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Farrell, John J.

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this is Cana

Our Lord made marriage a sacrament at that wedding in Cana. Today Cana is one means, and a potent one, of gratifying the hunger of married people for teaching and inspiration to help them live their vocation. It is concerned with restoring the full stature of Christian married life, with developing a thoroughly Christian pattern for the twentieth century American home.

by **Mr. and Mrs. John J. Farrell**

ONCE there were two young lovers. They were comely beyond description and a certain nobility, like a radiance, shone from them. They looked at each other for a little while in deepest admiration. Then he took her hand in his and together they walked down a green pathway. It was the world's first wedding.

There were no bridesmaids, no families, no little girls wide-eyed at the bride's splendor. No wedding guests save the great solemn beasts of the forest as docile as lambs. The wedding music rose in perfection out of the arching branches, which bore as well the wedding feast.

No one was there except the bride and the groom—and the Celebrant: He who had fash-

ioned all this loveliness, who had made their souls Godlike and destined them for paradise. He blessed these two whom He loved so much and said, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth, and make it yours." His wedding gift to them was dominion over the world.

Christ at Cana

Everyone knows what happened next; how, in a terrible gamble, they lost that gift, lost their Godlikeness, lost heaven. One thing remained, though not in its original glory: their love and its faculty of bringing forth new life.

Everyone knows too that a long time later another young couple was being married. Their circumstances were comfortable enough and a wedding feast was being given in their honor. But through some unfortunate miscalculation the wine ran short.

Among the guests was a kind and solicitous Lady. She called her Son aside and whispered the difficulty to Him. Because He could not refuse her, He made wine out of water, thus revealing Himself to be not the humble carpenter everyone took Him for, but the Son of that first Celebrant.

And He, too, brought a wedding present. He brought this couple, and all who would follow after them, what the world had longed for since Eden: Divine Life, the lost Godlikeness. He gave it, anticipating the perfect offering of Himself to His Father on the cross. He gave it in other ways too, in a whole series of sacraments.

But that day He gave it in a particular way to all who would marry in His name, to help them reach the lost heritage which His death would restore—heaven. That day He made marriage a sacrament, a means to Godlikeness.

And for a long time married people made claim on that gift, bringing Him into their common life so that He could refashion it after His own. They believed that marriage belonged to God, that He had made it for one man and one woman, that He had made it to people earth and heaven.

Cana Without Christ

But then, in an era of rebellion, men broke away from His teaching and began to hold that the Son of God had given no such gift, that marriage was no more sacred than tilling the soil. People's good instincts, bred in the centuries of Christian tradition, held back for a while the tidal wave of this heresy. But inevitably it gathered force and now, as we look around us, we can see that man has once more thrown away a divine wedding gift.

Once the sacrament was lost, the divine helps which it gave were lost and the sense of a sacred vocation was lost too. Marriage has become a mere civil contract, and not a very binding one at that.

It is small comfort to reflect that this deterioration is worse in other lands. Here the law considers a church wedding equivalent to the city hall variety and does not require a separate civil ceremony. Here too, most people seem to consider a church wedding more really a wedding. These

facts probably indicate some lingering belief in the religious character of marriage. But this almost unconscious respect is not enough, and it too is fading.



At the same time other forces began pillaging even the natural bonds of marriage. Not only is the sacredness gone, but that natural love and that natural fruitfulness which remained even after Eden are likewise disappearing.

Among these forces were the Industrial Revolution which brought factories and offices and cities and which completely changed the family's way of life; the emancipation of women which, though basically good and just, took a wrong direction; secularism or the divorce of God from life; selfish individualism; materialism and the cult of pleasure.

The pressure of all these was especially felt in our country where they were part of the evolving life of a new land. Today statistics tell the sad story: twenty-five per cent of all marriages end

in divorce; couples have an average of 2.5 children; for the first time in history over half the working women in the labor force are wives; family responsibility in educating children is shunted to agencies outside the home; we have the highest percentage of juvenile delinquency of any civilized nation in the world. Catholic marriages, immersed in this tradition, have been seriously affected.

