor leads to greater love of God – in an ever widening spiral. When our love for God deepens (because we recognize more deeply His love for us through our recognition of how much we have been blessed by Him), the grace coming from our closeness to Him spills over into every one of our human relationships. Our sense of unity with the divine, sacredness, security, fulfillment, and joy *frees* us to give ourselves to others with almost reckless abandon. When we have hope, joy, and security through our relationship with God, we don't need to accumulate worldly securities for ourselves – material things, honors, successes, promotions, and comparative advantages. God's love, peace, and security replace the need to build up our material fortress and our resume' – enabling us to be generous, complementary, and even magnanimous to others. We don't have to do this falsely or

obsequiously, because the truth of the other is more than sufficient. Thus all we need do is recognize the intrinsic value, goodness, lovability and mystery of the other – and reflect it back to them. When we do this, God’s grace – that is, God’s love – flows through our words, expressions, gifts, and emotions, reinforcing our intention to build the other up temporally, personally, and spiritually.

## II.C Humility

Jesus speaks often of humility as a key characteristic of love. He tells us that whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Mt. 23:12), encourages us to be “poor in spirit” -- “humble-hearted” (Mt. 5:3) and describes Himself as humble and gentle of heart (Mt. 11: 29). All major spiritual writers from the time of Saint Paul have made humility central to the development of our spiritual lives, and Saint Ignatius Loyola believed it was so important that he devotes an entire meditation in his *Spiritual Exercises* to the three degrees of humility.

Saint Augustine expressed it well:

It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.<sup>64</sup>

Mary’s Magnificat portrays the path to the exaltation of love through humility quite poetically:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he remembered his promise of mercy,

<sup>64</sup> Saint Augustine. Quoted in the late medieval anthology *Manipulus Florum*, ed. by Thomas Hibernicus (Thomas of Ireland). The entire Latin 14<sup>th</sup> century text is available and searchable digitally in the *Electronic Manipulus Florum* (<http://web.wlu.ca/history/cnighman/>).

the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children forever (Lk 1:46-55).

Notice where Mary begins – in prayer, proclaiming the greatness of the Lord. She rejoices not in herself, but in the Lord her Savior. She acknowledges that God has looked with favor on her because of her humility, and says “From this day all generations will call me blessed.” This passage is frequently misunderstood because it might appear to someone who does not know Greek that Mary has suddenly become proud! Mary is not showing off her holiness here, but is addressing *God’s* favor to her. We might translate it as “From this day, all generations will view me as the most fortunate person in the world,” because God allowed her to carry His Son.

Mary continues by praising God – “For the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is His name. He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation. He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit, He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.” Here Mary acknowledges that pride -- self-aggrandizement, self-indulgence, and self-idolatry – are contrary to love and faith – and therefore contrary to God’s will. Ultimately, pride will divorce us from God and His Kingdom. However, *humility* supports love and faith, and so is consistent with God’s will, leading ultimately to unity with God and entrance into His Kingdom.

Why do these saints believe that humility is so central to love and the spiritual life? In a way, they are describing what we have been saying in more contemporary terms – namely, that if Level 3 (contributive-love) and/or Level 4 (transcendent-faith) identity do not supersede Level 2 (ego-comparative) identity, then we will be focused on ourselves and caught up in jealousy, fear of loss of esteem, inferiority, superiority, ego-sensitivity, ego-rage, emptiness, and self-pity. This general state of unhappiness and ego-centricity (bordering on narcissism) will likely undermine all our interpersonal relationships as well as our relationship to God. The more intimate a relationship is supposed to be (e.g. in marriage), the more pride – ego-comparative identity – undermines it. As we saw above, Level 1 and/or Level 2 identity (in their pure state) are opposed to looking for the good news in the other, generosity, gratitude, and surrender to God. Hence, Level 2 identity undermines marriages and families (see above I.B).

Though humility is difficult for everyone, the path can be made easier by allowing Level 3 and/or Level 4 identity to supersede Level 1/Level 2 identity. If we recognize the difficulties inherent in Level 1/Level 2 identity, and the true benefit and goodness of Level 3 and Level 4 identity, we leap out of the grip of Level 2 by using the attractiveness and power of contributive-loving and transcendent-faith identity. This is not a “one and done” project – it must be consciously re-chosen and re-charged every day through real acts of generosity and prayer.

One such simple prayer of humility is “Jesus – who are perfectly gentle and humble of heart – help me to imitate you in humility and gentleness.” This simple prayer is quite powerful because it avoids the problem of stoically willing ourselves to be humble – which generally turns into pride or failure – by appealing to our desire to be like the one we love – Jesus our Savior who loved us first. Saint Ignatius Loyola recognized that the most powerful motivation of a convinced Christian to be humble is to appeal to his desire to imitate and be a companion of the one he loves – in this case, Jesus. He also recognized that the way to incite this love is to know Jesus personally

through prayer, scripture, and contemplation, which would reveal His unconditional, unrestricted affection, delight, healing love, compassion, and salvific intention for us. When we really recognize and accept in our hearts the incredibly gracious and unconditional love God has for us, He becomes irresistible – we want to follow Him and be like Him – precisely as He is.

