

THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE¹

In Churches everywhere there arises the problem and the opportunity of revising present marriage liturgies. Certain Churches, notably the Church of Rome, have already made changes that are in the process of deeply modifying tradition.² We ought not to be astonished at this need for revision. The biblical renewal of the 1940s and 1950s restored to the theology, and perhaps especially to the spirituality of Christian marriage, a depth that had faded into oblivion.³ Research in liturgical history has reminded the Church of the extraordinary diversity her tradition has known in this area. What is more, in this particular sphere she is not tied to a liturgical order, as in baptism or the eucharist. She can thus take or leave that which seems to her the best adapted to needs of the present day; she can even be inventive.⁴ But it is especially in the needs of pastoral care, that profound revision is necessary. Subsequently, as is visible in the Roman Church, for instance, an appeal is made to the human sciences, in particular to psychology and sociology, which seem intent on playing in the Church today, the major theological 'reference-role' that the Scriptures played in the Church of yesterday. It has reached the point that one at times has the impression that the emphasis on that which is pastoral eclipses even theology; that the *ad personam* obscures the *ad Dei gloriam* which should typify every Christian rite. It would be wrong to misunderstand me in thinking that I criticize the dedicated pastoral concern which characterizes the recent research in wedding liturgies. Compared with the automatism present when recourse is made to a formula which is always identical and impersonal we have seen considerable progress. Ministers and engaged couples are now choosing a liturgy 'more flexible but therefore more demanding', and which as a result requires careful personal preparation.⁵

In this paper, I would like simply to contribute to the examination of the major guide-lines that must be respected in the research, attempts and decisions dealing with any revision of the rite of Christian marriage. I will begin by recalling what the New Testament teaches concerning the provisions made for the marriage of Church members. After mentioning several of the more serious difficulties that are encountered in dealing with this subject. Lastly I shall examine how to translate the major facets of the doctrine of Christian marriage into liturgical language.

It may seem futile to try to begin with a New Testament reference. As a matter of fact we know that the New Testament does not give

the least indication as to how Christians celebrated their marriages. Even the account of the wedding at Cana fails to provide us with a liturgical pattern. It teaches us only (John 2:1, 12) that the presence of Jesus transformed an ordinary marriage into a sign (*sēmeion*, v. 11) of the superabundance of the Kingdom he was to inaugurate. Yet this absence of Apostolic testimony does not signify indifference as regards the marriage of Christians. For, if it is silent on the subject of the liturgy used, it is *not* silent on the subject of the doctrine of marriage or on the subject of Christian discipline which can authorize or prevent it. Indeed, long before it became a liturgical problem, Christian marriage was a theme of doctrinal and moral teaching, and an area subjected to a certain discipline.

We shall not stop now at the major framework of Biblical teaching concerning Christian marriage.⁶ Rather, it is important to remember under what conditions the members of the early Church could contract marriage. If I understand correctly, there are *four* of them.

The first is so obvious I hesitate to mention it: the fiancés must not be of the same sex. The New Testament has not the slightest sympathy for homosexuality (Rom. 1:26, 35; I Cor. 6:9). Paul must not be interpreted as announcing radical ideas on sexuality as he writes to the Galatians who have 'put on' Christ: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (3:28). The apostle does not mean that from now on, Christians are in a situation where the ordinary conditions of life are abandoned, where, as a result, marriage is no longer possible because there would be neither male nor female, or else where marriage would be possible regardless of the sex of the partner. Rather, Paul is declaring that the profoundest reasons for incompatibility, for jealousy and for human lusts have been done away with. That which stirs up one man against another has been quelled in Jesus Christ. Paul's words refer to reconciliation; they are not an anthropological statement. For him the human being is sexed by providence rather than by accident. The way in which he behaves sexually actually directly concerns his resurrection body (I Cor. 6:12-20).⁷

Christians must fulfil a second condition in order to marry. Their marriage has to be able to be concluded 'in the Lord' (I Cor. 7:39). According to the most current exegesis, 'in the Lord' means 'in the Church with a partner who is also Christian'. Being bound to Christ to the point of being a member 'of His body' demonstrates the impossibility of being joined to another without this new relationship partaking of the 'one spirit' that the Christian has with Christ. This new tie must not compromise Christ but glorify him. This is the question. This is what the apostle is seeking to teach the Corinthians who believed that their body, once joined to that of Christ, remained

within their control to be freely disposed of as they wished. Yet in reality, on the day of their baptism, says Paul, they committed it in such a way that every aspect of their life was involved. (I Cor. 6:15ff.)