Sex vs. Love

Such are the results. Those broad, general causes have seeped into our individual lives in a number of ways. First, we have forgotten what love is. "To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part," says the wedding promise. Until all of us understand what that means we will not know how to love, no matter how much our hearts may throb.

Instead of love, with the sex faculty as one means of expressing it, we have sex divorced from love. But sex, when it is not an echo of all of love, is no more than a physical function which can never satisfy the heart of man. Nevertheless it is sex as the only expression of love which is being sold to people in every imaginable way: in radio and newsprint and literature and television and photography and art, and even in marriage counseling.

Not only has sex been separated from love, but woman from womanhood and man from man-

hood. In justice, woman did need emancipation, but the misdirection which that emancipation took in education and industry and politics has produced a different kind of woman, one untrained in the gentle, loving, compassionate, self-giving qualities to fulfill her destiny as the helpmate of man and the mother of the living. And likewise with man. Those aggressive and competitive characteristics which were to serve his role as husband and father have been wrongly developed and even perverted toward material success and possessions alone, estranging him from his role of maker and father.

Marriage vs. Parenthood

In this whole process of divide and conquer, wherein love and sex have been separated, woman defeminized and man dehumanized, the final stroke is to divorce marriage from parenthood. People marry, not to increase and multiply, but to seize at pleasure, as long as it lasts. The child is almost the accident, seldom the purpose of their union. The marriage is not a union at all, really, but a 50-50 proposition where each, remaining independent, contributes only what he knows he can get back out of the investment.

Thus psychologically and physiologically the children of Adam and Eve are being steadily unfitted for the realization of even the natural goods of marriage. And it seems that the result of taking marriage away from God could hardly have been otherwise.

The totality of marriage has somehow to be restored. Married couples and those about to marry need to see that totality. They need to see their natural union ordained to parenthood. They also need to see their supernatural union, their sacrament, their vocation. They need to see their married life in relationship to the life of Christ, their offering to God through each other in relationship to His offering in the Mass, their union in the light of His union with the Church.



They are to show forth God's glory as spouses and parents. That is their vocation. It is husband and wife, as mother and father, that they

are to prove themselves good and faithful servants worthy to enter into the joys of the Lord. They have to be dedicated, have to envision everything in this vocation as sacred because of their sacrament. They have to find their way back to the meaning of Cana.

The Restoration

Within the Church strong reassertions of the sacred character and divine institution of marriage are leading the way: the encyclicals and addresses of Leo XIII, Pius XI, and Pius XII on the mind of God regarding marriage; the statements of the Bishops of the United States, calling people to the full Christian vision of the home; and the welling up within the Mystical Body of services and movements dedicated to marriage and the family.

Notable among the latter is the Cana Conference which has been developed and spread by married couples. Cana is one means, and a potent one, of gratifying the hunger of married people for teaching and inspiration to help them live their vocation. It is concerned with restoring the full stature of Christian married life, with developing a thoroughly Christian pattern for the 20th Century American home.

It grew out of the "Family Renewal Days" begun in New York by Rev. John Delaney, S.J. In 1944 a Chicago couple who had read about those first "Family Renewal Days" invited Father De-

laney there and persuaded a number of other couples to attend.

To all of them it was a rich and significant experience. They knelt side by side and recited Mass with him. After breakfast he gave two conferences, followed by dinner, another conference, and a round table discussion. At the end of the day came Benediction and renewal of the marriage vows, a fairly widespread practice now, but unique then. The couples spent the day together as spouses, receiving inspiration not so much for individual holiness but for cooperative holiness in marriage.

The substance of the talks and the very special spirit which permeated the whole day affected every one of them. Some had been married many years, had grown children. A few were newly married. Others were in between. It would have been hard to find a group of more happily married couples, more exemplary husbands and wives. Yet all of them came away with an entirely new perspective.