This contemplative approach to Jesus and His gentle and humble heart must also be continually chosen within our prayer and reflection. Though we may feel quite bonded to the Lord and His gentle and humble heart at one particular moment, we can easily fall prey to the temptations of vanity and pride by simply going to our workplace, competing with a colleague, getting into a contest of egos at home, or playing the comparison game throughout the day. Thus, we must continually rekindle our desire to imitate the Lord by contemplatively recalling His love for us. We don't have to do this in any formal, lengthy way – it is simply enough to say, “I know you love me, and I love you too” or “I know you are here and you love me.” We do not even have to say this. It is sufficient to look at an icon of the Sacred Heart or the holy face in the Shroud of Turin which can rekindle the desire to follow Him.

Those who have a close affinity to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, may want to be her companion in humility and apostolate. The same spiritual practice given above can enkindle the desire for humility. Here again we might say the prayer, “Mother Mary, I know you are here and you love me – and I love you too” or to simply gaze upon a favorite picture of the Blessed Virgin. As Saint Ignatius would advise, when your heart is close to Jesus or His Mother, ask for the grace intrinsic to that love – the grace to follow them or to be like them – gentle and humble of heart. If couples can bring this simple spirituality into their marriage, it will lead to quick resolutions of conflicts, expressions of gratitude and generosity, and deep unity through surrender to God.

## **II.D**

### **Forgiveness and Healing**

Though not all marriages will have significant problems or conflicts requiring forgiveness, most will. In view of this, it is best to be realistic about the possibility of negative events occurring even if a relationship looks virtually perfect at the present moment. The happiest and most optimistic couples may want to look over this section even if it seems unduly negative or problematic. We have already treated this subject in some detail above in Chapter Two (Section II.B). In view of this, I will limit my discussion to a few points concerned with forgiveness during times of marital conflict.

Recall from above that forgiveness interrupts the cycle of vengeance begetting vengeance and violence begetting violence – which, if left to itself, can disturb, undermine, and even dismantle what was a good marriage. Hence it is imperative to put a protocol of sincere forgiveness in place to meet serious conflicts and challenges that may occur in marriage. A protocol is a series of action steps capable of remedying a negative condition or situation generally prepared before the negative situation arises so that it can be quickly and reflexively implemented.

Such a protocol presumes that a couple is Level 3 and/or Level 4 – preferably Level 3 *and* Level 4. It also presumes that a couple understands the importance of forgiveness and agree together that if significant challenges arise, they will make use of this protocol through their faith.

The power of having a protocol is its potential to be used almost mechanically or reflexively when conflicts and emotional challenges virtually rule out the possibility of creativity, reflectivity, and willingness to see the others' point of view. The reader can imagine any number of possible events – from insults to betrayals – that could lead to such conflicts.

So what should be included in a “forgiveness protocol”? Presuming that the couple has active faith, they might use the following five-step protocol in times of serious conflict or injury:

1. Each spouse should begin with a prayer. It does not have to be done together. Indeed, if one spouse has been particularly hurtful, negligent, or insulting, or has betrayed the other, shared prayer will be virtually impossible. I would recommend using certain passages from the New Testament to start the prayer – from Chapter 5 of the Sermon on the Mount, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 11-32), or some of the many passages on forgiveness from the New Testament epistles. The prayer should then proceed to a petition asking the Lord to make good come out of the harm and injustice in the situation, and then to a prayer for God to take care of the negative situation. The one I use frequently is, “Lord you are the just judge – you take care of this.” When I am confronted by such challenges, I repeat these short prayers over and over again – giving both the pain and the offender to God to take care of. I can assure you that if you do not bring the Lord into this negative situation, it will be very difficult to let go of the pain and anger intrinsic to an unjust offense.
2. Resolve beforehand that you will do everything in your power to avoid resorting to rash actions, vengeance, or violence.
3. If you are the injured party, reflectively consider what *your needs will be* if the marriage is to be restored and kept healthy. The reason for engaging in such reflection is that *objective* consideration of what must be *done* in the *future* is much better than *brooding* about the hurtful conduct of the *past*. The former practice leads to healing while the latter leads to dissolution. This reflection would include: (a) consideration of what kind of conduct is “off limits” (generally concerned with needed protection from physical or emotional abuse), (b) what kinds of protections might be required, (c) what kinds of conditions should be met by the other spouse and (d) what kind of restitution will be necessary for the injured spouse to regain his/her dignity.  
The injured spouse cannot make impossible conditions for the offending party – such as asking for a change in personality, becoming perfect in a particular virtue, asking for restitution which is beyond the injuring party’s capacity to accomplish, etc. The proper criterion for establishing conditions of protection, accountability, restoration of dignity, and restitution is *reasonableness* – not perfection or vengeance.
4. After a period of sufficient prayer, reflection, and recovery (which may be several weeks), the injured spouse will want to communicate with the offender. Person to person communication is probably best if enough trust and understanding is possible. If the emotional pain precludes trust and understanding, it is probably best to communicate through an intermediary – such as a knowledgeable priest, a person or minister involved in marriage encounter, or a marriage counselor. It is imperative that communication not be put off indefinitely after a reasonable period of prayer and reflection. Failure to do this gives the impression that the offending party does not have accountability (and the matter will be swept under the rug) while the injured party feels that justice and restitution will never be done. This generally leads to the unravelling of intimacy and friendship within the marriage – and eventually to its dissolution. If the injured spouse is reticent to communicate (because

of the degree of emotion on both sides), it is probably best to leave a sufficient time for reflection and healing, and then call a counselor (from the parish, marriage encounter or marriage counseling service), and make an appointment. If there is a date certain that communication is to take place, then odds are that it will take place. However, if it is not on the calendar, the process of prolonging – with its absence of accountability and restitution – will likely extend indefinitely into the future.

