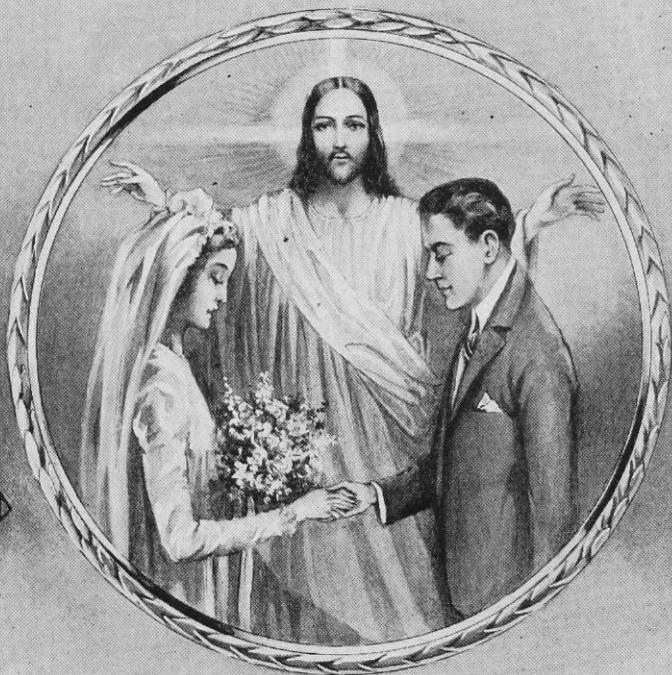


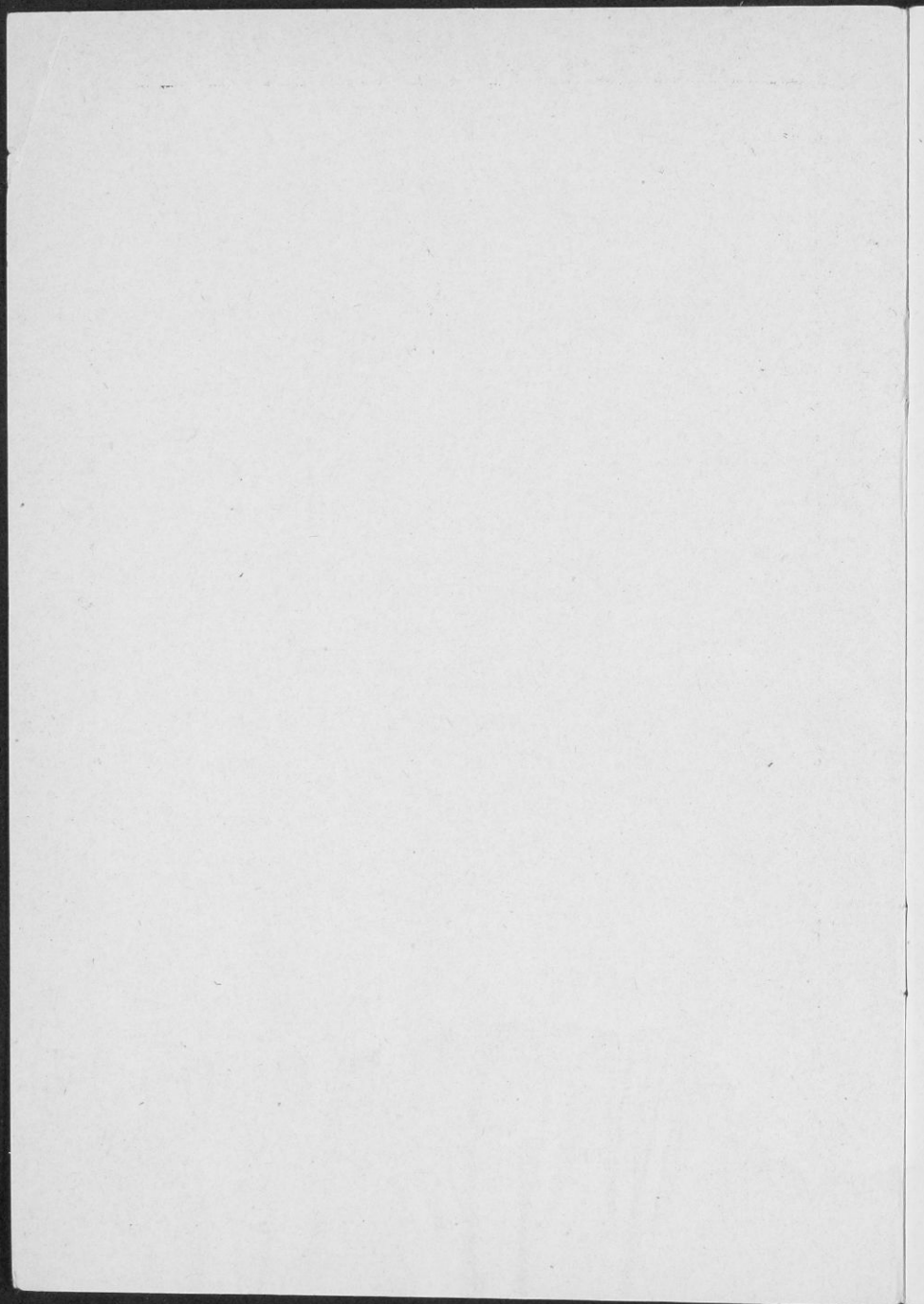
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# Marriage

HUMAN OR DIVINE?



THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY



# MARRIAGE— HUMAN OR DIVINE?

With Study Club Outline

*By*

THE REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., S.T.D.



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## I. MARRIAGE AS A CONTRACT

**E**VERY day throughout the world thousands of men and women enter the married state. The physical basis of marriage is the bodily adaptation of each sex to union with the other; its moral basis is the ethical principle, admitted by even the most primitive races, that a man and woman may not lawfully enjoy sexual intercourse unless they are pledged to each other by some manner of formal agreement making them husband and wife.

Many erroneous notions are current today regarding marriage, especially with reference to its permanence and its obligations. The basis of these errors is the failure to recognize the sacredness of marriage. When people regard marriage as something merely material rather than as an important institution ordained by the Creator to the fulfillment of His wise designs, it is not surprising that they flaunt its binding force and disregard its duties. Hence, the world of today beholds countless marriages brought to ruin through the selfishness and the sensuality of the married parties. Because of the prevalence of these evils and their disastrous effects on society, every intelligent person should study seriously and thoroughly the teachings of the Catholic Church on matrimony. If these teachings were known and practiced by all married couples, holy and happy marriages would be the rule rather than the exception.

In expounding the Catholic doctrine on marriage, theologians distinguish between matrimony as a *nat-*

*ural institution* and matrimony as a *supernatural* entity, or *sacrament*. Under the first aspect marriage can be again distinguished into the *contract* and the *permanent state*. These distinctions give us the subjects of our first three chapters.

As a contract of the natural order, marriage is the pact, or mutual agreement, whereby a man and a woman give each other the right to sexual relations and to the other normal features of conjugal life, such as cohabitation and collaboration in their common needs and interests. One who is permanently deprived of the physical power of sexual intercourse is barred from marriage by the law of nature, because such a one lacks the very faculty about which the marital contract primarily centers. Again, one who is devoid of the use of reason cannot marry, because he is incapable of making a contract. And if a person had not at least a general notion of the way in which conjugal rights are exercised, such a one would not be truly married even if he or she had gone through the marriage ceremony, for no one can make a valid contract without understanding at least in a general way the duties and rights it involves.