A third condition: Christian marriage must be secure from all suspicion of incest; more precisely, it must not contradict the list of marriages that the Jewish Law forbade (cf. Lev. 18:1-18). This is clearly shown in the conditions imposed by the 'Council' of Jerusalem, so that the Churches among the pagans could be recognized as true Christian Churches.⁸ This is also what is brought out in other texts; for example where the apostle is indignant with the Corinthians who seem to be quite willing to tolerate an incestuous person in their midst (I Cor. 5:1ff). Another probable indication is found in the addition the Gospel of Matthew makes to the words of Jesus concerning divorce: among Christians, the sole ground for repudiation of a marriage partner and subsequent remarriage, was that of incest. Otherwise the new marriage would be adulterous.⁹ It is for this same reason that John the Baptist protested against Herod's marriage (Mark 6:17ff and parallels). One can deduce that, just as under the Old Covenant incest separates an individual from the people of God, and consequently threatens the guilty one with perdition, so under the New Covenant, if he does not repent, he is delivered 'unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of Christ Jesus' (I Cor. 5:5).

A final condition either obstructs or opens the way to marriage for Christians: they must be free to contract a marriage; free meaning not involved in another marriage bond (in which case their marriage would be adulterous (Mark 10:1-12 and parallel passages) or widowed (cf. Rom. 7:3; I Cor. 7:39). To be free, however, probably also means: capable of publicly consenting to their marriage, of being in a position to make valid commitments with regard to legal procedures. It is true that the New Testament does not give us any precise indication as to the freedom of the young woman in consenting or not consenting to the proposed marriage. But the fact that a widow can wed 'whom she will' (I Cor. 7:39), as long as the man she marries is Christian, and the fact that a temporary suspension of physical relations cannot be considered unless the partners make the decision together (*ek sumphōnou*, I Cor. 7:5) presupposes a liberty that the woman must also enjoy before marriage.¹⁰

We know that the fundamental catechism of the early Church taught the basic principles of marriage discipline that I have just mentioned.¹¹ It is also known that the primary person responsible for this discipline was very soon the bishop of the local Church. We have a text from the beginning of the second century which is the first to point explicitly to the fact that Christians could not marry

simply as they wished. Ignatius of Antioch, writing to Polycarp, bishop in Smyrna, said: 'Those who marry and those who are given in marriage must enter into their union *with the knowledge of the bishop* (*meta gnōmēs tou episkopou*), in order that their marriage be according to the Lord and not according to lust' (Polyc. 5:2). This text says nothing about a nuptial blessing, although it is not excluded.¹² But it states most clearly that Christians are subject to a proper marriage discipline. This discipline preceded, but also founded and justified a liturgy for Christian weddings. And it is perhaps here that rests the major teaching upon which we should draw concerning what we have seen thus far: on the basis of her doctrine, it is more urgent that the Church respects her discipline than elaborates a liturgy for the wedding ceremonies of her members. In other words, the obvious absence at the very beginnings of the Church, of marriage rites that are specifically Christian, in no way indicates that for the Christians, marriage was an affair with no direct relation to the commitment of their faith. The insistence of the Pauline writings on the power of sanctification within marriage¹³, as well as their severity regarding marriages that must be maintained or those that can be terminated, shows on the contrary that Christians are committed, by their marriage, on the very level of their being ingrafted into the Body of Christ. As for the feasts and the nuptial rites, they retained local customs, freed, of course, from that which was idolatrous. All later tradition seems to regard this as understood.¹⁴

However, history shows that very quickly the weddings of Church members were sought to be solemnized in a Christian manner, first of all by the presence of the bishop or a presbyter. The reasons for this are multiple. Probably more than anything else they were of a pastoral nature. The renunciation of pagan marriage festivities had to be compensated for in a positive way. It was important also to borrow from certain sects, notably the Montanists, the attractive benefits of Christian marriage rites;¹⁵ the couple desired some sort of tangible evidence that the marriage into which they were entering was 'in the Lord'; they sensed the need and desire to claim divine protection on the threshold of a life that would not always be easy; and, perhaps most of all, they wanted to make known the 'meta-physical' dimensions of the joy and gratitude which filled their heart on their wedding day (cf. Song of Sol. 3:11).

