

# MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD

THE CATHOLIC IDEAL

BY

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FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1911 BY JOSEPH F. WAGNER, NEW YORK

**Nihil Obstat**

Remigius Lafort, S.T.L.

*Censor Librorum*

**Imprimatur**

✠ John M. Farley, D.D.

*Archbishop of New York*

New York, 19 January 1911



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Printed on 10 August 2024

SKU: 131

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## Introduction

A man thinks he is very clever if he can make an aeroplane. Thousands of other men think he is a genius if he can fly over the Alps, even though at the end of the journey he break his neck. But these are paltry trifles compared with the work of training a soul for the kingdom of God. Such a task needs the genius of the Catholic Church.

Amongst her many helps for this purpose not the least important is the Sacrament of marriage. The ideal which she holds before the world and the power which she gives for the realizing of such ideal stand out as the chief hope for the salvation of modern society. On every side we see influences at work which tend to break up the family and consequently to break up society. The increase of divorce, the falling off in the birthrate, the spread of the white slave traffic, these are a few of the more obvious symptoms which follow upon a low ideal of the marriage bond.

That there is something wrong, is admitted on all hands, as is proved by the attempts to mend matters. The Divorce Commission at present sitting in London is an evidence of such unrest. The formation of the Eugenics Education Society is another. In these movements, however, the Catholic student detects a lack of the knowledge of foundation principles. Most of the remedies proposed are a tinkering with the symptom rather than a treatment of the root cause.

Here and there, however, the value of the Catholic ideal asserts itself. Thus, for instance, in the evidence before the Divorce Commission, Sir John Bigham, then President of the Divorce Court, said: "My experience shows me that members of the Roman Catholic Church seldom come to our court, and I attribute that fact to the great influence of their priesthood, and to the respect which is inculcated amongst Roman Catholics for the marriage vow."

Another witness, Dr. Glynn Whittle, of Liverpool, bore magnificent testimony to the fidelity of the Catholic poor. Speaking as he did in favor of divorce, there was a double weight in his words. He said he had questioned countless poor women, victims of habitual cruelty, as to whether they would avail themselves of divorce if they could get it. The answers had been most impressive. Protestants said "Yes;" Roman Catholics said "No." He could not recall a single Protestant exception.

What is the cause of this grand steadfastness amongst Catholics and of weak changeableness amongst their Protestant neighbours? A member of the Council of the Eugenics Society shall make answer. Writing in a London journal<sup>1</sup> he says: "Marriage, like other natural and necessary relations, is sacred. Only in Catholicism is it a Sacrament; in scientific sociology the term is meaningless. Protestantism will have none of it. The Reformation, in this as in other points a revolt from Catholicism, expressly declared that marriage is not a Sacrament, that it is essentially a secular matter."

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 11 November, 1910

For the present disastrous state of affairs, then, we have to thank the system which for three hundred years has proclaimed the denial that marriage is a Sacrament. But, as we have seen, the leaven of truth is still working. The preaching and the practice of the sacramental ideal with all its implications is to be the leaven of the whole mass. To promote and foster this ideal is the aim of the following pages.

It is also hoped that a re-statement of the Catholic ideal, in the face of modern ideals to the contrary, will tend to increase the happiness of Catholic family life. We cannot shut our eyes to the many failures. In all cases they are due either to ignorance of the ideal or to a refusal of its graces. They may be traced largely to the fact that false views of marriage and parenthood do make their way into Catholic homes. These views concern the most intimate, the most delicate, and the most sacred marriage relationships. The protective modesty, so natural to a good conscience, has been carried too far, and false doctrine has been able to make headway simply because the true was not present to resist it.

Now reticence in these matters is a very strong protection against temptation. But there is some knowledge which we must have. Some people require more, others can do with less. I acknowledge that I have found the greatest difficulty in deciding what must be left out of this book. What has been retained has been retained by advice of authority much more competent than myself. If knowledge in these matters is needful then that knowledge must be acquired and we

must trust to grace to keep us from abusing it. No less an authority than St. Clement of Alexandria has said: "Be not ashamed to know what God was not ashamed to make."