As is evident, each of the parties must really intend to make the contract. One who would pronounce the words of the marriage ceremony, but would at the same time intend not to give and receive the marital rights, would not contract a true marriage. Of course, if such a one subsequently attempted to prove this lack of intention, he would have to adduce good evidence, over and above his own testimony; otherwise, unscrupulous persons would have a very easy way of getting free from undesirable marriage ties.

Marriage consent must be *freely* given. If a person were coerced into expressing a consent that would not be a rational act, the marriage would be invalid by the law of nature. And in order to safeguard still more the freedom of matrimony the Catholic Church declares null and void a marriage in which the consent of at least one of the parties, though rational, was actuated by grave and unjustly inflicted fear.

Like any formal agreement between human beings, the marriage contract must be expressed externally. This is normally done in spoken words; but it could be done in signs or in writing. As far as the natural law is concerned, two parties could become husband and wife by letter, without having ever met. Or, they could marry by proxy—that is, through representatives who would go through the marriage ceremony in their name—and at the moment when the ceremony is performed, the principals would become man and wife. Such marriages were not unusual in past ages in Europe, especially in the case of royal personages marrying at an early age. Nowadays, the conditions for marriage by proxy are laid down most explicitly by the law of the Church. Thus, the document by which a person appoints another his proxy must be signed by the principal and also either by an authorized priest or at least by two witnesses. Moreover, if the principal revokes the commission or becomes insane before the marriage ceremony takes place, the marriage is null and void even though the proxy or the other principal was unaware of the changed circumstances.

The parties to a marriage must intend to give each other the unqualified right to complete conjugal intercourse, as nature prescribes it. Nowadays, when the

loathsome vice of birth-control is so prevalent, a couple might have the intention of giving each other only a limited conjugal right—that is, only to contraceptive relations, in which case they would not be truly married. This, however, would be different from the case of a couple who would indeed transmit to each other the full conjugal *right*, but would agree to exercise this right only in such a manner that conception would be positively frustrated. Such persons would sin grievously because of their intention to abuse the sacred functions of the conjugal state; nevertheless, their marriage would be valid. If a couple who entered marriage with the evil intention of practicing contraception later sought to have their union declared invalid by the Church on these grounds, they would have to prove conclusively that this intention predominated over the intention of contracting a true marriage, and thus of giving each other the normal conjugal rights.

Since marriage is directed to a *social* purpose, the propagation of the human race, the marital contract is directly subordinate to the jurisdiction of some *public* authority, which is empowered to lay down conditions for the *validity* of the contract. For the marriages of baptized persons this public authority is the Catholic Church; for those of unbaptized persons it is the civil government. Thus, if the civil laws decree that a certain condition must be fulfilled for the validity of marriage, two unbaptized persons could not be truly married if they failed to observe this law. However, the State could not establish a marriage prohibition which would be opposed to the law of God or would be manifestly unreasonable.



### Questions

1. What is the physical basis of marriage? The moral basis?
2. What is the source of the many evils connected with marriage today? Where is the remedy for these evils found?
3. What distinctions do theologians make in explaining the Catholic doctrine of marriage?
4. What essentially constitutes marriage as a contract? Who are incapable of making this contract?
5. What is to be noted about the internal consent required for the marriage contract?
6. When will lack of freedom invalidate the marriage contract?
7. In what ways can marital consent be manifested? What is to be noted about marriage by proxy?
8. What must be the intention of the parties regarding the giving of marriage rights? How does the intention of abusing marital functions affect the consent?
9. Why is the marriage contract by its nature subject to some public authority? What authority is empowered to regulate the marriages of baptized persons?
10. What authority has jurisdiction over the marriage of the unbaptized? How is the exercise of this authority restricted?

## II. MARRIAGE AS A STATE

The contract of marriage is a transitory act, taking only a few moments. But the state on which the married couple enter after they have become husband and wife is something permanent, intended by the law of God to endure until they are separated by death. It is one of the most tragic of human events when a couple who on their wedding day were overflowing with happiness and with love for each other later become embittered and estranged, even to the point of separating. Oftentimes these failures in married life arose from the fact that husband and wife did not properly understand the purpose of matrimony and the grave obligations it entails.

According to the common teaching of Catholic theologians, the principal purpose of marriage is the generation and the rearing of children. It is very evident that the chief end of the sexual powers is the production of new life. Like all the higher creatures of earth, human beings are generated by the sexual union of a male and a female; and the normal individual who has come to the full development of the procreative faculties feels a strong inclination to co-operate with one of the other sex in this act of bodily union. The gratification which accompanies this act is the means whereby nature—or, to be more exact, the all-wise God of nature—induces creatures to concur in the propagation of their species, and rewards them for so doing. In the case of mankind the propagation of the species has a far deeper significance than in the case of other creatures; for, whereas these perish at death,

every human being possesses a spiritual and immortal soul, created directly by God and destined for everlasting happiness in His heavenly kingdom. Moreover, at the end of time the body of every human being will be raised up from the dust of earth to be reunited eternally with its soul. Hence, married persons co-operate very intimately with Almighty God in the exercise of His providence over the human race when they generate a tiny body into which the Most High infuses a human soul, stamped with His own image and likeness.

It is most important that married couples bear in mind this doctrine concerning the principal purpose of their union. Sad to say, there are many persons nowadays who regard the chief end of their marital relations as their own gratification, and do not hesitate to frustrate positively the conception of offspring, while enjoying the pleasure that God intends to be the recompense of those who collaborate with His designs for the preservation of the human race. This is the degrading sin of contraception—commonly called birth-control—which consists in the deliberate and positive prevention of the normal effects of sexual intercourse. In our land the decrease of the birth-rate as a result of this vice is becoming so pronounced that it is recognized by all intelligent persons as a menace to our national welfare, even apart from religious and moral considerations.

Some people imagine that the prohibition of birth-control is a law invented by the Catholic Church. This is incorrect. It is a law of God, which binds Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The Church as the authorized exponent of God's message to mankind merely

proclaims and interprets this law. It is important to note that the Church does not teach that married couples are obliged to have as many children as they can. Financial limitations or considerations of health will sometimes make it advisable for a husband and wife not to have more children, at least for a time. But the only lawful method is abstinence (at least periodic) from the use of their conjugal rights. Furthermore, in interpreting the divine law on this matter, the Church teaches that married persons are not forbidden to perform the marital act at times when from some natural cause conception is impossible—for example, when they are advanced in age, or during the so-called “sterile period.” As long as they employ their sexual faculties as nature intends, without positively frustrating the natural effect of the act, they are not violating God’s law.

The other element of the primary end of marriage is the rearing, or bringing-up of the children to whom the married couple have given life. It is instinctive in all living creatures to look out for their young until they are able to take care of themselves. Human beings, the highest in the scale of earth’s living creatures, need the assistance and the protection of their parents for many years. Parental care comprises the providing of food and shelter and also the mental, moral and religious training of the child. Only when a boy or girl is fully equipped for the problems and the duties of life can the fathers and mother feel that they have fulfilled this momentous purpose of their married life.

