

White Robed Monks of St. Benedict



On the Sacrament of Marriage

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to offer the reader a general background appreciation of the Sacrament of Marriage. (For a specific discussion on Sacraments in general and the Sacrament of Marriage in particular please refer to Sacraments and the Sacrament of Marriage: An Overview.)

A sacrament is any visible sign of God's invisible presence. Matrimony is a sacrament of vocation and commitment. In marriage, the Church reveals itself as a community called forth and committed to a life of mutual love and service. The ministers of the sacrament are the bride and groom. The priest is only the principle witness and the minister of the blessing, itself a sacramental and not part of the sacrament of marriage.

Old Testament

The creation narrative of Genesis (2:18,24) is the root of the sacredness of marriage. The Lord God said: it is not good that a man should be alone... Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. The highest honor paid to marriage is the appreciation to it of the symbol of the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel (Hosea 2; Isaiah 54:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2, 3:20).

New Testament

Jesus deepens the Hebrew concept of marriage insisting on the oneness that exists between the man and the woman. The woman may not be cast aside, therefore divorce is outlawed. The deuterio-Pauline and pastoral epistles affirm the important of marriage and the family. (The pastoral epistles, in fact, insist that bishops should be successful in marriage and family life before their election to office <1 Timothy 3:3-5>.) In Ephesians (5:21-23) portrays marriage as a symbol of Christ's union with his Church. It also affirms that the union of Christ and the Church is the basis of marriage. While not reinforcing patriarchy, but only asserting that Christians did not oppose the Roman sociocultural order, husbands loving their wives as their own flesh are only doing what Christ does with the Church.

Second to Fifth Centuries

St. Augustine in his *The Good Of Marriage* discussed the three values of marriage: fidelity being the faithfulness inherent in mutual love of spouses that involves sexual love and a commitment to love and trust; offspring whose parents accept them in love, nurture them with affection, and educate them in <love and compassion> <WRB>; and sacrament that signifies the unity of God.

Middle Ages to Vatican II

Innocent III (1208), Second Council of Lyons (1274), Council of Florence (1439), Council of Trent (1563), Leo XIII (1880), and Pius XI (1930) affirmed that marriage is a true sacrament.

Vatican II

A personal irrevocable consent seals the covenant of marriage. (Pastoral Constitutions on the Church in the Modern World, n. 48) Furthermore, "...the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole nature of family life resulting from it, tend to dispose the spouses to cooperate courageously with the love of the Creator and Savior who through them day by day expands and enriches His own family." (n. 50) The redemptive power of Christ and the salvific activity of the Church rules, enriches, and subsumes authentic married love into divine love. (n. 48) People marry and remain in marriage because they love each other. There is a stress:

1. on the mutual exchange of love as constituting the sacrament of marriage,
2. on married love as the source of the institution of marriage, and
3. on the need for the Church to constantly bring forth the witness value of this sacrament to the whole community of faith.

As husband and wife are called to be faithful, generous, and gracious* to each other in fulfillment of their marriage covenant, so is the whole Church called to be faithful to its covenant with God in Christ.

Marriage is not just a ceremony by which two people are legally bound together. As a sacrament, marriage is an act of worship, and expression of faith, a sign of the Church's unity, and a mode of Christ's presence. The expression of the mutual love which is at the heart of the sacrament consists of more than biological union. "It involves the good of the whole person. Therefore, it enriches the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of friendship distinctive of marriage... Such love pervades the whole of (the spouses') lives." (n.49)

Indissolubility

Following Mark 10:2-9 and because of its understanding of marriage as a covenant, a marriage that is both sacramental and consummated is indissoluble. Yet, Origen (d. 254) taught that divorce and remarriage was a kind of "lesser-of-two-evils" principle, acknowledging that divorce and remarriage was contrary, but not entirely without reason. The Eastern Church holds the Principle of (Divine) Economy, which is similar to

the Western Church's notion of dispensation. This principle removes the unintended harshness of a given law. Thus, the Eastern Church permits remarriage after divorce. The Orthodox-Roman Catholic "Agreed Statement on the Sanctity of Marriage" (Origins 8/28; December 28, 1978; p. 446f) states: "Marriage (is) the fundamental relationship in which a man and woman, by total sharing with each other, seek their own growth in holiness and that of their children, and thus show the presence on earth of God's kingdom" (I, par. 2). Although marriage involves a permanent commitment, the statement acknowledges that the Orthodox Church, "out of consideration of the human realities, permits divorce...and tolerates remarriage in order to avoid further human tragedies" (II, par.2).

White Robed Monks of St. Benedict on Remarriage

As a covenantal bond, Christian marriage is a sacrament analogous to the union between Christ and Church (Ephesians 5:22-32). The sacrament of Matrimony is also a decisive moment when the Church reveals itself as the Bride of Christ, as the sign that God is irrevocably committed to the human community in and through Christ. <The marriage bond, therefore, is one of infinite compassion and infinite love.> Once established, it cannot be broken.

When a man and woman enter a spousal relationship and discover through their human experience that they are—for whatever reason—unable to maintain that relationship and seek dissolution of that relationship, that very human experience itself is prima facie and exculpatory evidence that the couple had never established, without praise or blame, the marriage bond (VRB) in faith, being generous and gracious* (cf).

Faith implies conviction, trust, and commitment. Conviction connotes an inner disposition to the truth of love. Trust connotes an acknowledgment and acceptance—capability—of God and of oneself to love and be loved. Commitment connotes a total self-surrender in active engagement in the service of the Kingdom of God. (Catholicism, pp. 929-939)

If the couple had established the marriage bond, then out of infinite compassion and love for one another, they would have realized the grace (been gracious) to discover in their human experience a resolution to their spousal relationship problem. Without judgment (Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Matthew 7:1) and given the Principle of Divine Economy, and the historical fact that

The Church of the Middle Ages has brought kings to their knees, and indeed lost England to Protestantism based on another Aramaic mis-translation.. .Matthew 19:9 (as usually translated) "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." George Lamsa (New Testament Origins) on page 98 ... shows put away is the Aramaic shvikta, while divorced is another word shrita. Jesus is NOT here making some profound new LAW against Christian divorce, but merely showing that a man who marriess another woman without granting his first wife a real divorce (very easy in Jewish laws of that time) was ethically responsible for his former bed-mate's supposed BIGAMY because she was still legally married to

him.....Putting the ONUS here on the man, not the woman! (cf Aramaic: Language of Jesus!)

The WRBs solemnize remarriages with joy and the peace of Christ.

For those of the Roman jurisdiction, the WRB, out of pastoral concern, cite the following acknowledgment from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (April 26, 1971) over the signature of its prefect, John Cardinal Wright: "Conscience is inviolable and no person is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her conscience, as the moral tradition of the Church attests" (cf., p. 991). Roman Catholics might also find interesting the information contained within Internal Forum.

Be at peace.

Amen.