This is probably the history of innumerable marriage liturgies that could be analysed at this point. The result of this analysis, I think, could be summarized in two statements:

- (1) It is theologically and pastorally clear that the Church is entitled to solemnize the marriage of her members.
- (2) Contrary to the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies, whose

structure is determined by their institution, what must prescribe and limit a marriage liturgy is its conformity to the teaching and the discipline of Christian marriage as well as to the pastoral care which surrounds the couple and their families. Thus a marriage liturgy must be (*'lex orandi, lex credendi'*!) the translation into ritual of what the Church believes when she expresses herself on the subject of marriage for her members.¹⁶ The liturgy must also be the public declaration that the wedding being solemnized is concluded 'in the Lord'; and finally, it must expose the couple to the grace of God.

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Before going further, we ought to examine three problems that cause difficulties.

The first concerns the relationship between the civil recognition of marriage and its ecclesiastical consecration. The problem does not arise so much from the duality of the ceremonies as from the fact that, for almost one thousand years, these ceremonies were *one* for the majority of Christians. The Christian minister and the officer of the state were one and the same person.¹⁷ Now in numerous western 'Christian' countries where legislation has removed from ministers of the Church the responsibility for official marriage registration, the Church has scarcely changed the wedding liturgy designed in the days when all marriages were concluded solely before a Christian minister. As a result a church wedding seems to be a copy of that performed at the town hall, at least it leaves the suspicion that civil marriage is looked upon as a lesser marriage than the religious one. This is so especially if the Church maintains that the only lawful marriages are those which have been performed in the presence of a bishop, priest, or deacon.¹⁸ But the Church wedding, duplicating the civil ceremony at the city-hall, is customary also in Protestant Churches, and this embarrassing situation has also spread on to many mission fields through the insensitive exportation of western Christian customs. As a result the rupture with the traditions of ordinary marriages by native law and custom has been accentuated.

A twofold temptation has to be overcome at this point. The first would consist of refusing to recognize, explicitly or implicitly, the competence of the State in drawing up marriage laws which would also concern *Christian* citizens. Such a refusal would amount to an attempt to exempt Christians from their duty of rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's. This would be a form of illuminism. Now the Church is not far from falling into this temptation when she prescribes for her members a ceremony that practically repeats all

the determining elements of the civil wedding.¹⁹ The other temptation, which is no less serious, would consist in remitting to the State the entire responsibility of regulating all marriages, including those of Christians. The Church would thus release, in favour of the State, all control of Christian legitimation of the marriages of her members. At the same time, she would be admitting that marriage, for Christians as well as others, can be an affair only of this world, without possible consequences regarding the eternal destiny of those who are to be joined together. At the mercy of cultural situations, demographic needs or fears, racist phobias or sodomite tolerancy, civil authorities would settle in the most expedient manner the way in which men would embark upon marriage or terminate one in order to enter another.²⁰ The Church would simply reserve the possibility of exhorting and of blessing those of her members who marry.

The practice of the Ancient Church allows one, I believe, to find a solution to this problem. She left it to the civil powers to define their marriage laws according to external and internal criteria which were peculiar to themselves and which seemed expedient to them. At the same time the Church claimed for herself the right of knowing, for her members, and for them alone, a discipline which on one hand could refuse to recognize a marriage registered by the State as being lawful and valid, or on the other hand recognize as legal and valid a union which the State rejected.²¹ This first problem, therefore, is not tied to the celebration of Christian marriage except in so far as the Church endeavours to rid herself of the conception that she alone is entitled to marry.

The second problem that causes difficulty is notably more complicated. It is connected with the understanding of marriage as a sacrament. This problem has not neared solution, for, in addition to all the exegetical, historical and doctrinal hesitancy it provokes, it is influenced by a weighty ecumenical coefficient. We know indeed that for certain churches marriage is a sacrament, whereas for others it is not. Here I shall only just mention the incidence of this problem as related to the celebration of marriage. I see, then, three themes for reflexion.

The first is a question of whether the 'sacrament' of marriage is concentrated in the *wedding celebration*, as in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, or also as in the framework of a 'catholic' theology, in confirmation, penitence, unction of the sick and ordination: or whether, on the contrary, it is expressed in the complete marital life. On the answer given this question will largely depend (in scholastic terminology) the question of what is *matter* or *form* in the 'sacrament' of marriage:²² and whether it is the spouses who are the ministers of this 'sacrament' (as is understood in the Roman tradition), or if it is the priest (as is generally understood

in eastern tradition).²³ The current tendency in the Roman Church to situate the sacramental nature of marriage in the marital life rather than in the wedding ceremony itself,²⁴ frees it from several difficult encumbrances and undoubtedly eases interconfessional confrontation.