However, besides the generation and the rearing of children marriage has other objectives. The marital union is intended to provide the parties with happiness

and contentment. Each gives the other the whole-hearted affection that is so consoling to the human heart; each finds in the other a kind of completion of his or her personality; each renders the other assistance and comfort in the necessities and trials of life. All these benefits constitute a secondary object of marriage, subordinate to the primary purpose indeed, yet an object which is legitimately sought in the married state. And finally, marriage furnishes the means of abating the strong inclination to sexual gratification that is normally found in every human being. By providing a lawful outlet for this inclination, marriage contributes effectively toward the prevention of incontinence. In fact, it is often advisable for an unmarried person who finds the avoidance of sins of impurity very difficult to enter the married state.

From the purposes of marriage we can ascertain the obligations incumbent on those who have entered the marital state. In the first place, each has a grave obligation to accede to the rights of the other in the matter of conjugal relations. A married person who would refuse his or her partner's reasonable demand in this matter would be guilty of serious sin. However, there is no obligation to grant marital intercourse at the grave risk of one's own life or health, or when there is some other equally serious reason for refusing. Furthermore, if one party has been guilty of adultery, the other may permanently refuse conjugal privileges and even seek a separation. Of course, before these extreme measures are taken the guilt of the offender must be established with certainty; and even then, it is usually better for the innocent party to forgive, at least if the offense is not habitual.

Both parents have the grave obligation of caring for the children and of providing for their physical, intellectual and spiritual welfare. Ordinarily the mother takes the greater share of this work, especially when the children are young; but the father should do his part also. Parents must not forget that they are expected to train their children not only by word but also by example. Of course, married persons are supposed to live together, and only a very good reason will justify a separation for a notable time. It belongs to the husband to decide where they should dwell. In fact, it is a general principle of Catholic ethics that the husband is the head of the household. However, he may not be harsh and domineering toward his wife and children; and he should consult his spouse in matters pertaining to the domestic circle.

Even from the merely natural aspect the state of matrimony is something very holy, involving as it does co-operation with the Almighty in bringing into existence immortal souls destined for unending bliss. On this account God gave a special blessing to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, bidding them "Increase and multiply" (Genesis i. 28). Hence, even those marriages that are not sacramental, such as the marriage of two Jews, are sacred unions, enjoying the watchful care of divine Providence. But Christian marriage possesses an additional dignity and holiness from the fact that it is a sacrament; and it is this aspect of matrimony that we shall now study.

Questions

1. What is the difference between marriage as a contract and as a state? What is the source of many of the failures of married life?
2. What is the principal purpose of the married state? How does the sexual urge aid toward this end?
3. Why is the generation of a human being far more important than that of any other creature?
4. Why is the sin of contraception so serious an offense?
5. To what law is contraception opposed? What is to be said of marital relations when conception is impossible?
6. Explain the other element of the primary end of marriage, the rearing of children.
7. What are the secondary ends of marriage?
8. What obligations have married persons with reference to conjugal relations?
9. What are the duties of married persons toward the rearing of their children, cohabitation, and the management of the household?
10. Why is marriage holy even when it is not a sacrament?

### III. MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT

A sacrament is an external sign capable of conferring grace, established by Jesus Christ for permanent use in His Church. It is an article of Catholic faith that Matrimony is a sacrament. This is denied by most Protestants, although they may revere marriage as something sacred, and regard it as fitting that the state of wedlock be entered with a church service. Besides Catholics, those Oriental Christians who are separated from the Church, such as the Greek Orthodox, regard Christian marriage as a sacrament.

The Bible does not indeed present any explicit and convincing evidence on this point; but there is a passage in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians which implies the sacramental dignity of Christian marriage. The apostle lays down the general principle that the marriage of Christians is similar to the union which exists between Christ and the Church, and then draws certain conclusions, particularly that the wife is obliged to obey the husband and the husband is bound to love the wife. Then St. Paul adds: "This is a great sacrament, but I speak, in Christ and in the Church" (Ephesians v. 32). To establish our doctrine, we do not utilize the word "sacrament" in this text in its present-day significance, for St. Paul employed it in a broader sense. He meant that Christian marriage is a sacred sign or symbol of the intimate bond which unites Christ and His Church. However, from this text we argue as follows: As the apostle portrays marriage, it possesses all the requisites of a sacrament. It is an external sign, for like every human contract, marital consent must be manifested externally. It is capable of conferring grace,



for the saint compares it to the union between Christ and the Church, and this latter is productive of supernatural grace for the faithful. That marriage as a sacrament was instituted by Christ is not indeed expressly stated in this passage; but from other sources we know that under the Christian Law all sacred signs capable of giving grace have been established by our Lord.

This argument from the written word of God is confirmed by tradition, which contains many doctrines taught by Christ or by the apostles, though not committed to the pages of the New Testament. From the earliest centuries Christian marriage was regarded as something very holy, productive of special graces for the couple and subject to the authority and the solicitude of the Church. Thus, in reference to the marriage of Christians Tertullian wrote in the early part of the third century: "Where shall we find power to declare the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the offering confirms, the blessing seals, the angels proclaim and the Father ratifies?" St. Ambrose in the fourth century declared that marriage was "sanctified by Christ, His divine voice saying: They shall be two in one flesh." The artists of the early Church were fond of portraying Christ bestowing His blessing on a bridal couple. All these sayings and facts indicate that matrimony among Christians was always recognized by the Church as something exalted and sacred, capable of imparting grace to the couple—in other words, as a sacrament.

Even if we had no positive testimony from Scripture and tradition we could argue with great probability that matrimony is one of the Christian sacraments. For the sacraments were instituted by Christ to provide

mankind with spiritual assistance in the principal duties and necessities of life. Now surely, the married state brings with it many momentous duties and abounds in occasions when husband and wife need special assistance from on high. And so, it seems almost a foregone conclusion that Christ must have elevated marriage to the dignity of a sacrament.

We do not know exactly when our Lord made marriage a sacrament. Some think He did so when He attended the marriage feast of Cana; others believe this took place when He promulgated the indissolubility of marriage (Mark x. 7-12). The better view, however, seems to be that He announced the sacramental dignity of Christian marriage in the course of the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension, when He frequently spoke to His disciples "of the kingdom of God" (Acts i. 3)—that is, of the belief and worship that were to prevail in His Church.

The sacrament of Matrimony is not something *superadded* to the natural contract of marriage; it is *identical* with it. In other words, just as our Saviour decreed that the pouring of water and the saying of certain words should be able to cleanse the soul of sin and enrich it with grace, and thus constitute the sacrament of Baptism, so He decreed that the very act of mutual consent whereby a Christian man and woman become husband and wife should be capable of giving them grace, thus constituting the sacrament of Matrimony. Consequently, the contract and the sacrament are inseparable, so that two baptized persons cannot marry each other validly without receiving the sacrament. It makes no difference whether these persons are Catholics or non-Catholics, whether or not they realize

that Matrimony is a sacrament—in any case, a valid marriage between them is a sacramental marriage. From this we can see how unjust is the accusation, not infrequently heard, that the Church regards the marriages of all non-Catholics as null and void. In reality the Church teaches that every marriage of two baptized non-Catholics free from matrimonial impediments, is just as truly a sacrament as the marriage of two Catholics celebrated before a priest.