5. Once a strategy for accountability and restitution has been communicated and agreed to by the offending party, it is important to explicitly forgive the offending party – and to follow through on the strategy of accountability and restitution.

If the couple follows through on the conditions and steps of reasonable protection, accountability and restitution, the healing process can take place that will likely allow the marriage to regain its footing—though it might remain weakened until the emotional pain of the injured party subsides.

The above protocol was set out quite tersely, but it contains the basic elements needed to successfully overcome and heal situations in which offensive conduct and its emotional pain can threaten or undermine a marriage. There are three additional points that might be made to clarify the five-step protocol given above.

First, recall that forgiving is not forgetting (see above Chapter Two, Section II.A). Forgiving – letting go of an unjust offense and pursuing a protocol for healing-- occurs much more quickly than forgetting. The more injurious the offense, the more deeply one's memory and subconscious psyche are affected, and the more deeply our memory and psyche are affected, the longer the process of forgetting will take. Nevertheless, if we do not forgive – letting go of unjust offenses and using the above protocol to begin the process of healing – we will never forget. Moreover, if we do not forgive, we will likely amplify our pain by re-living the situation that caused it. This generally leads to unresolved anger and pressure to seek vengeance. If these negative consequences are to be avoided, the above protocol should be implemented as quickly as possible after incidents of significant injury or conflict. Failure to do so may lead to the eventual dissolution of the relationship.

Secondly, recall that forgiveness does not entail enduring continuous abuse into the future. Jesus' proclamation of the indissolubility of marriage was not intended to inflict continuous abuse or pain on one of the spouses. All Christians have a right—and even a duty—to protect themselves, and to respect their physical, emotional, and mental health. If no remedy to abuse can be found, then separation may well be the best course of action for the injured or battered spouse. Forgiveness is not inconsistent with taking protective or evasive action to avoid abuse. An injured spouse can forgive (i.e., let go of an abusive offense—that is, not hold the offense against the abusive spouse or take vengeance on that spouse) while at the same time taking steps to protect or avoid further abuse. Notice that the above five-step protocol helps to do this by focusing the injured spouse on a process of finding and communicating the conditions necessary for healing and continuing fruitfully within the relationship.

Thirdly, there are occasions in which both spouses are injuring parties—that is, each spouse is contributing to the conflict by preventable activities they know will cause unnecessary injury to the other. This may occur for a variety of reasons—though the two major motives are vengeance for past hurts and egocentric desires to gain advantage over the other. When this occurs, both spouses must admit their responsibility in the destructive cycle, and take the time to engage in the

above protocol—setting out reasonable conditions for what they will need for healing and the continuation of a fruitful relationship.

In conclusion, recall that chance favors the prepared mind. One of the best preparations for healing in the midst of serious injury or conflict is the above five-step protocol of forgiveness. If couples use this protocol, and the injured spouse is reasonable about the conditions needed for protection, accountability, and restitution, and the injuring spouse sincerely accepts those reasonable conditions, then healing is likely to occur. However without a protocol, forgiveness will be difficult indeed, because the strength and creativity to engage in forgiveness and productive healing will have to arise out of the ashes of pain, hurt, and offense. This will not be easy.

Some couples may believe that their marital situation is beyond the pale – that the conflictual nature and accumulated injuries are simply too much to overcome. In these circumstances, if a couple is trying to stay on Levels 3 and 4, I would recommend going to a Catholic marriage rehabilitation organization called Retrouvaille (<https://www.helpourmarriage.org/>). This faith-based approach to the rekindling of marital love is taught by couples who have been in similar situations and have developed tools to overcome what may have been imminent divorce.

## II.E

### Freedom, Commitment, and Human Nature

Marital commitment is the highest form of human freedom—tantamount to faith in God—because it is commitment to a course of action for a lifetime. In Volume 13, we will discuss the difference between “freedom from” and “freedom for.” “Freedom from” means avoiding external constraints *from* other people, the forces of nature, or a totalitarian political system, thus, it leads to greater autonomy (self-rule) and independence. However, this does not exhaust the range of freedom, because human meaning and fulfillment are not completely satisfied by autonomy and independence. This is the restricted viewpoint of Level 1 and/or Level 2 individuals. Level 3 and/or Level 4 individuals recognize a deeper and broader view of human meaning and fulfillment—one that comes from love, contribution to others, transcendence, and relationship with God. The problem with viewing human beings as *merely* autonomous is that it omits altogether two other essential dimensions of our nature—we are interpersonal (meant for love—level 3)--and we are transcendent (meant for interpersonal and eternal relationship with God). Therefore associating human meaning and fulfillment with autonomy and independence alone will lead unavoidably to a radical absence of meaning and fulfillment—and its attendant emotions of emptiness, loneliness, and alienation.

So if “freedom from” corresponds only to a view of human meaning and fulfillment as autonomy and independence, what view of freedom corresponds to human meaning and fulfillment as interpersonal and transcendent? Most theistic existentialists – Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, and Max Scheler—recognize that it is a kind of freedom that moves *away* from autonomy and independence – namely, *freedom “for”*. Acknowledging our interpersonal nature forces us to acknowledge our radical incompleteness without the other. In our autonomy, we are a mere splinter of ourselves, but when we are in relationship with others, we come alive through them—alive in companionship, friendship, collaboration and common cause.