The second topic for reflexion poses the question as to whether all married life is sacramental or only the one that binds men and women who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and who agree to discipline their lives according to his commands. If this is the case there is no need to be afraid to distinguish, even in the celebration itself, between a wedding involving Christians and one involving non-believers (in spite of the current denial of the Roman Church, which lends a sacramental import to every marriage thereby exposing herself to inextricable contradictions). We must go even further, however, and ask (thus resuscitating an ancient tradition which has continued in the East but which also has had supporters in the West)²⁵ whether all marriage between Christians is a sacrament, or if only the first marriage is sacramental, under the pretext that a second union cannot signify the positive and unique love of Christ for his Church.²⁶ In this case, the celebration of a first marriage would be performed using a liturgy which would not be identical to the one used in the celebration of weddings where one or both of the spouses were widowed or divorced.

The problem of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage leads us to a third consideration. It often happens that, in the confrontation of points of view between different Churches, sacramentality and indissolubility of marriage are bound together, as if the latter was the function of the former; that is as if a non-sacramental marriage was less binding than a sacramental one. It would follow, then, that in the celebration of a marriage considered theologically non-sacramental the promises of exclusive love and faithfulness taken by the couple would be less conclusive and binding than in a marriage celebration acknowledged as sacramental. Such logic seems inadmissible to me for one very simple reason: from the origins of the Church, Christian marriage has been held as indissoluble, while it was only in the twelfth century that the Western Church, in general, allowed marriage into the list of sacraments.²⁷ The affirmation or negation of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage should not play a determining role in the evaluation of its dissolubility or indissolubility,²⁸ or in the formation of its liturgy.

Ought the specific *Christian* character of weddings consecrated in the Church to be accentuated or, on the contrary, de-emphasized? This is the third problem that I would quickly like to broach. This problem rears its head especially in a situation where the Church is

losing the key position it used to hold, but where neither traditional practice nor ecclesiastical law has really yet awakened to the fact of this loss of prestige and power. If, on the other hand, the Church's discipline provides that only those who have agreed to be married in the Church are considered by her as married (with the ensuing rights of baptism of children, their catechization, Christian burial, etc.), the problem of emphasizing or de-emphasizing the Christian character of wedding ceremonies cannot be avoided. Scarcely can it then be resolved in any other way than by the decision to de-emphasize specific character. The Roman Church at present furnishes us with regrettable examples.²⁹ Devoted to a pastoral practice of receiving everyone without limitation, they are seeking to 'reconcile', in the heart of the couple, 'the Christian and the lover',²⁹ as if the Christian and the lover had any need to be reconciled, and that for the benefit of the lover! This tendency is found on every level; that of the proclamation of the Gospel, of faith, of the role of the minister and of the uniting of marriage to the eucharistic mystery.

On the level of the proclamation of the Gospel. We can certainly rejoice at the greater variety proposed for the Scripture passages to be read during the liturgy. However, one wonders if a number of the choices are not also offered to make it possible to avoid the reading of certain classic passages which supposedly are no longer the 'mode' in our day. For example, it is often said concerning Ephesians 5: 'This epistle is not acceptable . . . nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus say that the man is the head of the woman. Can Saint Paul really be followed when he pushes the analogy so far as to make man Christ and woman the Church?' And if the officiating minister wishes to counter the bad effect by saying that the epistle says it 'this way' but in reality it must be understood 'that way', the guests will wonder logically what use it is to read it at all. 'Besides this, the language of Saint Paul here is too complicated for the majority of people.'³⁰

This retreat from the specific character of *Christian* marriage appears next in the fear of making marriage into a confession of faith. The questioning of the faith of the fiancés has disappeared from the new Roman ritual,³¹ even if one maintains that it is present implicitly, since the ceremony takes place in the Church; the joining of the couple's hands is no longer done 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.³² All reference to trinitarian theology, as well as every mention of the Holy Spirit, are absent as well. The same situation exists in the reduction of the minister's role. As a matter of fact, an effort is being made to replace the questions the minister addresses to the fiancés on their desire to marry, with a reciprocal declaration of love by the engaged couple,³³ less, perhaps,

to promote their pride and freedom as adult laymen, than to dismiss the disciplinary claims of the Church upon its members. 'We are moving . . . towards a progressive withdrawal of the priest in the dialogue in which consent to marriage is expressed.'³⁴ And, 'We are continuing . . . towards a formula which will have no explicit reference to God or to the Church: declarations of love do not need either to be explicitly religious or to be made sacred. . . .'³⁵