The truth that Christian marriage is a sacrament should be deeply impressed on the minds of all Catholics intending to get married or already joined in marriage. The former should be impressed with the thought that they are about to receive one of the seven efficacious means of grace established by our divine Redeemer to bestow abundant supernatural helps on the children of men for the needs of life's journey. The latter should realize that they are bound to each other in a union that bears a close resemblance to the union between Christ and His Church. The chief characteristics of this latter union are generosity and love. Christ generously gave His very life for the Church because of His unbounded love for every human soul; and the Church is constantly laboring devotedly for the glory of Christ and expressing its love for Him, dwelling in her midst in the sacrament of the altar. Surely then, Catholic married couples should deeply appreciate the honor their marriage enjoys in representing the union between the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and His earthly spouse, the Church, and should endeavor to live up to this honor by ever manifesting toward each other an unselfish devotion and an ardent love.

**Questions**

1. What is a sacrament? What is the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding Matrimony?
2. What is the attitude of non-Catholics regarding the sacramental nature of Matrimony?
3. What argument does the Bible give us that Matrimony is a sacrament?
4. What argument for the sacramentality of Matrimony is furnished by tradition?
5. Why was it most fitting that Christ should make marriage a sacrament?
6. When did our Lord make marriage a sacrament?
7. What is the relation between the contract and the sacrament of Matrimony?
8. What takes place whenever two baptized persons marry? Does it make any difference whether they are Catholics or non-Catholics?
9. What unjust accusation is sometimes made regarding the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the marriage of non-Catholics? How is it answered?
10. What should be the chief thought of Catholics preparing for marriage? What should be the attitude of married Catholics toward their marriage?

#### IV. FEATURES OF THE SACRAMENT

Since only one who has received Baptism is capable of receiving the other six sacraments, an unbaptized person cannot receive the sacrament of Matrimony when he enters marriage. This does not mean that the marriage of the unbaptized is something degrading or unholy. As was said before, it is a sacred contract, enriched with the blessing of the Most High, and those who contract such a marriage with high ideals of the state they are entering and with the purpose of living up to its obligations as they conceive them undoubtedly receive precious graces from the Almighty to aid them in their trials and difficulties. Furthermore, it is generally held by theologians that if both parties to such a marriage later receive Baptism their marriage at once becomes a sacramental union.

As was stated above, a valid marriage contracted by two baptized persons is always a sacrament, irrespective of their religious denominations. The question naturally presents itself whether a baptized person marrying one who is unbaptized receives the sacrament of Matrimony or makes a merely natural contract. The better theological opinion is that such a marriage is not a sacrament for the baptized party. For, since the matrimonial contract should be perfectly equal for both husband and wife, and in the case at hand the unbaptized spouse is incapable of a sacramental contract, it seems to follow that the other, though baptized, does not receive the sacrament. However, if the unbaptized party later receives Baptism, the marriage immediately becomes sacramental according to the more general teaching of Catholic theologians.

Since the sacrament of Matrimony is identical with the marital contract, those who make the contract—that is, the bridal couple—are also the ministers of the sacrament. Each one, by accepting the marital pledge of the other, confers on him or her this sacrament. Doubtless many persons believe that the priest is the minister of Matrimony; but in reality the priest is only the official witness, required by ecclesiastical law for the validity of the marriage (when at least one of the parties is a Catholic), not the dispenser of the sacrament. From this same principle—that the couple themselves administer the sacrament to each other—we can understand how it is that baptized non-Catholics contract a true sacramental marriage even though no priest officiates.

Like the other sacraments, Matrimony confers on those who receive it worthily a twofold grace. In the first place, it imparts sanctifying grace, that beautiful supernatural quality that makes the soul a partaker of the nature of God Himself. Secondly, it gives a special sacramental grace, bringing with it a claim to the supernatural helps that the couple need in the course of their married life to be faithful to their duties and obedient to the laws of God. It is important to remember that the sacramental effects of Matrimony are not limited to the time when this sacrament is actually received, but are continually bestowed on husband and wife until death severs them. Marriage brings trials and sorrows as well as joys and consolations, and if the couple are striving to lead good lives they will receive abundant divine assistance in the hour of tribulation through the sacramental grace of Matrimony annexed to their state. Moreover, the measure of grace given

the couple is proportionate to the dispositions with which they receive Matrimony and subsequently endeavor to conform their conduct to the sacredness of the bond that unites them.

Matrimony is a sacrament of the *living*—that is, it was intended by Christ for those in possession of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace. Hence, if one who is conscious of the presence of mortal sin in his soul receives this sacrament, he is guilty of grave sacrilege. All practical Catholics prepare for marriage by making a good confession. Indeed, this is one of the occasions when a person might appropriately make a general confession, with the approval of his or her confessor. Moreover, on entering the matrimonial state every Catholic should receive Holy Communion—if possible, on the morning of the wedding. However, there is no strict law commanding the reception of Penance and the Holy Eucharist on the occasion of marriage, and as far as the worthy reception of Matrimony is concerned, one in sin could dispose himself for it by making an act of perfect contrition with the intention of later going to confession.

If a person has been so unfortunate as to receive Matrimony unworthily—that is, in the state of unrepented mortal sin—he can subsequently receive the spiritual benefits of this sacrament if he returns to the state of sanctifying grace. In this case, the sacrament is said to *revive*. Of course, the normal way to procure this effect is to make a good confession. It must be noted that an *unworthy* reception of the sacrament of Matrimony is not identical with an *invalid* marriage. Even though a person is married in the state of mortal sin, his marriage is valid—that is, a true marriage—

provided there is no impediment by divine or ecclesiastical law and the requisite formalities are observed. But the presence of mortal sin on his soul is an obstacle to the graces which Christ has annexed to this sacrament.

Because of the exalted dignity of Matrimony as a sacrament, it is most appropriately received in conjunction with the holy sacrifice of the Mass. The Church has drawn up a special Mass, known as the nuptial Mass, especially for this occasion. The marriage ceremony takes place before the Mass, at the altar, so that the first action the newly wedded couple perform jointly is to assist at the holy sacrifice. The prayers said during this Mass are directed to obtain the divine assistance for the two who are now sacramentally united into one. After the Pater Noster the priest recites a very beautiful prayer over the kneeling couple, calling down the blessings of heaven on them, particularly on the bride. Just before concluding the Mass he pronounces over them the benediction: "May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob be with you, and may He fulfill His blessing in you, that you may see your children's children even to the third and fourth generation, and afterward possess life everlasting." Because of the extraordinary graces bestowed by the divine sacrifice, it is advisable for all Catholic weddings to take place at Mass, although there is no law of the Church making this obligatory. And it is an eloquent sign of the Church's disapproval toward those of her members who contract mixed marriages that she does not permit them to be married at Mass.

The Church also has legislation for the espousals.



or the formal promise of a couple to marry each other. These are to be drawn up in writing and signed by the parties and also by either the pastor or the bishop or at least by two witnesses. Espousals made in this form bind the parties to marriage, so that to break them, apart from a grave reason or mutual consent, would be a serious sin. In our country solemn espousals are rare; and couples usually bind themselves to marriage by only an informal promise, or engagement, which the Church does not regard as entailing a strict obligation to marry.