In relationship, our emotional being comes to life through the other—but by ourselves, we are reduced to a state of emotional stasis and boredom.

Similarly, acknowledging our transcendent nature forces us to acknowledge our radical incompleteness without God—the sacred, numinous, transcendent, inviting, spiritual being who is present to us in the innermost sanctuary of our conscious and unconscious psyche. As noted in Volume 2, the presence of the mysterious, sacred, transcendent, wholly “Other” reveals our true destiny and calling—to be in eternal relationship with Him who is our ultimate meaning and fulfillment—unrestricted consciousness embracing perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home. Our refusal to acknowledge what Martin Buber called “the I-Thou relationship” leads once again to radical incompleteness—to stasis and emotional boredom on a cosmic and ultimate level, which in turn, leads to cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation. (See Volume 13, Chapter Four). As noted above (Chapter Three, Section I.B), religious *non*-affiliation has even broader negative consequences manifest in a study published by the American Psychiatric Association—namely, significantly increased suicide attempts, meaninglessness, depression, impulse aggressivity, substance abuse, and familial tensions.<sup>65</sup> These are mental and emotional indicators of what happens when we remain radically incomplete in our transcendent nature, meaning, and fulfillment. St Augustine expressed this quite succinctly 1600 years ago when praying to God at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “For thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”<sup>66</sup>

Let us now return to the topic of freedom. If we are to acknowledge our *whole* nature, meaning, and fulfillment we cannot restrict ourselves to our autonomous nature alone, but must extend ourselves to our interpersonal and transcendent nature as well. If we do that, then we must extend our view of “freedom” to one which is commensurate with our interpersonal and transcendent nature. Since these two dimensions of our nature are *relational*, they are in tension with our autonomous nature which seeks self-rule and independence. Thus the “freedom *from*” of our autonomous nature must be complemented by our freedom *for* others (our interpersonal nature) and freedom *for* God (our transcendent nature).

“Freedom *for*” necessarily means letting the other in, letting the other matter, respecting the other, empowering the other, and giving the other partial jurisdiction over us. This means giving up some of our autonomy, and therefore, some of our “freedom *from*.” The more we desire to receive the interpersonal complementarity of the other and God, the more we will need to surrender our autonomy and “freedom” to them. The more of ourselves we commit to the other, the more the other will be able to commit to us—our time, physical energy, psychic energy, and future. Thus if we commit our whole future to others, they are free to commit their whole future to us, and if we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for others, they are free to sacrifice themselves for us. Therefore, commitment and reciprocal obligation are the keys to interpersonal support, complementarity, and fulfillment by others.

Now here’s the rub—commitment of time, physical energy, psychic energy and future as noted above-- lead to deeper interpersonal and transcendent meaning and fulfillment, but commitment to another is in tension with autonomy (self-rule), independence, and “freedom

<sup>65</sup> See Kanita Dervic 2004 “Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt.”

<sup>66</sup> *Confessions* bkI, Section 1

from.” We cannot have it both ways--maximizing “freedom from” (our autonomous nature) *and* maximizing “freedom for” (our interpersonal and transcendent nature) at the same time. We will have to give up one kind of freedom ( meaning and fulfillment) in order to increase the other. In a way, then, commitment is in tension with “freedom from” (our autonomous nature) but supportive of and complementary to “freedom for” (our interpersonal and transcendent nature).

It should not be surprising then, that some people think that commitment will lead to a reduction of their freedom. In a sense, it does, but only one kind of freedom -- “freedom from.” If one looks at the issue more broadly, it becomes clear that commitment also enhances freedom – “freedom for,” which enables our interpersonal and transcendent nature to be more deeply and broadly fulfilled.

Now here is where the four levels of happiness and meaning come back into play. If we have a dominant Level 1 or Level 2 view of meaning and identity, “freedom from” will be far more important than “freedom for.” Indeed, if we are deeply committed to Level 1 or Level 2, we may not even recognize “freedom for” (our interpersonal and transcendent nature). However, if we have a dominant Level 3 and/or Level 4 meaning and identity, we will recognize and value our interpersonal and transcendent nature (requiring “freedom for” and commitment), and also recognize the sacrifice of our autonomous nature (“freedom from”) required for their fulfillment. Put simply, dominant Level 1 and Level 2 individuals are likely to have an aversion to commitment while dominant Level 3 and Level 4 individuals will have an attraction to commitment.

What does this have to do with marriage? Evidently, dominant Level 1 and Level 2 individuals will likely not have the attraction to commitment needed to pledge themselves to another person for the rest of their lives. Their view of freedom will likely be restricted to “freedom from,” and as a result, they will feel their freedom being constrained or even stolen from them by making a lifetime commitment. The more attached they are to Level 1 or Level 2, the greater will be their aversion to commitment and their feelings of losing their freedom (i.e. being enslaved). Alternatively, the more attached we are to Level 3 and/or Level 4, the more we will recognize and value “freedom for,” enabling us to value, or even treasure, commitment and the sacrifice of autonomous freedom for it. This view of commitment and freedom are essential to making a realistic and actualizable lifetime commitment needed for marriage.

