

FR. LOUIS HORMAN

The Open Window



Q—A good friend of mine is going through hell because of her daughter. She and her boy friend have decided to live together without getting married. They say they are disillusioned with the institution of marriage — too many married people are either a) desperately and permanently unhappy; b) divorced and on the prowl for a new mate; c) switching partners in a sort of game. The press and TV seem to be answering the young people's doubt with the practical advantages and aspects of "arrangements." But where is the basis and answers in religious doctrine and a belief in God?

A—Sacred Scripture gives very clear answers: "This (marriage) is a great sacrament." Eph 5: 32. "A man shall leave father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh." Gen. 2: 24. This same passage is quoted by Christ in Mark 10: 6 and he adds "What therefore God has joined together, let no man tear apart." (Also Mt. 19: 6). He also says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, commits adultery against her." Mk 10: 11.

There are others but these make it clear what the word of God is on the dignity of marriage. It is the basic unit of society. It is from God. It is ratified by God.

Certain other facts should be pointed out to that young lady:

1. In human history, the cultures with the strongest family ties — both social and emotional — have produced the best-adapted and mature adults.

2. Calling a marriage license and/or certificate a "piece of paper" is childish. So is the Constitution, your diploma, your driver's license. But they represent something very important to yourself and society — in this case a basic commitment. What becomes of a family and the members thereof is important to all the members of society just as it is important to society who may drive a car and who may not.

3. The substitutes for marriage have all been tried before in the history of man and simply don't work — for the individual or society. Trial marriage lacks commitment and makes a cop-out almost as arbitrary as buying a new hat. Besides, it has no value whatever in predicting the success of a future marriage. A simple "arrangement" rather than a marriage offers no security, no real merging of lives, little real hope of permanence (which love craves) and makes pregnancy a tragedy. It opens the gates to playing games with the emotions of another and the probability of inflicting gaping, unhealable wounds in the personality.

4. One doesn't throw out marriage because of the incidence of failure of those married or the disrespect they have for their commitment any more than one throws out the stove or the cook when a meal is burnt. The name of the game is to learn to cook or in this case to learn to be a good person, a good husband or wife.

It has always scared me how little prepared most people are to become two in one flesh. There is nothing wrong with marriage that better men and women can't cure.

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