On three occasions before the marriage of Catholics the banns, or proclamations of the coming wedding, are announced in the parish churches of both parties. The purpose of the banns is to find out if any of the congregation knows a good reason why the marriage should not take place. Anyone who believes there is such a reason should at once inform an official of the Church—ordinarily, the pastor.

### Questions

1. What is the first requisite that one may be capable of receiving the sacrament of Matrimony? When does the marriage of two unbaptized persons become a sacrament?
2. What argument have we that the marriage of a baptized person with one who is unbaptized is not a sacrament even for the former? When does such a marriage become sacramental?
3. Who administers the sacrament of Matrimony? What is the part of the priest?

24      MARRIAGE—HUMAN OR DIVINE?

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4. Explain the graces conferred by the sacrament of **Matrimony**.
5. What is necessary for the fruitful reception of **Matrimony**? What is the difference between an unfruitful reception of this sacrament and an invalid marriage?
6. How should a Catholic prepare for the sacrament of **Matrimony**?
7. How can one who has received **Matrimony** unfruitfully afterward receive its graces?
8. Describe the nuptial **Mass**. Why is it most fitting that Catholics should be married at **Mass**?
9. What is to be noted about espousals and marriage engagements?
10. Explain the bans of marriage and their purpose.

## V. THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH OVER MARRIAGE

It is an unquestionable Catholic tenet that the Catholic Church alone possesses authority over Christian marriage. The reasoning process that leads to this doctrine is very simple and logical. Whenever two baptized persons marry, they give and receive the sacrament of Matrimony; and the Church has received from Jesus Christ the exclusive jurisdiction over the sacraments. When only one of the parties is baptized, the marriage is certainly not sacramental from the standpoint of the unbaptized person, and most probably not from the standpoint of the baptized one either. However, in the case of the latter it is at any rate a sacred contract made by one who is subject to the authority of the Church in spiritual matters on account of his or her baptismal character, and because of this fact the Church possesses jurisdiction over the marriage, at least as far as the baptized person is concerned. It is important to note that this authority of the Catholic Church extends to baptized non-Catholics as well as to Catholics.

When both parties are unbaptized, the Church has no authority over the marriage. As was said above, such a marriage is subject to the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, who can lay down conditions for its lawfulness and even for its validity, provided these conditions are not unreasonable or opposed to God's law. One naturally asks if the State can legislate for an unbaptized person marrying one who is baptized.

Some theologians believe that this authority does belong to the civil government; others teach that such a marriage pertains in its entirety to the jurisdiction of the Church.

Among the most important legislative enactments of the Church is that which concerns the form, or ceremony, of marriage. Nowadays the ecclesiastical law stipulates that Catholics can contract a valid marriage only in the presence of an authorized priest and two witnesses. By an authorized priest is meant one who has jurisdiction to assist at the marriage in the place where it is celebrated. A bishop officially possesses such jurisdiction within his diocese and a pastor within his parish. Moreover a bishop or a pastor can delegate another priest to assist at a marriage in his respective territory. Ordinarily curates receive from the bishop the jurisdiction to assist at marriages within the parishes to which they are assigned. The two witnesses must, of course, be persons possessing the use of reason, and must be present during at least the essential part of the marriage ceremony, the mutual exchange of consent. As far as the validity of the marriage is concerned, they need not be Catholics; however, apart from exceptional circumstances non-Catholics should not be chosen for this office, especially when the wedding takes place in church.

The law requiring the presence of an authorized priest and two witnesses binds all persons who were baptized in the Catholic Church or converted to it, even if subsequently they left the Church. Moreover, this law holds even if only one of the parties is or was a Catholic. There is an exception when one born of non-Catholics (or apostate Catholics) or of a Catholic

and a non-Catholic and baptized in the Catholic Church but never brought up in the Catholic religion marries a non-Catholic. In this case as also when both parties are and always have been non-Catholics the Church makes no stipulation as to the ceremony required for the marriage.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the law of which we are speaking refers to the *validity* of the marriages of Catholics. Before this law was passed in 1908 Catholics who appeared for marriage before a non-Catholic clergyman or a civil magistrate committed sin by so doing, but contracted a true marriage if all the other requirements for validity were fulfilled. But since the present law went into force a Catholic who goes through the marriage ceremony without the presence of an authorized priest and two witnesses is not truly married in the eyes of God and of the Church (even though the State may recognize his marriage), and his marriage associations constitute a disgraceful concubinage.

The Church does indeed grant two exceptions to this law because of the possibility of extraordinary circumstances. Both cases presuppose that an authorized priest cannot be obtained without grave inconvenience. The first exception occurs when there is grave danger of death to one or both of the persons wishing to contract marriage; the other when it is prudently foreseen that the impossibility or grave difficulty to procuring an authorized priest will last for a month. In either of these two cases the marriage may be lawfully and validly contracted in the presence of two witnesses. The first case would be exemplified if a bridal couple on their way to the church had an accident, and one was at the point of death. An example

of the second case would be present if the couple lived in a backwoods village which a priest from a distance visited only a few times in the year. Whenever a marriage is contracted in one of these exceptional ways, the contracting parties and the witnesses are bound to report the matter to the parish priest, so that it may be recorded in the official books. It may happen that when the occasion arises for the use of one of these exceptions a priest who is not authorized to assist at marriage—for example, a priest from another diocese—is available. He should be asked to be present at the marriage; but nevertheless his presence is not necessary for the validity of the marriage.

In virtue of its authority over the marriages of baptized persons the Catholic Church has established certain matrimonial impediments. That is, the Church has legislated that under certain circumstances a marriage is unlawful or even null and void. These impediments will be considered in detail in our next chapter; but it should be noted now that they apply to all baptized persons unless the contrary is stated in the Church law. This holds true even though a person is unaware of the law or of the impediment. Thus, if two baptized Protestants who are second cousins contract marriage, they are not really married, according to Catholic belief, because of the impediment of blood-relationship that exists between them.

The Catholic Church also claims the exclusive right to declare authentically the circumstances in which the law of nature forbids marriage or renders it invalid. This is one phase of the right to teach and to interpret the moral law—a right which Christ gave to the apostles and to their successors, the bishops of the Church,

particularly the Pope. The Church also makes its claim to be the sole judge of the matrimonial cases of baptized persons. Thus, if a baptized couple who have lived for some time as man and wife suspect that for some reason their marriage was invalid from the beginning, only the Church authorities—not the parties themselves nor the civil court—are empowered to give an authoritative decision on the matter. And it should be noted that in exercising its judicial power in matrimonial cases the Church is most exact and just. Only after the pros and cons of a case have been examined in fullest detail is a decision given, and the ecclesiastical judges give their verdict entirely on the merits of the case, irrespective of the social or financial standing of the persons concerned.

Often non-Catholics, and sometimes even Catholics, complain that the Church is despotic and autocratic in exercising her authority over marriage. But they should remember that the Church has had experience with mankind for nineteen centuries, and that in formulating laws the Church is actuated solely with the desire to benefit her members. In what pertains to marriage especially there must be detailed and exact legislation; otherwise human passion would lead men to perpetrate all manner of abuses against the sacrament and the sacred state of Matrimony. It is consoling to see that the vast majority of Catholics give loyal obedience to the Church's matrimonial legislation, with the realization that in doing so they are not only observing the command of Jesus Christ to obey the lawful authorities of His Church, but are also providing themselves with the surest guarantee of happiness both in this world and in the next.