The best that a dominant Level 1 or Level 2 individual can do in making a lifetime commitment is likely to be a grudging accession to the pleas of the other partner—“ok, if this is what you really need to stay with me, I’ll do it, but it’s only to keep you happy.” If this is said out loud, the other spouse is at least aware of the partner’s half-heartedness or even tenth-heartedness. Far worse is when it is not said out loud, because the manifestations of the Level 1/Level 2 spouse’s feelings of loss of freedom, enslavement, and consequent resentment will begin to emerge almost immediately after the marriage. If the other spouse is Level 3 or Level 4, she will be bewildered and even offended by her spouse’s feelings of enslavement and resentment, and if she is Level 1 or Level 2, she will share the same feelings of enslavement and resentment as her spouse. Such a marriage is likely to be short-lived.

Regrettably, a majority of our culture seems to be dominant Level 1 or Level 2, and seems to be growing. This does not bode well for the future of marriage, if the general population does not re-orient itself back to Level 3 and /or Level 4. Such a turn-around is not impossible, because the negative feelings of the comparison game and the emptiness, loneliness, and alienation coming from the non-recognition of our interpersonal and transcendent nature have a way of motivating people to move to Level 3 and Level 4 to avert emotional misery, tragic relationships, and existential crisis. However, if this is to occur, then the victims of dominant Level 1 and Level 2 (meaning and identity) will have to be informed about the way out of their crisis (moving to levels 3 and 4) and given a way to accommodate that move freely and resolutely (this is the subject matter of Volume 13). This almost assuredly means that religious people will have to “evangelize” the culture by rekindling knowledge and interest in our interpersonal and transcendent nature. Short of this, we are likely to face a future of continued decline in marriage, family, and faith.

When religious couples are preparing for marriage, it is not enough to deepen their Level 3 and Level 4 meaning and identity, to look for the good news in the other, and to commit themselves to humility and a protocol of forgiveness, they will also have to explicitly conform their feelings about freedom and commitment to their Level 3 and Level 4 meaning and identity. Unfortunately, Level 3 and Level 4 identity don’t automatically lead to positive feelings about “freedom for” and commitment. A couple has to *explicitly* realize that their commitment to love and faith brings fulfillment to their interpersonal and transcendent nature, and then *explicitly* recognize that this fulfillment entails “freedom for” which will be in partial tension with “freedom from” (their autonomous nature). After recognizing these associations and trade-offs, they will want to *choose* “freedom for” the other and “freedom for” God *over* “freedom from” and autonomy (self-rule). The more they reinforce this choice, the more the feelings of imprisonment, enslavement and resentment will subside, and be replaced by feelings of reciprocal support and love coming from their lifetime commitment. By aligning their feelings about freedom with their Level Three/Four meaning and identity (through *explicit* recognition and choice of “freedom for”), the couple will replace feelings of “buyer’s remorse” and “stolen autonomy,” with feelings of love and support for one another. This committed awareness and choice is not only a solid foundation for the marriage, but also for the children who are likely to come from it.

Once a couple explicitly recognizes, values, and chooses their interpersonal nature, transcendent nature, and “freedom for,” and aligns their feelings about freedom and commitment to them, there is only one more step in the commitment process—a final pledge, “never to ask the question ‘whether’ again, but only the question ‘how.’” The question “whether”—“whether I should have entered into a lifetime commitment”—is destined to undermine permanent commitment, because it throws it into abeyance. The moment this occurs, we are given a false sense of “freedom from”—a false sense of “availability” which is contrary to our initial intention as well as the expectation of our spouse. This inauthentic sense of “freedom from” and availability in turn, causes the mind and heart to wander—“perhaps this other person would have been a better match” or or more threateningly “perhaps that person would have been a better spouse.” The moment our imagination takes hold of this inauthentic “possibility,” our resolve to remain committed to our spouse is weakened—whether we act on these fantasies or not. If we do act on these fantasies, our weakened resolve can easily turn into betrayal – with its terrible consequences for spouse, children and the marriage itself.

It is difficult to keep a purely negative resolve at the forefront of our consciousness -- “I will never ask the question ‘whether’ again—I really, really won’t—really.” The negativity of the resolve makes it hard to imagine and choose. It is much easier to *substitute* a negative resolve with a positive resolve that will engage our imagination and will—“I will never ask the question ‘whether’ again, but only the question ‘how’.” The question “how?” is filled with positive possibilities. When problems or conflicts arise or spirits droop, we do not have to succumb to the destructive question “whether we should have entered into a lifetime commitment with this person.” Instead we can replace it with the positive question “how?” which fills the imagination with positive ways of making the relationship work—“how can we use our mutual strengths, our faith, our families, our friends, and our mutual resolve to make the best out of this challenging situation and our drooping spirits?” Notice that the minute we engage in this positive question, the negative question of “whether?” is pushed into the background, and the products of our positive imagination come into the foreground, rekindling the commitment and the relationship.

In conclusion, religiously-oriented couples who are preparing for marriage will want to reinforce their commitment to the following six items:

1. Their Level 3 and Level 4 meaning and identity
2. The fulfillment of their interpersonal and transcendent nature
3. The “freedom for” and commitment needed for the fulfillment of their interpersonal and transcendent nature
4. The sacrifice of some of their autonomous nature—“freedom from”—for the sake of “freedom for” and the marriage commitment
5. The alignment of their *feelings* of freedom with “freedom for” (conforming to their interpersonal and transcendent nature) so that they will not be surprised by discordant feelings of “freedom from” – such as feelings of imprisonment, enslavement and resentment.
6. Resolving never to ask the question “whether” again, but only the question “how?”