In this same movement, supposedly pastoral, which is attempting to free the wedding ceremony from its specifically Christian character, one notes also a progressive uprooting of the ceremony from its eucharistic milieu. As a matter of fact, the Roman Church is more and more reluctant to include the ceremony within the framework of the mass if it is not certain that the couple being married will take communion. Hence it follows that since 'today it often happens that those who come to be married have lost the habit of attending the Sunday mass, they no longer know how to take part in the eucharist: and so it is with their parents, friends and guests'. In conclusion, the author who makes this remark does not add: 'The minister has therefore to prepare the couple also to begin its conjugal life by communicating in the bread of life'. He rather adds: 'It would be abnormal to impose on them a mass in which they no longer know how to participate, a mass where no one replies, where the priest communicates by himself in front of them, a mass which would, in fact, risk being a kind of implicit reproach to their non-participation'.³⁶ In short, because 'the large majority of fiancés that ask for the sacrament of marriage are no longer practising Catholics',³⁷ the Roman Church (and she is not alone) tends to place the wedding liturgy on the least exacting level, thereby making it a marriage service for proselytes rather than for baptized Christians.³⁸

To me this 'evolution' appears most serious. Confronted with the gravity of this question, I propose that we reply, on the contrary, with an emphasis on the specific Christian nature of the wedding ceremony; it should be the *most* and not the least Christian possible. But this presupposes that two conditions will be fulfilled. The first is that the wedding consecration must not be viewed solely as an opportunity to proclaim the Word. If it were only this, one would be correct in seeking any kind of love simply to justify, sanctify and glorify it with the Word, or on the other hand to question a particular love by the Word.³⁹ But a wedding benediction has to be requested by those who wish to expose themselves to it. It is not only a sign of the grace of God; it is an act of faith on the part of those who are being married. One important difference between the Word and the Sacrament can be mentioned here. If the Word rejects that which seeks to hinder it from spreading, the sacrament ascertains to what degree the word has been received. The wedding benediction,

in this sense, becomes related to what characterizes the sacrament.⁴⁰ The second condition to be fulfilled if the Church wishes to be able to emphasize rather than de-emphasize the specifically Christian nature of the marriage she consecrates, is that she ceases from considering only those whose wedding was performed in the Church as being lawfully married. She should be able to accept as legitimately married all for whom there would have been no impediment to keep them from a wedding consecration. She should also accept, as not exceptional, a wedding consecration requested by a couple months or even years after their 'civil' wedding.⁴¹

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The witness expressed in a Christian wedding must ring clearly. But exactly what is this witness?

Having shown that the earliest information that we have regarding the marriage of Christians is of a catechetical and disciplinary nature and not yet of a liturgical order, and having dealt with three of the problems that cause difficulty today when speaking of the Christian celebration of marriage, we must, in conclusion, clarify the essential elements of such a celebration.

Subject to the traditional liturgical liberty and diversity in this area, it is possible to say that the celebration of a Christian wedding is the confession that this marriage is willed by God and it is recognized as such by those who are being united; it is an intercession for and a blessing on the bride and groom. Let us briefly mention these four points again.

The rite of Christian marriage is first of all *the confession that this marriage is willed by God*. It could also be said that it is the Anamnesis, regarding a particular marriage, of the first marriage in human history, recorded in the mythical account of the creation of woman (Gen. 2:18-24). Every Christian marriage expresses that in it is renewed what was 'in the beginning', this possibility of renewal having been given in Jesus Christ, the reconciler (cf. Mark 10:5ff and parallel texts). This ought to be expressed in the celebration itself in three ways: by teaching on the Christian essence of marriage; by the declaration that the marriage being performed is done 'in the Lord' (I Cor. 7:39), and that the one flesh which the couple will become will, therefore, not compromise their union in the Body of Christ; and finally, by the 'translation' of the bride to the groom in which she is given to him in the name of God. Thus the groom receives his wife as a grace instead of taking her as a prey; thus the bride is allowed to be given, instead of offering herself. He who proclaims the Gospel of marriage gives the couple the assurance that they are marrying 'in the Lord' and he who gives them to each other must, himself, be authorized to do so in the name of God. That is

why it is usually the minister of the Church who marries.⁴² The ministers of the wedding ceremony are thus not simply the couple nor only the congregation present, but also the one who ensures that this marriage takes place 'in the Lord' and who accompanies this assertion with the teaching and ritual that will illustrate it.⁴³