### Questions

1. What is the basis of the Church's authority over the marriages of all baptized persons?
2. What authority has jurisdiction over the marriage of two unbaptized persons? The marriage of a baptized person with an unbaptized?
3. What is the present law of the Church regarding the ceremony to be observed at the marriage of Catholics?
4. Who is an authorized priest with respect to the marriage of a Catholic?
5. Who are bound by the law in question? Who are not bound?
6. Does this law regard only the lawfulness of marriage? What is to be said of a Catholic who marries without regard for this law?
7. Explain the two exceptions to this law.
8. What is meant by matrimonial impediments? To whom do the Church's impediments extend? Does ignorance of an impediment exempt a person from incurring it?
9. What is to be noted about the Church's power to declare the natural law regarding marriage and to judge matrimonial cases of baptized persons? How does the Church exercise this power?
10. Why is it unjust to complain of the Church's matrimonial legislation?



## VI. MATRIMONIAL IMPEDIMENTS

The matrimonial impediments are of two classes—*prohibitive*, which render a marriage unlawful but not invalid; and *diriment*, which render it both unlawful and invalid. The first type of prohibitive impediments mentioned in the Code of the Church's laws comprises certain *simple vows*—namely, of virginity, perfect chastity, not marrying, receiving Holy Orders and embracing the religious state. By a simple vow is meant either a private vow or one that is taken in most of the religious congregations that have been established in the past four centuries. The members of the older religious orders, such as the Benedictines and the Dominicans, take a solemn vow of chastity, which constitutes a diriment matrimonial impediment.<sup>1</sup>

In those regions where by civil law legal adoption renders marriage between the two parties concerned or their blood relatives merely unlawful (but not invalid) the Church makes it a prohibitive impediment; but where the civil law declares marriage between a person and his ward (or the near relatives) also invalid, the Church law makes this a diriment impediment. Thus, by the civil law of Belgium one who is adopted may not marry the adopter or a natural child of the adopter;<sup>2</sup> and the Church takes over this law as a prohibitive impediment. In Brazil legal adoption constitutes a diriment impediment of both Church and State. Another prohibitive impediment is the difference of religion between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, which will be considered later under mixed marriages.

<sup>1</sup> By special privilege of the Holy See the simple vow of chastity taken in certain religious institutes, such as the Jesuits, is a diriment impediment.

<sup>2</sup> Some other relatives of each also come under this law.

The natural law lays down certain diriment impediments. Thus, the fact that a person is already bound by the ties of marriage makes him incapable by the law of nature of entering another marriage, as long as his partner lives. Again, by the natural law one who is sexually impotent—that is, physically incapable of conjugal intercourse—is barred from marriage. However, to the natural impediments the Church has added certain others, such as defect of age. A boy under sixteen and a girl under fourteen years of age cannot validly marry. These ages correspond to physiological maturity; and the Code of Canon Law adds that young folks should be advised to defer marriage until they reach the age that is customary in their locality.

Holy Orders is also a diriment matrimonial impediment. That is, a man who has received the subdiaconate in the Latin rite is by ecclesiastical law incapable of marrying. Even in those Oriental Churches which allow a married clergy, a man may not marry after he has been ordained subdeacon, though if he has been married before, he may continue to live with his wife after ordination.<sup>8</sup>

Certain crimes connected with marriage also constitute diriment impediments. Thus, if a man keeps a woman a prisoner or abducts her with a view to marrying her, they cannot marry validly until she has regained her freedom. Again, if a married person commits adultery, making an agreement with the other sinning party to marry later (or, if they actually go through a form of civil marriage) they cannot marry each other, even though subsequently the death of the

<sup>8</sup> In the Churches of the Orient a bishop must observe celibacy as in the Latin Church.

lawful partner or partners gives them freedom. Adultery joined to the murder of a lawful spouse by one of them, and also such a murder performed conjointly by the two (even without adultery) also are numbered among the Church's diriment impediments, even though there has been no agreement on a future marriage.

Three kinds of relationship invalidate marriage—consanguinity, affinity and spiritual relationship. Consanguinity, or blood relationship, excludes marriage with every direct descendant or forebear, and also with one's collateral relations to the third degree inclusive. The three degrees of collateral relationship are brother and sister, first cousins, second cousins. The Church never grants a dispensation for marriage to a direct descendant or forebear or to a brother or sister; for a sufficient reason she will give such a permission to second or even first cousins. Sometimes collateral relationship is uneven, one being nearer than the other to their common ancestors, as is the case with uncle and niece. He is removed one generation, and she two from their common forebears; and their relationship is said to be in the second degree touching the first. Even for such a marriage the Church can give a dispensation, but rarely does so.

The relationship of affinity constitutes a diriment impediment between one who has been previously married (and is now widowed) and the near relatives of the previous partner. This extends to every degree of the direct line—that is, to the forebears of the former spouse and to any descendants this latter may have had by a previous marriage. It also extends, in the collateral line, to the brothers and sisters and first

cousins of the deceased partner. Finally, spiritual relationship renders invalid a marriage with one's baptismal godfather or godmother and also with the person who administered the Baptism. Of course, this last clause has a practical bearing, as far as matrimony is concerned, only when the baptizer happened to be a lay person.

The impediment of public decency is present when a man and woman have been living as husband and wife, though they have had no form of marriage or have had one which was invalid. This extends for the man to the woman's blood relatives in the first and second degree in the direct line (mother, grandmother, daughter, granddaughter) and for the woman to the man's corresponding blood relatives.

The Church is particularly opposed to mixed marriages—that is, marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics. This is a prohibitive impediment if the non-Catholic is baptized, a diriment impediment if he or she is unbaptized. The Church's opposition is most reasonable. Mixed marriages frequently turn out unhappily, because when husband and wife differ in religious beliefs they cannot have that unity of mind and heart that is so vital a factor toward domestic happiness. Furthermore, such marriages are often a menace to the faith of the Catholic party; and the children of such unions frequently grow up without proper religious training. (A mixed marriage in which there is grave danger of such evils is also against God's law.) Accordingly, a Catholic may not in conscience contract a mixed marriage unless there is a grave reason for doing so; and the mere fact that the two parties are deeply in love does not constitute a sufficient reason. In addi-

tion, the Church will not grant a dispensation for a mixed marriage unless both parties promise that all the children will be baptized and brought up as Catholics, and the non-Catholic promises that he will not endanger the faith of the Catholic. Furthermore, the Church requires good proof that these promises will be kept before she grants a dispensation.

Church law also forbids Catholics to marry persons who have been Catholics but have fallen away from the practice of their religion, even though they have not affiliated themselves with another religious denomination. The same prohibition includes Catholics who have joined forbidden societies. When a Catholic marries one of this class, the union is not strictly a mixed marriage, but it has practically the same objectionable features and dangers. Hence, a priest is not permitted to assist at such a marriage without first consulting the bishop, who may allow the wedding to take place if there is a sufficiently grave reason.