If a couple is explicitly aware of these six dimensions of freedom, commitment, and human nature—and can keep them in view throughout their marriage-- they can maintain their lifetime commitment in times of waning romantic feelings, the challenges of life and children, and even significant conflicts.

## **II.F**

### **Individual and Shared Prayer**

The charismatic “rosary priest,” Fr. Patrick Peyton, popularized a Christian-Catholic truism about marriage –“The family that prays together, stays together.” His contention has been borne out by study after study, and embraces the truth that grace (through prayer) lies at the heart of truly blessed Christian marriages.

In Chapter One above (Section III.C) we addressed the five characteristics of deep, enduring, resilient, and nurturing marriages that are significantly enhanced by couples who practice a sacramental and spiritual life. This correlation is supported by four major longitudinal studies at seven universities – Florida State University, University of Georgia, Bowling Green State University, University of Auburn, East Carolina University, University of North Texas, and

the University of Calgary.<sup>67</sup> The findings of these studies also correlate well with best practices in Catholic marriages. Though there are many ways for couples to practice their sacramental and spiritual lives (see the resources below), the following four general practices are virtually universal in these deep and enduring marriages:

1. Spouses who actively participate in sacramental church services (note also the above study indicating the high correlation between a father's participation in church services and his children's lifetime participation in church<sup>68</sup>).
2. Spouses who actively participate in their church community beyond church services—e.g. volunteering on parish committees (e.g. parish council, finance committee, etc.), participating in prayer groups or bible study groups, volunteering to help in social service or other ministerial projects, helping to form community at church through events after Mass, etc.).
3. Spouses who dedicate a prescribed amount of time to daily individual prayer and/or shared prayer—see the resources below.
4. Spouses who actively teach and model their faith and commitment to a moral life to their children—and when appropriate, to their friends and community.

Though individual prayer is important and cannot be completely substituted for shared prayer, shared prayer has been found to be one of the most important factors in helping couples to resolve conflicts, meet challenges, and deepen their intimacy.<sup>69</sup> It also provides the foundation for family prayer—bringing children into a spiritual life outside of church services.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it is incumbent upon couples to dedicate time every day to some form of shared prayer at the inception of their marriage—or if they are already married, as soon as possible. Four kinds of shared prayer are frequently practiced by deeply intimate and caring couples:

- 1.
2. The rosary, or some part of a rosary (two or three decades)<sup>71</sup>.
3. Recitation of common prayers (e.g. the Our Father or Hail Mary) and other prayers from favorite prayer books<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> David Briggs 2015 “5 Ways Faith Contributes to Strong Marriages, New Studies Suggest” in *Huffington Post* (February 08, 2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/5-ways-faith-contributes\\_b\\_6294716](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/5-ways-faith-contributes_b_6294716)

<sup>68</sup> This correlation validated by a Swiss demographic survey of 2000 was summarized by Robbie Low. See Robbie Low 2003 “The Truth about Men & Church” in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, June 2003 (<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v#ixzz4RjWtmadF>). See also Volume 2 of *Population Studies No. 31, The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States*, edited by Werner Haug et al. published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January 2000.

<sup>69</sup> See the studies in David Briggs 2015 “5 Ways Faith Contributes to Strong Marriages, New Studies Suggest”

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*

<sup>71</sup> There are literally dozens of good books on how to pray the rosary—the meditations of the rosary, biblical passages to accompany the rosary, saints' reflections on the rosary, etc. Perhaps the best way for couple to find some resources that suit them is to do an internet search for “rosary books amazon” and to select from the various options.

<sup>72</sup> There are some excellent Catholic prayer books providing an array of traditional and contemporary prayers that can be used by younger and older family members. Again, the best way for couples to locate one that best suits them is to do an internet search for “Catholic Prayer Books Amazon.” Couples may want to look at the publisher to find one or two resources that best suits their spiritual practice.

4. Reciting together the Daily Psalms and readings from the breviary or a derivative of it (such as *Magnificat*, *Daily Word* or *the Word Among Us*). *Lectio Divina* – selecting a particular reading(s) from the Gospels or New Testament Epistles, and using the recommended techniques to reflect upon them and hear the Lord speaking through them (to each spouse and to the spouses collectively).<sup>73</sup>

Normally it is enough for a couple to select one of these forms of prayer on a particular day. The time set aside for prayer should be manageable and regular (e.g. twenty minutes), and spouses will want to agree on how much time is “manageable”—otherwise one spouse’s enthusiasm can become another spouse’s frustration. Some couples prefer to stay with one form of prayer over the course of months—or years. Other couples prefer some form of variation during the week—and still others, some variation after a month or two. Again, it is important for couples to agree on what forms of prayer practice will give the most spiritual life and sustenance to each of them and to their relationship.

The rosary and common prayers are generally more accessible to children than the breviary and *Lectio Divina* and so couples may want to emphasize these options when inviting their children into their prayer. After their children retire, they may want to complement these prayers with readings from the breviary (or a derivative of it) or *Lectio Divina*.

### III. Conclusion [Back to top](#)

Throughout this chapter we have elucidated several Christian-Catholic decisions and expectations (Section I) as well as attitudes and habits (Section II) that foster sound marriages. We have summarized each of these four areas in every section and subsection, and so we will not repeat these summaries. It may be helpful for couples (and prospective couples) to review these summaries at the end of each subsection, and to discuss them with one another for the purpose of integrating some of the points into their marriages.