Let it be admitted at once that isolated points of this doctrine may seem harsh and unkind to the individual. At the same time let it be remembered that the Church is an expert in human nature and that by her divine guidance she can see further than the individual. When under her direction the larger vision has been gained, when through painful experience the lesson has been learnt, then will Mother Church be discovered to be right after all. What a man loses as an individual, through keeping the Church's laws, he gains as a member of a world-wide society; what he loses in a portion of life he gains in the whole of life, yea a thousandfold in the life eternal.

The Church guards a divine ideal, that is why she is always right. A nation's decadence consists not so much in the actual lowering of its moral life, as in the lowering of its ideal. If it preserves its ideal there is hope of its resurrection. But if it calls good bad and bad good, then its doom is sealed.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Gideon W. B. Marsh, Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, and Vice-President of the Guild of Sts. Luke, Cosmas, and Damian, for valuable suggestions regarding the medical side of the subject. I have tried to avoid all topics that do not involve moral principles. These must be sought elsewhere. Unfortunately many books, most excellent from the medical and nursing point of view, contain directions, here and there, contrary to Catholic principles. If they are to be used



without harm, therefore, they must be read with caution and duly corrected according to the reader's knowledge of the Catholic ideal.

THOMAS J. GERRARD

New Hall, Chelmsford,

*Feast of the Nativity, 1910.*



## Chapter 1

**INSTITUTION AND PURPOSE**

One of the most remarkable phenomena of the social life of the new century is the movement among womankind for a readjustment of the relations between man and woman. The movement affects all spheres of life. It makes most noise in the sphere of politics. But as the affairs of the state have their root in the affairs of the family, it is to the family that we must look for the cause of the disturbance. There would seem to be something wrong with many of the current ideas concerning the relationship between husband and wife. The fact indeed is that in many quarters the Catholic ideal of the great Sacrament of matrimony has become obscured. The protective love of the husband toward the wife has been changed into a tyrannical overlordship. The loving acquiescence in that protection on the part of the wife has been construed into a servile obedience. The outrage on both nature and grace has rendered the mutual life irksome beyond endurance, and consequently ideas have become prevalent which tell both against the sanctity of the marriage state and against the indissolubility of its bond. Let us see then what the Church has to say about this wondrous mystery.

The very institution of marriage has its reason in the weakness and insufficiency of man. God, although supremely happy in the company of His own blessed Trinity, had

willed to exercise His love outside Himself. He had willed to produce a created world in which there should be one class of creatures bearing His own likeness.

After separating the night from the day, and the land from the water, after making the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, and the cattle of the earth, He made man to rule over the earth. He made man a reasonable being, capable of giving a reasonable service. But even with all the delights of that paradise of pleasure, with all his unimpaired intelligence and power of ordaining things for God's glory, man by himself was not enough for God's purpose. There were parts in God's great design which man by himself could not accomplish. He was wanting in both physical, mental, and moral complements. So God said: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself."<sup>1</sup> So God cast Adam into a deep sleep, took a rib from his side from which He built a woman. And when God brought the woman to the man, then did Adam say: "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh."<sup>2</sup> Having been thus made for each other and united to each other, they then received the message of God as to the end for which all these things had been arranged. "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:18

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 2:21-24

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1:28

The formation of Adam and Eve and their union in the matrimonial bond had, however, a very much wider significance than the mere multiplication of human beings and the replenishment of the earth. God, when He created them, had also in His mind His own Incarnation and His Church. The institution of matrimony was to be a kind of prophecy of His Incarnation and a figure of His Church. As Adam was made weak so that Eve might be given to him to be his strength, so the Son of God became weak, emptying Himself of Himself so that He might take upon Himself the form of a servant and, clothed in flesh, might accomplish the strong victory over sin and death. As Eve was taken from the side of Adam as he slept, and became the mother of all living, so was the Church taken from the side of Christ as He slept upon the Cross, and became for Him His chosen spouse, the Mother of all those to whom He had come to give life.