The Church can, of course, dispense from the impediments that arise from ecclesiastical law, but not from those that are laid down by the natural law. However, Catholics looking to marriage should seek as their life-partners those who are not barred to them by Church legislation, and only for very cogent reasons should they plan to wed those whom they may not marry without a dispensation. All the impediments established by the Church are wise and beneficial enactments, and many who have entered marriage in opposition to these rulings, even though they obtained a dispensation, have afterward regretted their conduct and heartily wished that they had followed the motherly guidance of the Church.

### Questions

1. What are the two kinds of matrimonial impediments? Explain the impediments arising from vows.
2. Under what circumstances does the Church make legal adoption an impediment?
3. Give some examples of impediments established by natural law? Explain the impediment of defect of age.
4. Explain the impediment arising from Holy Orders.
5. Explain the impediments of abduction and crime.
6. What relationships constitute matrimonial impediments? Explain each.
7. What constitutes the impediment of public decency?
8. Why does the Church oppose mixed marriages? Explain the Church laws on this matter.
9. What is to be said of the marriage of a Catholic with a renegade Catholic?
10. From which impediments can the Church dispense? Should Catholics look to marriages which call for a dispensation?

## VII. THE UNITY AND THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE

The two essential qualities of marriage, dictated by natural reason as well as by the positive law of God, are unity and indissolubility. By unity is meant that marriage is intended by nature to exist between only one man and one woman. The opposite of this quality is polygamy, which may be either polygyny (when one man has several wives) or polyandry (when one woman has several husbands). It is not difficult to prove that polygamous unions are contrary to the natural law, for such marriages lead to jealousy and hatred and the destruction of domestic peace and happiness. The perverse nature of such marriages is so evident that all civilized nations forbid polygamy. The worse type is polyandry, for this often leads to the sterility of the woman; and even if children are born, the father is uncertain.

At the very beginning of the human race Almighty God implied that unity is one of the fundamental properties of marriage by proclaiming, through the mouth of Adam, the significant principle concerning husband and wife: "They shall be *two* in one flesh" (Genesis ii. 24). The express mention of *two* indicates that God wills only *one* man and *one* woman to form the parties of a marriage. Our Lord repeated this same principle, in speaking of matrimony (Matthew xix. 5), and St. Paul proclaimed the law of matrimonial unity by declaring that a husband and wife possess complete dominion over each other's body with respect to marital relations, thus excluding the possibility of a third party as a spouse of either (1 Corinthians vii. 4).

Indissolubility means that the bond of marriage is intended to last until the death of either husband or wife, so that divorce with the right to remarry is prohibited. Unfortunately divorces are very common today. Indeed, the Catholic Church is practically the only religious organization that opposes divorce in the United States. Yet, any sensible person can see that nature itself dictates the permanence of the marriage bond. For the rearing of children, one of the principal ends of marriage, cannot be properly attained if the parents are free to separate and to contract new matrimonial alliances. Besides, the love and the devotion that should bind together the hearts of husband and wife are banished when each one realizes that the other may be planning to dissolve the marriage, as a business partnership is dissolved, and seek the affections of another. Divorce is particularly degrading to a wife and mother.

To this argument from reason we can add an argument from the words of God Himself. Through the lips of our first parent the Almighty declared that a man "shall leave father and mother and *cleave* to his wife" (Genesis ii. 24). Our Lord repeated this principle, adding: "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder" (Matthew xix. 6). In even more explicit language Christ said: "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark x. 11, 12). Certainly the law of God forbids divorce, at least if it be undertaken merely by the authority of the two parties themselves.

However, the author of the natural law, Almighty



God, can allow polygamy and divorce in certain circumstances, and He has done so under both the Old and the New Law. Beginning with the time of Abraham (or perhaps immediately after the deluge) God allowed both the Jewish and the Gentile men to have several wives. However, it was never permitted a woman to have several husbands. Moreover, through the Mosaic law God allowed a man to divorce his wife *for some uncleanness* (Deuteronomy xxiv. 1), which most probably meant the sin of adultery (Matthew xix. 9).

In the New Law the Church has been empowered to determine certain extraordinary cases in which a married couple can separate and marry again. St. Paul designated a case of this kind, known nowadays as the Pauline privilege (1 Corinthians vii. 15). The case is this. Two unbaptized persons are married. Later one is converted to Christianity and receives Baptism. The other refuses to dwell with the convert, or is a menace to the latter's faith and religious practices. When these conditions are present, the convert is free to leave the unbaptized partner and marry a Christian; and this new marriage dissolves the bond of the previous union. Even though many years have passed since the conversion took place, the Pauline privilege may be used if the requisite conditions exist. Of course, the case would always have to be submitted to the judgment of the Church, which has determined the technicalities to be observed, such as the formal questioning of the unbaptized party regarding his willingness to be converted or to live peacefully with the convert. Moreover, the Church would not authorize

the use of the Pauline privilege in a country where this manner of dissolving a marriage is not recognized by the State, until a civil divorce had first been secured by the Christian party.

Furthermore, the Church claims the power to dissolve a marriage between two baptized persons or between one who is baptized and one who is unbaptized, provided it has never been consummated—that is, provided the two have never had sexual union subsequently to the marriage. Such a marriage is dissolved, according to the enactment of the Church, if one party takes solemn religious vows; it can also be dissolved by the authority of the Pope. Again, if both were unbaptized at the time of their marriage and the marriage was consummated, then later both received Baptism but did not subsequently have marital relations, the Church can dissolve their union, and both are free to marry again.

Finally, the Church can grant a complete severance of the marriage bond between one who is baptized and one who is unbaptized, even after the union has been consummated. This power the Church uses only in the event that the baptized person was a non-Catholic; for if a Catholic marries one who is not baptized, even though he receives a dispensation from the Church,<sup>4</sup> he cannot expect to receive any extraordinary favor from the Church afterward.

The Church uses its power of dissolving marriage only when there are very grave reasons for doing so, usually reasons of a spiritual nature. The most fre-

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<sup>4</sup> A marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person without a dispensation would be null and void because of the diriment impediment of disparity of cult.

quent occasion for the use of this power by the Church is when a convert to the faith will be spiritually benefited by being released from the marriage bond. It will be noted that the dissolving power of the Church can be used only when one of two conditions is verified—first, the marriage was not a sacrament; second, though it was a sacramental union, it was not consummated after it became such. The Church has no power to break the bond of a normal Christian marriage—that is, the marriage of two baptized persons which has been subsequently consummated. Such a marriage represents most perfectly the union between Christ and His Church, and no power on earth can dissolve it. It matters not whether the husband and wife are Catholics or non-Catholics; as long as they have been baptized and have afterward consummated their union, their marriage can be dissolved only by death. It is to this type of marriage that we refer when we say that the Catholic Church never permits a divorce with the right to remarry.

Sometimes, however, married persons may separate from each other, either for a time or permanently, without the right to remarry. This is especially the case when one has been guilty of adultery. However, apart from the case of certain adultery, Catholics should not have recourse to this measure without consulting the ecclesiastical authorities unless there is danger in delay and the reasons are evident. Moreover, it is usually better for a married couple to remain together, even though one may be justified in seeking a separation; because according to God's ordinary providence husband and wife are to work out their salvation as "two in one flesh."