In the second place, the celebration of a Christian marriage is *the confession made by the couple that they wish to enter into married life and to live it as Christians*. A marriage between Christians is apparently not different from any other monogamous union. It raises the same 'human values', as we say so often today; it sanctions a desire for love and fidelity that is publicly expressed; it is registered by a legal procedure; it envisages the procreation of children as one of its immediate fruits. This is why, as we have seen, extremely weighty reasons must be present for the Church to recognize, in instances that concern her, the legitimation and validity of a marriage that the State would not recognize. Nevertheless, I believe that a marriage between Christians is distinguishable from a monogamous wedding of non-Christians (if I dare say it), in the sense that consecrated bread differs from ordinary bread. It may be understood differently because it has entered upon a process of transfiguration. That is why it is not abnormal that, in addition to the civil ceremony, the celebration of a Christian marriage should contain a public consent from the bride and groom: not just a consent to their marriage but also to this process of transfiguration to the Christianity of their marriage. They pledge themselves to fulfil a particular type of witness, that of reflecting, on the concrete level of their everyday life, the union between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-23), a union founded on love which never spares itself nor withdraws; a union founded on an exclusive faithfulness of a complementary nature which permits each of the partners to return to his true vocation of being a man or a woman; a union which is founded also on collaboration in the creating and saving work of God. Thus, finalized by its very celebration, the wedding ceremony is not only a memorial of what God did 'in the beginning', but the anticipation of what He will do in the end, a foretaste of the final transfiguration, similar to the way the eucharist looks forward to the Messianic supper. It must be shown and told here on earth, even in our usual clumsy way, of what our hope consists: we must dare to show and tell it. This is why the western liturgical tradition ought to listen attentively to that which, little by little, has been formed in the East, and which makes of Christian marriage, by the crowning of the bride and groom, a kind of feast of the resurrection.⁴⁴ And if we were to stop asking the couple to promise love and faithfulness to each other until death parts them, it is not so much that in a day of joy, such words would appear 'a little out of place',⁴⁵ even improper:⁴⁶ but rather that a union is

mysteriously forming that must be bold enough to face even death without collapsing.⁴⁷

The celebration of Christian marriage is, in the third place, *the intercession of the Church* so that, through good and bad days, the couple being formed remains worthy of its calling, faithful to its promises and finds strength to resist the 'Separator'. The entire Church is strong in the strength of her members, or weak through their weakness. Thus the Church itself is directly affected by their comportment; her witness will be affected by their witness.

Finally, the celebration of a Christian marriage is the *blessing* of the couple, the act by which, in the name of God, a man and woman are entrusted to God and to his life-giving power for the task that lies ahead of them. It could also be called a *consecration* of the partners to the life, or rather to the ministry of witness which awaits them.

If the celebration of the marriage of Christians is really that which we have just been considering, would not, I wonder, the most natural time of its celebration be the Sunday communion service? It is there, in reality, that God's grace, the commitments of believers and the intercession of the Church are brought together at the highest point; and it is from there that one enters into the *missio Dei*, into the fulfilment of his calling.

Instead of de-emphasizing the specific Christian nature of the weddings of Church members, as is the desire of an important movement in contemporary pastoral theology, it would appear to me that we must on the contrary accentuate and emphasize it, by re-discovering, for its celebration, the very heart of ecclesial life: the Sunday Communion Service.⁴⁸

NOTES

1. Lecture delivered in Edinburgh, for *The Church Service Society*, 26 October 1970. This lecture was based on the text of a course given in Kinshasa, 24 July 1970, during the fifth theological week organized by the Faculty of Theology of Lovanium. The translation from French into English has been made by David Craig.
2. See *Ordo celebrandi matrimonum*, published following a request from Vatican II (Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 77-8), 19 March 1969 by Pope Paul VI. Concerning the Roman Catholic Church, I mention also the *Rituel pour la célébration du mariage, à l'usage des diocèses de France*, Paris, 1969. The *Liturgie de l'Église réformée de France*, already by 1955, had accepted a ritual for the exchange of vows inspired by the traditional liturgy of the Anglican Church. Regarding these questions, see also P. de Lochet and Th. Maertens, *Parole pour un amour, La nouvelle liturgie du mariage*, Paris, 1967, in particular pp. 31-49. I refer also to articles devoted to the new Roman and French rituals in *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, 3rd quarter 1969, pp. 124-209.
3. One of the best studies on this theme remains that of P. Grelot, *Le Couple*

humain dans l'Écriture, new edition, enlarged by annexed studies, Coll. 'Lectio Divina' No. 31, Paris, 1964. English Translation: *Man and Wife in Scripture*. Tr. by Rosaleen Brennan, New York, 1964.