<sup>73</sup> One particularly good contemporary approach to *Lectio Divina* is recommended by Tim Gray 2009 *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Westchester, PA: Ascension Press). Another approach may be found in Brother Dan Korn, CSsR 2011 *Lectio Divina How to Pray Sacred Scripture* (Ligouri, MO Ligouri Press)

## Chapter Four

### The Problem of Divorce and the Process of Annulment

[Back to top](#)

Divorce – the intentional rupturing of the marriage covenant to live separate lives – has grave consequences on children, extended family members, friends, and society. If there is no sufficient reason for it – such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or infidelity/betrayal or severe psychological problems that make life unmanageable for spouse and children – then it causes unnecessary harm to the other spouse and children, for this reason the Church views it as sinful. Thus the following reasons are insufficient to justify divorce -- falling out of love, being “annoyed,” “being bored,” and/or “not having enough money.” However, the Church does provide for legitimate (non-sinful) separation from a spouse when there are significant reasons, such as those mentioned above. If a civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it does not constitute a moral offense. The key point is that the marriage covenant be observed throughout the time of separation if the marriage has not been annulled. This means that a person is not free to marry another spouse during the separation (if the marriage has not been annulled), because the first spouse is still considered to be the only legitimate one.

Divorce is an action of last resort that couples will want to avert through any manageable means. Normally, counselling with a priest, a marriage counselor, or another qualified professional can help immensely if both parties are willing to make sacrifices (see above Chapter Three, Section I.A) and they are open to prayer and God’s grace. These efforts may not always work, but they do have a remarkably good success rate when both couples meet these conditions sincerely.

Many divorces can be avoided if couples make the effort to integrate the relevant suggestions mentioned above in Chapter Three – particularly those concerned with gratitude, forgiveness, and prayer (Sections II.B, II.D, and II.F). Many couples are greatly assisted by participation in marriage encounter which provides weekends for Catholics to rejuvenate their marriages as well as ways of keeping connected with the marriage encounter community.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, making a weekend retreat – either individually or with a group – helps to bring prayer and sacred commitment back into focus. When couples work on their marriages by refocusing their attitudes (Chapter Three), and taking the time to make retreats and encounter weekends, divorce becomes a virtual moot point, because the issues and attitudes that might provoke it are being continually addressed.

Couples who are experiencing deep conflict and struggles (leading toward divorce) will want to make contact with Retrouvaille (<https://www.helpourmarriage.org/>). As noted above, this organization is devoted to working with struggling couples through couple to couple encounter to explain best practices for overcoming conflict.

<sup>74</sup> Couples can go to the worldwide marriage encounter website to discover marriage encounter weekends in their area as well as advice on how to keep connected with the marriage encounter community. <https://alifetimeoflove.org/>

If couples are faced with divorce, because of psychological challenges, physical and emotional abuse, or other situations that are injurious to the children and the other spouse, then divorce may be unavoidable. If this occurs, then one of the parties should investigate the possibility of obtaining an annulment from his or her parish priest. If a divorced spouse decides to remarry without an annulment (see below), then they cannot receive communion in the Catholic Church. Pope Francis has provided some pastoral resolutions to couples who are remarried without annulments in his Encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*.<sup>75</sup> but these pastoral resolutions seem to be reserved for couples living in countries where there is either no tribunal or very limited access to a tribunal to process annulments. . In dioceses where tribunals are available, couples who are divorced and remarried should try to retroactively pursue an annulment of their previous marriage by contacting their parish priest.

Most parishes have a priest, deacon, or lay associate dedicated to initiating and facilitating the annulment process (discussed below). They attempt to discover the conditions that might invalidate a marriage at the time the couple declared their consent to one another (see the criteria below). As will be explained, Pope Francis has added clarity to the criteria showing invalidity of consent – and has also shortened the annulment process. Before addressing this, a word must be said about annulments themselves.

According to canon law, an annulment is properly called a "Declaration of Nullity" because, as noted above, Jesus declared it to be indissoluble, meaning that it cannot be dissolved as long as the parties are alive. A "Declaration of Nullity" is not dissolution of a marriage, but merely the legal finding that a valid marriage was never contracted. In Chapter One (Section III.B), we mentioned seven impediments to free and valid consent:

1. Being too closely related within the family (called degrees of consanguinity) according to Canon law marriages within direct lines on consanguinity and within four degrees of collateral consanguinity are not valid -- parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, great grandparent and great grandchild, brother and sister, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew, and first cousins.
2. One of the parties was married in the Catholic Church previously, and this marriage was not annulled.
3. One of the parties secretly withholds the intention to remain married for a lifetime (even while promising it during the wedding ceremony).
4. One of the parties is incapable of intending a lifetime commitment to the other party for psychological reasons, profound immaturity, serious addiction, or profound ignorance.
5. One of the parties explicitly withholds consummation of the marriage after the marriage ceremony.
6. One of the parties was unbaptized, and no explicit dispensation ("disparity of cult") from this impediment was obtained.
7. The marriage is not witnessed by a priest or sanctioned by the Church. In such cases, the marriage is considered to be invalid. Additionally, if a marriage is performed in a

<sup>75</sup> See Pope Francis 2015 *Amoris Laetitia* – Chapter 8, particularly paragraphs 300-312.

ps://cruxnow.com/church/2016/04/08/amoris-laetitia-chapter-accompanying-discerning-and-integrating-weakness

non-Catholic setting (such as a home or a club) without a priest and a dispensation from canonical form, the marriage is also invalid.