Impelled by a desire not only to realize the newly found ideal in their own married lives, but to give other couples an opportunity for the same inspiration and direction, a number of the couples began working together. Some of them, including those already working in Catholic Action, were acutely aware of the need. They, and the priests who had come in contact with the idea saw the possibilities of these days set aside for husbands and wives.

The Name "Cana"

Among the priests was Rev. Edward Dowling, S.J., of St. Louis. One of his many contributions was a name—Cana Conferences. "Why not call them Cana Conferences?" he suggested. "Our Lord made marriage a sacrament at that wedding in Cana. He showed for all time how close husbands and wives were to His Heart."

And so, gradually, Cana came into being. Two elements hastened its growth. One was the vast sacrifice of time and energy the couples were willing to make. The other was the wisdom and vision of the priests who became interested. There was, from the start, an extraordinary spirit of cooperation between the priests and the couples.

Both were convinced that the movement, while under the authority and direction of the clergy, had to be deeply rooted in the couples themselves. The work of organizing and promoting Conferences was a job for laymen. It was much easier and much better for couples to reach other couples. And the counsel of couples was needed in developing the content of those Conferences, if they were to answer the needs and be suited to the mentality of married people. Couples instinctively saw that the privilege and responsibility of working for the renewal of Christian marriage was their own.

Little by little, then, people began to hear about Cana. It wasn't easy at first to persuade them to give up a Sunday's outing or ball game. They

resented the notion that they had anything to learn about marriage. They would protest, "We're not having any trouble. Why should we go?" It took a while to establish the fact that Cana was not a clinic for bad marriages. Even though the wives might be willing enough, the husbands usually resisted manfully. Once they came, though, suspicion and apathy vanished in the pleasant informality of the day, and those same couples who came reluctantly caught the spirit and were soon doing their bit to promote the Conferences.

Approval

Chicago's Chancellor, Rt. Rev. Msgr. E. M. Burke, J.C.D., whose responsibility for the Marriage Court predisposed him to look with interest on any movement to improve marriage, kept in close touch with the work. And then, in 1946, when the lay committee petitioned for a full-time priest director, His Eminence Cardinal Stritch signified his confidence in Cana's positive, constructive effort by creating the post of Cana Director and naming Reverend John J. Egan to fill it.

Under Father Egan's direction, lay initiative has been further developed. The original lay advisory panel has evolved into an executive board working with the director to formulate and execute policy. This Board has set up thirteen districts in the Archdiocese so that district chairmen, under the direction of three division chairmen, can assist parish committees in arranging Conferences. Because of differences in facilities, the Board has altered

the traditional Cana day time schedule in some cases to answer the needs of individual parishes. And as problems facing married couples shift from year to year, it recommends new emphasis or new applications of the basic content material. On the more mundane side, it has set up an auditing system to meet Cana's budget problems.

Meanwhile, Cana took hold in St. Louis, Hartford, Washington, Peoria. Other areas soon followed. In November of 1947 the Bishops of the United States voiced approval of the work. Their 1949 statement on the family urged that Cana be promoted and encouraged. A survey taken in 1950 shows 88 dioceses having Cana Conferences. Articles about Cana have appeared in American, Italian, German, French, and English periodicals. Cana has sprung up in China, India, England, South America, the Philippines, Alaska, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia. Recognizing Cana's valuable contribution to the family, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, through its Family Life Bureau, has given it much assistance.

Everywhere the story has been the same. Couples were hungry for exactly the message that Cana was bringing them. They were, most of them, reasonably satisfied with their state of life. But, for lack of inspiration and direction, they were largely missing its real riches, so thoroughly had secular habits and attitudes permeated their marriage and family life.

Cana, with its unique spirit, with its perspective

on the sacrament and vocation of marriage, showed them that it was their means of sanctification; it showed them how to change their sights, how to begin realizing the potential that is in their sacrament. And the almost standard reaction was, "If only we could have had this long ago!"