4. On this theme, the classic work has been written by K. Ritzer, *Le Mariage dans les Églises chrétiennes du I^{er} au 11^e siècle*, Paris, 1970. The German original, *Formen, Riten und religiöses Brauchtum der Eheschliessung in den christlichen Kirchen des ersten Jahrtausends*, was published in Münster in 1962.
5. *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 228.
6. A résumé of this teaching is found, for example, in I Thess. 4:1-12, but also in the words of Jesus on divorce (Mark 10:1-12 and parallel passages) taken up again in I Cor. 7:10. The culminating point of this New Testament teaching is without doubt the passage in Eph. 5:21-33.
7. On this point, see the interesting analysis of Adriana Zarri in *L'Impatience d'Adam, essai sur une ontologie de la sexualité*, Toulouse, 1968.
8. See Acts 15:20, 28, where *πορνεία* in all probability means incest (see J. L. Leuba, *L'Institution et l'événement*, Neuchâtel, 1950, p. 67).
9. Matt. 5:32; 19:9. See M. Baltensweiler, *Die Ehe im Neuen Testament*, Zürich, 1967, in particular pp. 87-108. See also my article 'La Discipline du mariage chrétien et ses raisons théologiques', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 1968, pp. 427-42, and my study 'Dissolubilité et indissolubilité du mariage des chrétiens' in the collection of papers presented at the fifth theological week organized by the Faculty of Theology of Lovanium, Kinshasa, 1971.
10. This same freedom of the woman in marriage, which permits postulating an analogous freedom before marriage, is portrayed in the fact that Paul gives instructions to married women on the care for their married life, instructions that presuppose freedom (see I Cor. 7:10-16). In Greco-Roman antiquity (it has remained the case in several liturgical traditions in the Eastern Church) the celebration of marriage did not necessarily imply an explicit consent to marriage: the participation itself in the wedding solemnities proved, implicitly, this consent (see K. Ritzer, op. cit., pp. 211ff).
11. The way in which Paul intervenes in the Corinthian affair of the incestuous man proves that the members of the Church knew that this man was living in a way unworthy of a Christian.
12. W. Bauer, in his commentary on the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, remarks: 'Das meta gnômês tou episkopou erschöpft sich für Ignatius sicherlich nicht in der Einholung der bischöflichen Zustimmung zu der beabsichtigten Ehe. Angesichts der Stellung des Bischofs innerhalb der Gemeinde und der wiederholt erneuerten Forderung, schlechtin nichts ohne ihn zu tun, ist es gewiss die Meinung des Ignatius, dass eine rechte christliche Ehe nur im Beisein des Bischofs, wenn nicht gar unter seiner aktiven Mitwirkung geschlossen werden kann' (*Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia und der Polykarpbrief*, Tübingen, 1920, ad loc.) K. Ritzer is less certain; he hesitates even to admit that the wishes of Ignatius were uniformly respected in his time (op. cit., pp. 81ff).
13. Passages that come to mind are: I Thess. 4:3-8; I Cor. 7:7, 14ff; Eph. 5:26ff, etc. See K. Ritzer, op. cit., pp. 34ff.
14. In order to show that Christians are as all other men, a rather immoderate conclusion is drawn today from the contents of the *Letter to Diognetus*. This is the text: 'Christians are not distinguishable from other men by country, language, or dress. They do not live in their own cities nor do they use a peculiar dialect. Their way of life has nothing strange about it . . ., they are spread throughout the Greek and barbarian cities, following (in life) the lot that has befallen each, they conform to the local customs of dress, food and way of