As noted above, the Church has a court (tribunal) and a defined process of annulment that assesses evidence to determine whether a marriage was validly entered into (i.e. consented to) by both parties. This process was very recently streamlined by Pope Francis, and the above criteria for determining the invalidity of a marriage was clarified and broadened. The following remarks compiled by Jimmy Akin give a succinct summary of these changes. Additional information about them and the new process can be obtained from the resources mentioned below.

Pope Francis' streamlining of the annulment process required that he replace the 21 canons on annulment (canons 1671-1691). Some of the major points made in his document, *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*, as summarized by Jimmy Akin, are:

- *Only a single judgment of nullity is required.* Until now, in most cases, if one tribunal determined that a marriage was null, the decision was automatically appealed to a court of second instance, and only if the second tribunal agreed was an annulment granted. Now the morally certain decision of the first court will be sufficient in uncontested cases.
- *The bishop himself is a judge.* Although the bishop has always been the principal judge in his diocese, previously, the section on annulments did not establish that the bishop himself was a judge in marriage cases. Now, in keeping with his role as shepherd of the faithful, it does. In fact, he is the principal judge in his diocese, to be assisted by others whom he chooses. The new law thus puts the responsibility squarely on the bishop as a pastor.
- *A new, briefer process involving the bishop has been created.* Up to now, there have been two processes for handling annulments: the formal process (which is the lengthier one involving gathering and weighing testimony) and the documentary process (which deals with situations where a marriage can be proved invalid simply by presenting certain documents, such as showing that a Catholic got married outside the Church without the required permission). Now there is a middle process involving the bishop. If the evidences for nullity are especially clear, they can be presented to the bishop in a process intended to take less time than a formal process case. However, if the evidences require more examination, the case is to be referred to the formal process.
- *Appeals can be made against the judgment of the bishop to the metropolitan.* As a check on the judgment of the bishop, parties can appeal his decision to the metropolitan bishop (i.e., the bishop who heads the local ecclesiastical province, composed of several neighboring dioceses). Or, if it was the metropolitan himself who heard the original case, appeal can be made to the senior suffragan bishop (i.e., the bishop in the province with the most seniority, apart from the metropolitan).<sup>76</sup>

The fourth impediment to free and valid marriage mentioned above -- one of the parties is incapable of intending a free and indissoluble commitment – is the most difficult one to ascertain,

<sup>76</sup> Jimmy Akin 2015 “Pope Francis Reforms Annulment Process: 9 things to know and share” *Catholic Answers* website: <http://www.catholic.com/blog/jimmy-akin/pope-francis-reforms-annulment-process-9-things-to-know-and-share>

for a judgment has to be made through a formal process about whether there was psychological impediments, profound immaturity, addiction, or profound ignorance at the time of the marriage. This process (which normally entailed two tribunals sequentially making two judgments of nullity) could be quite lengthy in duration. Yet, according to Pope Francis, this impediment is truly present in a very large number of sacramental marriages that result in separation and civil divorce. Hence, he explicated eight instances in which a judgment of nullity could be determined through his new shortened process (overseen by the diocesan bishop – see above). The elaboration of these eight instances has two effects:

- It focuses the priest initiating the annulment – as well as the tribunal – on cases that are likely to receive an annulment (which narrows the process of evidence gathering).
- It qualifies those cases for the shortened process (instituted by Pope Francis) to be overseen by the Bishop.

What are these eight instances in which a couple enters the marriage process in an unfree or invalid way allowing for the shortened process to determine nullity?

1. Lack of faith resulting in the simulation of consent to be married or an error that determines the will regarding one of the requirements of marriage.
2. The brevity of married life (i.e., the couple divorced very quickly after being married).
3. Procured abortion to prevent procreation (presumably during the marriage itself, prior to bearing other children and thus showing an unwillingness to procreate).
4. The stubborn persistence in an extramarital affair at the time of the wedding or at a time immediately following.
5. The malicious concealment of: infertility, a serious contagious disease, children born from a previous relationship, or an incarceration.
6. A reason for getting married that is completely foreign to married life (presumably something like entering a legal fiction of a marriage to be able to immigrate or gain an inheritance) or consisting of the unplanned pregnancy of the woman.
7. Physical violence inflicted to extort the consent to marry.
8. The lack of use of reason proved by medical documents.

Most parish priests, deacons, and lay associates are aware of these new criteria allowing couples to qualify for a shortened process of annulment (overseen by the bishop). If an annulment is granted through this shortened process or the lengthier formal process then the decree of nullity, which declares that the marriage was null and void because it was entered into invalidly, allows the petitioning party to remarry within the Catholic Church, and to receive Holy Communion at mass. .

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, divorce and annulment are a last resort to protect spouses and children from abusive, malicious, or injurious marital situations. Couples will want to take seriously all remedies that can avoid a divorce, if these will protect spouses and children from injurious or abusive situations. If remedies cannot be found, it frequently points to the invalidity of a marriage because of the criteria mentioned above. If a church tribunal determines this to be the case, then an annulment can be obtained, and the petitioning party will be able to re-marry.