Cana's message progresses from the natural to the supernatural. It takes first the two individuals, the man and the woman, and shows those natural characteristics with which God has endowed each for the completion and fulfillment of the other.

Because the union of marriage is partly a union of minds and wills, it demands an understanding and appreciation of the basic nature and role of each partner. The radical difference in the destiny of man as the head and woman as the heart of marriage has largely disappeared. Without that essential distinction there is competition instead of cooperation, a psychic splitting apart of two minds and hearts which pledged to become one. With it comes an admiration for manliness and woman-

liness in all their mystery which leads man and wife to reverence and complete one another, to become like the warp and woof of a fabric.

The union of marriage is also a union of bodies, to which the union of minds and wills contributes a great deal. Here, too, failures abound, failures rooted in the lack of Christian attitudes. We have had generations of parents who couldn't talk to their children about love and sex, a world which can and does talk to them in a variety of ways about sex, and religious precepts for the married which have been limited to the uninspiring terms of rights and duties.

Cana performs a very simple, but a much needed service in giving couples the full Christian view of their physical union as a natural and a supernatural act which has the immense dignity of continuing God's creation, and is a proper source of mutual joy, a loving gift of themselves to which God's gift of increase is added.

The union of marriage is a union of minds, wills, and bodies. But it is more than the sum of these, for there is that other element, the supernatural bond of the sacrament through which the couple is united not only to one another but to Christ. Cana achieves its full impact as it tells couples to draw upon the treasury of sacramental grace which is theirs, to use the specific helps provided by a loving God from the moment of marriage, so that through their sacrament and vocation they may worship Him and come to life everlasting.

Priests and Cana

This is the message of Cana. Its effectiveness is very dependent upon its priest conductors, who must not only love the family but know the fabric of everyday family life.

Not only have these priests grown close to the people, but they have also made it their responsibility to meet periodically with one another for an exchange of ideas and methods, in a constant effort to improve their work. The first manual on the Cana Conferences, which has served as a guide for starting Cana in many new areas, grew out of one of their study weeks, followed recently by a second volume.

Lay Initiative

Cana has developed best where it has been an independent organization and where couples themselves have taken the initiative of planning the day, recruiting husbands and wives, procuring the conductor. Though it began on a regional basis when it was virtually unknown and had to draw on several parishes for attendance, it has since become most productive within the individual parish where a lay committee, with the pastor's encouragement and the help of district chairmen, plans and makes all arrangements. The general practice has been to keep the groups fairly small, twenty-five to thirty couples, having as many Conferences as necessary to accommodate all the couples in the parish. Smaller groups are more

informal; the couples become friendly with each other, and the group discussion is better.

In addition to the Husband-Wife Conference described, there are further ones on such subjects as the Parent-Child relationship, social attitudes in the home, the family and the Mass. Father Delaney summed up the reason when he told those first groups:

“We all know the value of getting off once in a while to think things over, reviewing and renewing ideals. Priests, seminarians, nuns, brothers, the Pope himself, make retreats once a year. Why? Because selfishness, routineness and carelessness can creep into their lives despite all the spiritual helps they have. So, too, in marriage. Selfishness, impatience, differences of opinion, taking things for granted, carelessness, loss of the sense of the dignity of marriage—all these can and do creep in insidiously before their danger is recognized. Husbands and wives need a day of renewal together. Marriage is a perfect sharing; husbands and wives must rise together to a greater sense of dedication, responsibility, giving.”

How effective?

Until Cana Conferences spread further and become more deeply imbedded in the experience of the average couple it will not be possible to cite statistics on their effect in preventing marriage failures. Up to now Cana has largely reached people who were not in danger of winding up in

the marriage court—which is not to say they would have aspired to any great happiness or holiness without Cana. But there are other observable results over and above the changed attitudes toward marriage. Cana has brought about an intensification of spirituality within the home, has brought priests and people closer together, has given an appreciation of the importance of the spiritual well-being of each family to the whole of the Mystical Body, increased interest in the parish as the focus of their lives, has deepened the association between Catholic couples with its resultant sense of moral support. It has reached people who do not make retreats. And as it spreads it is beginning to reach lax Catholics and invalid marriages.