**Questions**

1. What are the two essential qualities of marriage? Explain unity and the natural reasons for its necessity. Explain the two species of polygamy. Which is worse?
2. What are the arguments from Scripture for the unity of marriage?
3. What is meant by the indissolubility of marriage? On what reasons of the natural order is it based?
4. What are the arguments from revelation for the indissolubility of marriage?
5. What exceptions from the essential qualities of marriage did God grant in the Old Law?
6. Explain the exception to the law of indissolubility known as the Pauline privilege.
7. Explain the ways in which a sacramental marriage which has not been consummated can be dissolved by the Church.
8. Explain the dissolution of a marriage between a baptized person and one who is unbaptized.
9. For what reasons will the Church use its power of dissolving marriage? What are the two conditions, one of which must be present, that the Church may dissolve a marriage? What type of marriage can be dissolved only by death?
10. In what circumstances may a couple separate? What authorities should first be consulted? What is to be said, in general, about the advisability of a separation of husband and wife?

### VIII. PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

The thought that should be uppermost in the minds of Catholics with regard to marriage is the exalted holiness and the grave responsibilities of the matrimonial state. Unfortunately many persons nowadays take a purely materialistic view of marriage, and center their aspirations entirely on the natural benefits it will confer on them individually. But Catholics must remember, first and foremost, that Matrimony is a sacrament, symbolic of the union between Christ and His Church. It is directed by divine decree primarily to the benefit of the human race, and only secondarily to the advantages of the married couple. It involves difficulties and hardships and many acts of self-sacrifice. Each of the two must give the other constant and undivided love; each must merge his or her personality in that of the other. Yet, to those married persons who strive to live up to the ideals of their holy state the matrimonial union brings an abundance of graces to aid them in their trials and burdens.

Every Catholic young man and woman should think seriously on the problem whether or not to marry. It is a doctrine of the Catholic Church that the state of virginity is nobler than the married state. Of course, this doctrine is especially applicable to those Catholics who enter the clerical or the religious state, solemnly pledging themselves to lead a life of perpetual chastity out of love for God. Young Catholics who feel an attraction or a desire for a life of this kind should pray fervently for divine guidance and should seek the advice of a prudent priest, so that they may not neglect the precious grace of a religious or sacerdotal vocation.

Nevertheless, most persons find their place in life in the matrimonial state. Hence, young men and women approaching the age when marriage is suitable should consider the matter of choosing a life partner. However, considerations of this nature should not engage the thoughts of mere boys and girls. It is silly, and it may also be sinful, for boys and girls of 16 or 18 years to keep "steady company"; this should not begin until they are in their twenties. Moreover, those who realize that for some good reason they cannot marry for several years—for example, because their parents need their support—should not keep steady company nor become engaged. Of course, a couple should not marry until they have some money put aside and are assured of a sufficient regular income. But on the other hand, a couple should not delay their marriage when conditions are favorable. They need not have enough money to provide a fashionable residence and a car. Even if they have to economize somewhat stringently, there is no reason why they should not get married, as long as the young man will have steady employment. But they should arrange to have a home of their own; and ordinarily the young woman should not hold a position outside the home after the marriage.

In the choice of a life partner the Catholic should not be guided by unreasoning sentimentality or passion. Love at first sight is usually a very fickle love. Especially should Catholics consider only those of their own religion with a view to marriage. Furthermore, steadiness of character and solid virtue are far more important than good looks or the ability to say clever and witty things. Any serious moral failing should be

a deterrent to the beginning of a courtship. The girl who starts company-keeping with a man who is addicted to drink is making a terrible mistake, and the young man who decides to court a young woman who is unkind to her parents or lazy or extravagant or who tries to flirt with every man she meets is running a great risk.

Ordinarily young people should consult their parents before entering the married state or even making their choice of a future helpmate. Sons and daughters should let their parents become well acquainted with their prospective wives and husbands, and if the older people make serious objections to the marriage, they should weigh the matter very carefully. Sometimes, it is true, parents object to the marriage of a son or daughter because of selfishness or unreasonable prejudices, and in such cases their counsel does not have to be followed; but usually their admonitions are founded on genuine love for their children, and have the value of long years of experience. And so, it is only when they are evidently acting unjustly that their sons and daughters are safe in opposing them.

The time of courtship is intended by Almighty God to be a period of happiness, when the dawning of love fills the hearts of the youthful pair with a full measure of joy, and they look forward to a blissful union as long as life shall last. However, this period is also fraught with grave moral dangers because the passions are easily aroused, and there may be strong temptations to anticipate marital privileges. But good Catholics will overcome these inclinations by prayer and the frequent reception of the sacraments, and will avoid even slight liberties of a forbidden nature, remembering

that once a person allows an opening wedge to the vice of impurity, he is very liable to go to the limit. If a young couple wish their wedding day to be truly happy they will bear in mind during their courtship that the white veil the bride wears is a symbol of inviolate virginity, and will do nothing to make this a mockery.

A courtship should not last too long. A year or a year and a half of company keeping should be fully sufficient to give the couple an opportunity of making up their mind whether or not they wish to marry; and the period of engagement should not last longer than five or six months. At least a month before the time set for the wedding the priest should be informed—first, the pastor of the young woman, because ordinarily the marriage takes place in her parish. If the young man resides in another parish, his pastor also should be informed, because the banns must be proclaimed in both churches. Of course, the couple will also attend to the legal formalities, such as the procuring of the license.

The weeks immediately preceding the marriage should be sanctified by a more frequent reception of the sacraments and by special fervor in prayer, asking God's abundant blessings on the new state of life which is soon to begin for the young couple. It would be a praiseworthy custom if the two, whenever they go out together, would first pay a visit to the church to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and beseech our Lord to enlighten and guide them. As was said before, the proper way for Catholics to be married is at a Mass. Sometimes couples complain that they cannot afford the stipend for a nuptial Mass; yet often, those who make this complaint spend large sums for flowers and



the wedding reception and the honeymoon. At any rate, if they really wish to have a Mass but cannot afford the stipend, they should tell the priest of their difficulty, and usually the matter will be settled satisfactorily.

Finally, the couple should receive Holy Communion together the morning of their marriage—if possible, at the nuptial Mass—thus pledging their love for God and for each other in the precious Blood of our Saviour. Surely, when marriage is prepared for and entered in this way Christ Himself will be present at the wedding, as He was present at the wedding at Cana in Galilee centuries ago, to impart His blessing to the couple, and to give strength and holiness to the pledge they make before His altar, when they promise to be faithful to each other “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death do us part.”

### Questions

1. What ideas should Catholics entertain about marriage?
2. What is the Catholic doctrine concerning the excellence of virginity as compared to marriage? What considerations should young Catholics give to this matter?
3. At what age may company-keeping be begun?
4. What financial considerations should enter into plans for marriage?

5. What norms should Catholics follow in choosing a life-partner?
6. To what extent should young people consult their parents in regard to marriage?
7. What rules should be followed regarding conduct during courtship?
8. How long should courtship and the period of engagement last? Which priests should be informed of the intended marriage, and when should this be done? What other arrangements should the couple make?
9. What is the best way to prepare for marriage immediately before the wedding? What is to be said of the advisability of a nuptial Mass?
10. Why should the couple receive Holy Communion together the morning of their wedding?