The state of marriage, therefore, as reflected in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Church is seen to have the high function not only of procreating human beings to replenish the earth, but also of training them in the higher life of grace and thus preparing them for the still higher life of glory. Christ came into the world solely to save sinners. The end of the Church is merely the salvation of souls. If, therefore, matrimony is a figure of the Incarnation and the Church, then its chief end is the population of heaven with immortal souls.

Seeing, then, that the chief end of matrimony is so high and noble, the means ordained for the accomplishment of that

end must be proportionately high and noble. And so we find that nature has provided such means. These may be summed up in the two properties of marriage, its unity and its indissolubility.

And if we would probe further into the mystery and find the common source of these properties of marriage we discern it in that all-attractive beauty of the state, conjugal love. The mere procreation of children could not possibly be the end of matrimony; for this could be done without the bond, without the unity, without the perpetuity, without the love. Manifestly, then, the chief reason for the institution of matrimony was the welfare of the offspring, not merely the existence of the offspring, but its growth and development, the promotion of all its interests. Therefore it was that God so made man and woman that they should love each other, that they should foster that love and concentrate it on each other by excluding all other love of the same kind, that they should make it so strong and lasting that only death should be able to bring about a breach of the union.

All this points to the fact that the marriage bond is a law of nature. It is a mutual agreement by which a man and a woman give themselves to each other until death, and this chiefly for the sake of the highest interest of the children which shall be born to them.

Its natural perfection, however, in course of time became corrupted. Impurity then, even as now, led to hardness of heart. Consequently Moses allowed divorce. The Pharisees, knowing this, brought it as an objection to Our Lord's teaching. Our Lord, however, was able to quote an earlier

and more fundamental law. “Have ye not read that He who made man from the beginning, made them male and female? And He said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.”<sup>4</sup> Moses had taken into consideration the hardness of their hearts and for the sake of preventing greater evils had permitted them to put away their wives. “But,” Our Lord reminded them, “from the beginning it was not so.”<sup>5</sup>

In this, as in many other matters, God had a greater design in view. He desired to provide a remedy for all this irregular life by raising the natural state of marriage to a supernatural plane. Forbidding divorce and insisting on the essential unity and indissolubility of the marriage tie, Christ raised it to the dignity of a Sacrament. Thus it became a more perfect figure of the Incarnation and the Church. Through the union of the Godhead and the Manhood, Christ in His human nature was filled with all grace and knowledge compatible with His created nature. Through the union of Christ with the Church, the Church is sanctified as His one perfect and unspotted bride. So likewise through the union of man and woman in the Sacrament of matrimony, there is conferred on them all the graces needful to enable them to carry out the arduous duties of that state. “Husbands,” says St. Paul, “love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life. ... So also ought men to love their wives as their

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<sup>4</sup> Matt. 19:4-5

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 19:8

own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. This is a great Sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

When St. Paul speaks of marriage being a great Sacrament he does not use the word in the strict sense in which we use it now. He means merely that it is a great sign of something sacred, a mystical symbol of the union between Christ and His Church. Nevertheless, on account of the similarity of the marriage bond to the bond between Christ and His Church, we are able to gather that marriage is a Sacrament in the strictest sense of the word. The union between Christ and His Church consists of sanctifying grace. It consists further of a continual flow of all those graces which are needful for attaining the Church’s end, namely, the salvation of all the souls for whom the Church was instituted. If, therefore, the marriage bond is like the bond between Christ and His Church, it must be the means by which graces sanctifying the marriage state are conferred. A Sacrament of the new law is a sacred sign instituted by Christ to signify and to confer grace. If, therefore, the marriage bond signifies and confers the graces needful for the marriage state, and if instituted by Christ, then it is one of the seven Sacraments of the new law. So it was then that Christ placed His divine seal on the natural contract and with His own lips proclaimed it henceforth to be a bond forged in heaven. “What, therefore, God hath joined together let no man put asunder.”<sup>7</sup>