The Conferences seem to generate a desire to go further. In some dioceses this has led to the formation of Cana Clubs where small groups of couples and a chaplain meet to discuss the application of the general principles to specific situations in their family life. In other dioceses the Christian Family Movement which works through the specialized Catholic Action technique to rechristianize the environment in which families live and work, provides the ideal medium.

Cana itself is limited, however, to the Conference, whose purpose is to help form and strengthen the inner life of the family, building up the proper relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, the family and God. Its primary concern is with making the home, in the words

of the Bishops, a "shrine of fidelity, a place where God is the unseen Host."

Pre-Cana Work

In the very early days of Cana, some of the couples, who were members of specialized Catholic Action groups, saw the need for similar Conferences for engaged couples. Together with their chaplains, they developed the Pre-Cana Conference.

The Pre-Cana series as it exists in several dioceses, consists of a Sunday afternoon session followed by three evening meetings. The opening and closing Conferences are given by the priest-conductor. His subject matter is essentially the same as that presented at the first Cana Conference (the meaning of love, the union of minds, wills, and bodies; the sacrament and vocation of marriage) except that the emphasis and application differ, as dictated by the needs of couples not yet married. The necessity of thinking and praying together about their new life, working toward it, learning how to love generously, all these form part of it, together with an explanation of the Canon Law on marriage, the liturgy of the wedding, the necessity of being spiritually prepared for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Experience Speaks

One session is addressed by a married couple who provide, out of their own experience, a picture of the gradual adjustments in marriage

which lead to unity and stability. These couples who speak have several years of marriage behind them and are parents of growing families. Many of them have seen military service, have coped with the housing problem, lived with in-laws, been in financial straits. They are very familiar with the problems which are plaguing couples marrying today. Their enthusiasm, conviction, courage, their faith in each other and trust in God's providence are the qualities which impress the younger couples, build up their confidence, help them come to grips with their apprehensions about marriage, the war, finances, parenthood.

Another session is addressed by a doctor whose task, like the priest's and the couple's, is partly one of re-education and partly one of inspiration. He must help the young people shed their false notions about sex and see it as the Church sees it. He must indicate that their physical relationship, predominant though it may appear in prospect, is only a part of marriage, interdependent with all the other parts, that it is and will always remain generative. He speaks, not from an isolated knowledge of the body and its functions but rather from the body-mind viewpoint. Because he is a doctor, the young people do not hesitate to press on him a variety of honest queries.

New Light on Love

Both the married couple and the doctor throw light from different directions on the basic principles which the priest has already set forth. It

is not that they contribute new elements but that, drawing upon their own background, they are able to reinforce what the priest has said, give concrete examples of dogma embracing life, show how love is expressed in a multitude of attitudes and deeds. They, like the priests in the work, meet regularly in a constant effort to improve their contribution.

Pre-Cana has the immense advantage of reaching young couples at the time when they are most receptive, most anxious to learn; during the engagement period their good will, their response to instruction and inspiration are at a high point. They have come willingly and in increasing numbers to Pre-Cana. And some of them have broken their engagements, realizing that by the standards they have learned, this particular marriage could not work.

Pre-marriage instruction is essentially a parochial responsibility; it is a responsibility which has weighed heavily on many parish priests because their other pressing responsibilities have made it nearly impossible to do justice to the work. They have welcomed the Conferences, recognizing them as an aid to fulfilling a pastor's obligation to his flock.

It has been said that there is enough sanctifying power in the sacramental state of marriage to fill our land with saints. But couples will not begin to find that sanctifying power until they know and love their vocation. To give them that knowledge and inspiration is the aim of Cana.

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