

Marriage and Church... a Direct Link

By Father Roy J. Kiggins

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There is a very intimate association between marriage and the Catholic Church. The reason for this becomes apparent if we take time to examine the biblical vision of man and marriage. Since God's revelation has much to say about marriage, it follows that the Church's constant desire has been that the marriages of its members reflect the relevant biblical statements. The biblical vision of marriage has guided the Church's marital doctrine and legislation as they developed over the centuries.

The Old Testament had great optimism for everything created by God. Since it considered marriage as a part of God's creative plan, not even abuses could prevent the Old Testament from viewing marriage as a basically good institution.

The New Testament emphasized the reality of sin and the resulting need for a redemption. While the Old Testament was content to view marriage as a result of God's beneficent creative activity, the New Testament saw it as a human relationship that needed to be redeemed and perfected by Christ.

Christians are recreated through the Sacrament of marriage relationship.



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of husband and wife is recreated and redeemed through the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The New Testament underlines the fact that marriage is a life-long commitment, an unbreakable bond between husband and wife. In the words of Christ: "Man must not separate what God has joined together." (Matt. 19: 6). This life-long and unconditional surrender of a couple to each other, made as it is without any precise knowledge of what the future may

hold, became the focal point for Christian reflection on the nature of marriage. A preliminary glance shows that the Church's understanding of marriage has developed along two lines— theological and juridical.

The theology of marriage took its first big step with St. Augustine. Until this saint's time, scholars took the indissolubility of marriage for granted and contented themselves outlining the moral precepts affecting marriage. However Augustine deviated into the underlying reality of marriage in quest of the source of its indissolubility. Ultimately Augustine reached the conclusion that marriage's indissolubility derived from the fact that it was a sign of Christ's union with his Church. He reasoned that if marriage was to mirror Christ's unbreakable union with his Church, it also had to be an unbreakable union.

Augustine's conclusions set the pace until the 11th century. Then there was a flowering of theological investigation. The studies of the scholars of that era caused them to advance beyond the conclusions of Augustine. The marital relationship, in their estimation, was more than a mere reflection of Christ's union with his Church.

They believed that Christ had perfected the marriage pact to the point that it recreated, on the occasion of a couple's exchange of vows, the union

of Christ and his Church. In other words, just as there is within the very union of Christ and his Church the impossibility of dissolution so there is within the very union of a Christian husband and wife the same impossibility of dissolution.

The contrast between Augustine and the medieval Schoolmen is best indicated in this way: where Augustine maintained that the dissolution of marriage was not permissible, the Schoolmen went a step further and held that its dissolution was not even possible.

A final stage of theological precision came with St. Thomas Aquinas. He emphasized that marriage was a sacrament not simply because of its basic indissolubility, but rather because the Christian marital bond carried within it the guarantee of God's aiding grace.

The Church's juridical approach to marriage has undergone a constant development. Bear in mind, however, that the process by which marriage came more and more under Church control went on pretty much independently of the gradual theological appreciation of marriage's being a sacrament. The Church's juridical concern with marriage could be charted thus:

1) In the first centuries after Christ, the marriages of baptized Christians were celebrated like those of unbap-

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Family: The Training School for Democracy

The following is extracted from Bishop Sheen's book "Three to Get Married."

By Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

There comes a moment in the noblest of human love when one "gets used" to the best. Jewelers lose the thrill of seeing precious stones.

There must always be a mystery in life. Once it disappears, life becomes banal. One wonders if the reason for the popularity of murder mysteries

today is because they fill up the void created by the loss of the mysteries of faith. The extreme interest in murder mysteries is a sign that people are most interested in how a person is killed than in the eternal lot of the one who is killed.

So long as there is nothing undisclosed and unrevealed in life, there is no longer a joy in living. The zest of life partly comes from the fact that there is a door that is yet unopened, a veil that has not yet been lifted, a note that has not yet been struck.

Marriage often ends the romance, as if the chase were ended and one had bagged the game. When persons



are taken for granted, then is lost all the sensitiveness and delicacy which is the essential condition of friendship and joy. This is particularly true in some marriages where there is possession without desire, capture without the thrill of the chase.

The Christian way of preserving mystery, and therefore attractiveness, is through the unfolding of love into the next generation, which is what we mean by making it triune.

Modern life is geared to the idea that beauty in a woman and strength in a man are permanent possessions. All the mechanics of modern advertising are directed to this lie.

If a man eats certain kinds of crunchy, crackly food, he is told that he can take ten strokes off his golf, and that if he swallows a few pills, he will no longer have a fine head of skin. The woman, in her turn, is told that beauty can be a permanent possession, and

that her rough laundry hands, her unattractive smile, can all be remedied by a tube of this or that; or she is led to believe that after a few days of diet she will no longer be a victim of circumference, and will not look as if she had turned forty, but as if she had returned to twenty.

Despite all this propaganda for the fixity of strength and beauty, it often happens that, a year or two after marriage, the husband no longer seems to be that strong brave Apollo who made end runs on the football team on Saturday afternoons, or who came home from war with three stars on his chest. One day the wife asks him to help wash the dishes and he retorts: "That's a woman's job, not mine." In her turn, she no longer seems to him as beautiful as the first day of the honeymoon. Her baby talk that once seemed so cute, now begins to get on his nerves. Then it is that some couples feel there is no longer any love, because there is no thrill.

God did not intend that strength in a man and beauty in a woman should endure, but that they should reappear in their children. Here is where God's Providence reveals itself. Just at a time when it might seem that beauty is fading in one, and strength in the other, God sends children to protect and revive both.

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