From the fact that Christ raised the natural contract into a Sacrament, it follows that the parties to the contract are

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<sup>6</sup> Eph. 5:25-26,28

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 19:6



the ministers of the Sacrament. It is the man and woman who hand themselves over to each other making a mutual contract to live together till death. It is the man and woman, therefore, who confer on each other the Sacrament enabling them to fulfil the higher duties which are involved in the Christian married state. The priest is not the minister of the Sacrament, but only the witness of it. Our late Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, emphasized this when he insisted that the contract and the Sacrament were not two separate things. "The distinction, or rather separation," he said, "cannot be approved of; since it is clear that in Christian matrimony the contract is not separable from the Sacrament, and consequently that a true and lawful contract cannot exist without being by that very fact a Sacrament. For Christ Our Lord endowed matrimony with the sacramental dignity; but matrimony is the contract itself, provided that the contract is rightly made. . . . Therefore, it is plain that every true marriage among Christians is in itself and by itself a Sacrament; and that nothing is further from the truth than that the Sacrament is a sort of added ornament or quality introduced from without, which may be detached from the contract at the discretion of man."<sup>8</sup> If, therefore, the Sacrament is the mutual contract, it is the woman, who, as God's minister, confers on the man those soul beauties which make him a figure of Christ, the bridegroom of the Church; and so likewise is it the man who, as God's minister, confers on the woman those soul beauties, which make her a figure of the Church, the bride of Christ. Husband and

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<sup>8</sup> Leo XIII, Encyc. *Arcanum*

wife are thus seen to be the complement of each other in their supernatural, as well as in their natural, relationships. It is well to keep this supernatural aspect of the case prominently before our minds when we consider the duties and obligations of the state. The end for which marriage was instituted was a most difficult end to attain. Indeed, it were an impossible task without the special divine helps provided. Remembering these helps, however, the married couple may face their difficulties with a good heart. The sacramental effect of matrimony does not spend itself out within a week or two of the nuptial ceremony. The grace conferred on the wedding morning remains with them when they leave the church, remains with them in their home life, fortifies them in their discouragements, and steels their wills to the emergencies of every difficult situation.

The Church then, having made this clear to them, sets aside all false modesty and tells them in grave and plain language what their duties are. The first duty is the bringing of children into the world and the educating of them in the service of God; the second duty is mutual love and service in the companionship of domestic life. In the nuptial Mass the priest solemnly prays over them that they may be fruitful in their offspring and that they may see their children's children unto the third and fourth generation. And finally in his exhortation he warns them to be faithful to each other, and to remain chaste at special times of prayer, during the fasts and solemn seasons of the Church.

Now all this involves much trouble and anxiety both on the part of the husband and of the wife. With the former lies the

paramount obligation of working for the sustenance of the household; with the latter lie all the cares of child-bearing; with both lies that anxiety for the temporal and spiritual well-being of each other and of the children. “But if thou take a wife,” says St. Paul, “thou hast not sinned. But if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned; nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh.”<sup>9</sup> Those who enter this state, therefore, should do so with their eyes wide open to the fact that it is a life fraught with difficulty and that both man and woman are supposed to be willing to bear grave inconveniences. When a man complains of his loss of liberty or the increased burden on his pocket; or when a woman complains of the troubles of children, there has evidently been some radical misunderstanding as to the end of the institution of marriage and of its burdens. What is needed on those occasions is the consideration that marriage is a Sacrament, a Sacrament which is a channel of divine strength to bear the burden, of divine light to see the way out of the difficulties, of divine refreshment for the constant renewal of conjugal life and love.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. 7:28

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