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Text of Father Connell's Family Life Address

By VERY REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R. (Associate Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.)

(This is the text of an address entitled "God Talks To The Family," which Dr. Connell delivered at the symposium on "The Christian Family," held Tuesday evening, March 2, 1948, at the Columbus Civic Center, Rochester, under the sponsorship of the International Federation of Catholic College Alumnae.)

More than 1900 years ago Our Divine Saviour elevated marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. He did not indeed institute marriage itself. That was done in the very



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first man and woman and endowed each with a spiritual soul made to His own image and likeness, blessed them and bade them to increase and multiply.

It was the first marriage, and it took place in the state of happiness and holiness which our first parents enjoyed in the Garden of Paradise. It was a sacred union, enriched with the special benediction of the Almighty; but it was not a sacrament.

The dignity of a sacrament was conferred on matrimony only with the establishment of the New Law, when the Son of God instituted certain rites and ceremonies to serve as instruments of divine power to impart supernatural grace to the souls of men. It was the will of Christ that there should be seven such rites, or sacraments, adapted to the more pressing needs and the more important tasks of human life, from the cradle to the grave.

Of these, seven, five were intended to assist man to perform his duties as an individual. The other two were intended to assist him to fulfill important duties for the benefit of society. Of these two, one was meant for those who dedicate their lives to the welfare of mankind in the priestly office, the sacrament of Holy Orders. The other was meant for those who dedicate their lives to the welfare of man kind in the conjugal state, the sacrament of Matrimony.

THE TRADITION of the Catholic Church has always found a close parallel between the priest and the Christian dwelling devoutly in the married state. Each occupies a consecrated office. Each has an important mission from the Most High for the well-being of his fellowmen. Each has a task to perform toward the kingdom of God in this life and in the life to come.

One of the great needs of our time is a deeper knowledge of the benefits which the sacrament of Matrimony confers on those who receive it and on society at large. In fact, if the citizens of our land understood better the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning marriage and applied those teachings to practice, most of the domestic problems that are afflicting modern American life would be readily solved.

Sixteen centuries ago St. Augustine, one of the most brilliant scholars that ever illumined the Catholic Church, summarized the blessing of Christian marriage under a threefold heading - children, fidelity, permanence. Now, it is true, these blessings were produced by marriage even as a natural institution; but as a sacrament, matrimony confers them in a far more sublime manner and a far more exalted degree. And if we study these three blessings and they are meant to be the product of Christian marriage, we shall find that most of the difficulties that beset married life

today arise from the fact that many married couples are not seeking or obtaining these blessings from their marriage. Consequently, the only solution of the problems that overwhelm society at the present time from broken marriages and unhappy homes is a return to the ideal of Christian marriage to see so many married couples ready to psychologists and marriage counselors and clinics in an effort to save their marriage from disaster, when they should go to Christ.

According to Catholic teachings, it is the will of God that the first and most important blessing of marriage shall be children. Now, this does not mean that every marriage is sure to obtain this blessing. Sometimes it is permitted by God that a couple, through no fault of their own, are not able to have children.

Yet, it remains true that the primary purpose of marriage in general is to continue the current of human life, to bring little ones into the world and to rear for them until they are able to take care of themselves. In a word, marriage is primarily a social institution - it is directed chiefly toward the good of society rather than the benefit of the two persons who enter into it.

In recent years a different concept of the purpose of marriage was proposed. There were those who claimed that the first object of marriage is the perfecting of the personality of each of the parties through the complete self-surrender of the other, so that there is formed what they called a "two-oneness." But, a few years ago the Holy Office, the Roman Congregation deputed to see guard the integrity of Catholic faith, rejected this view and clearly reasserted the traditional Catholic doctrine, that the primary purpose of Christian matrimony is the generation and the proper rearing of children.

IT IS QUITE evident that this Catholic notion of the chief purpose of marriage is very different from that which prevails among many Americans at the present time. Perhaps people would not express their ideas in technical language, but from their conduct it is very evident that a great proportion of our American people regard marriage as directed in the first place toward their own pleasure and happiness. In entering upon the married state, they seek themselves primarily, not the welfare of society. Self-gratification rather than the good of mankind is the chief, if not the only, object of their union. And consequently, such persons - and unfortunately they are numbered by the millions in our land today - never conceive the idea that in entering marriage they have accepted a

part of Catholic parents, but even if always their main ambition is to bring those to whom they have given life to life everlasting.

The first desire of truly Christian parents is to train their little ones in suchwise that one day they will be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. It is not necessary for me to prove the neglect of this ideal of parenthood that prevails in our land today. Millions of American children are growing up without any instruction about God or God's law. Juvenile delinquency is recognized as one of four major problems. Every day we read in the newspapers of shocking crimes committed by boys and girls in their teens.

It is evident that some measures must be taken to remedy this condition, but the tragedy is that so many of our people are ignorant of the only effective measure for this deplorable situation - the religious instruction of our young folks.

There are people - often, good sincere people - who tell us that the problem of juvenile delinquency will be satisfactorily solved if we can provide our boys and girls with more (Continued on Page 9)

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