- living' (V. 1, 2:4, S.C. no. 33, Paris, 1951, p. 63). Nothing seems to make them stand out. However the author continues: '. . . while always manifesting the extraordinary and truly paradoxical laws of their spiritual republic'. These 'extraordinary' laws also regulated the marriage of Christians, who, for the author, really formed a *third race*.
15. One wonders if there is not a little jealous envy of the Montanist practice in these lines written by Tertullian before he became a Montanist: 'How shall we ever adequately celebrate the bliss of this marriage that the Church makes possible (*conciat*), that the sacrifice sanctions (*confirmat*), that the blessing seals (*obsignat*), that angels proclaim concluded (*renuntiant*) and that the Father is the guarantor (*rato habet*)?' (*Ad uxorem*, bk. II, chap. 8).
 16. It would be worth the trouble to write a special history of the liturgy of marriages with references to the remarriage of widows and divorcees, and mixed confessional marriages, about all of which the Church has had or is having doctrinal hesitations.
 17. This situation began to set in gradually in Europe. Historians think that the Code of Theodosius (Lib. III, tit. 7, lex 3) that declares the validity of any marriage contracted by the mere mutual consent of the bride and groom in the presence of friends filling the office of witnesses, gave the Church the possibility of making the marriage of Christians a specifically ecclesiastical matter, from the second half of the fifth century on. 'Il apparaît donc que le mariage civil public a évolué progressivement vers le mariage ecclésiastique public'. (G. Jadoul, 'Le Mariage comme sacrement', in P. de Loch, *Mariage et sacrement de mariage*, Paris, 1970, p. 184). From the early medieval period onward, nearly everywhere, the ordinary marriage was concluded in the presence and with the assistance of a minister of the Church. (See also E. Schillebeeckx, *Le Mariage, réalité terrestre et mystère de salut*, I, Paris, 1966, pp. 228-46; K. Ritzer, *op. cit.*, *passim*).
 18. If the conciliary Constitution on the Holy Liturgy specifies of every marriage of Roman Christians, whatever its adaptation to 'uses of place and peoples', that there is an 'express condition' that it be 'the priest who assists at the marriage', who 'asks and receives the consent of the contracting parties' (no. 77), then the term 'priest' is understood generically. It is a known fact that 'deacons' can 'solemnly administer baptism, conserve and distribute the Eucharist, assist in the name of the Church at marriage and bless it', etc. (*Lumen gentium*, no. 29).
 19. K. Barth is right in asking the Church to renounce, in its manner of solemnizing the marriage of its members, a 'religiöse Dublette zur Ziviltrauung'. (*Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, III 4, Zollikon-Zürich, 1951, p. 256).
 20. One wonders if M. Luther, in an atmosphere other than that of an uncontested Christianity, would have shown as much theological indifference concerning the 'weltliche geschefft' (worldly affair) that marriage is for him. (See his preface to *Ein Traubüchlein für die einfaltigen Pfarrer*, 1529, *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, herausgegeben von Otto Clemen, Berlin, 1935, IV, p. 100.)
 21. In the first case, it could be unions that the ecclesiastical discipline reproves, because they are incestuous, because they are based on divorce that the Church does not recognize, because they would approve polygamy for Christians. In the second case, it could be interracial unions that nothing specifically Christian forbids.
 22. The Council of Trent theologians were divided on the question of what the matter of the sacrament is, the consent of the bridegroom and bride or the word of conjugal union pronounced by the priest. (See A. Duval, 'La Formule "Ego vos in matrimonium conjungo . . ." au Concile de Trente', *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 147.)

23. See for instance P. Evdokimov, *Sacrement de l'amour. le mystère conjugal à la lumière de la tradition orthodoxe*, Paris, 1962, pp. 178ff.
24. I am thinking of this affirmation of J. Ratzinger: 'Sakrament ist nicht etwas über, neben oder an der Ehe, sondern gerade die Ehe selbst, und als solche ist sie für den, der sie im Glauben lebt, das Sakrament. Je mehr es ihm gelingt, die Ehe aus dem Glauben zu leben und zu gestalten, desto mehr ist sie "Sakrament"' in *Theologie der Ehe*, Regensburg und Göttingen, 1969, p. 82. (See also G. Bavaud, 'La Sacramentalité du mariage', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 1966/67, pp. 272-89; G. Jadoul, 'Le Mariage comme sacrement', in *Mariage et sacrement de mariage*, edited under the direction of P. de Loch, p. 191: or my study *Maris et femmes d'après Saint Paul*, Neuchâtel, 1951, p. 61.)
25. If marriage is 'really and specifically one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law instituted by Christ the Lord', as the Council of Trent want it (see Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, no. 1801), and if one is certain of it to the extent of anathematizing those who should doubt it (ibid.), one must explain how unbelievers who ignore or who attack the faith can be ministers of a 'sacrament of the evangelical law instituted by Christ'. One must also ask what sacramental worth either the marriage of a polygamist or that of a remarried person has, etc.
26. Ph. Delhay, 'Fixation dogmatique de la théologie médiévale du mariage', *Concilium*, no. 55, p. 79. For the tradition of the first millennium, in the East and in the West, see K. Ritzer, op. cit., index s.v. 'remariage'.
27. See Ph. Delhay, art. cit., p. 78. For a famous text of the Early Church, I refer to Hermas, *The Pastor*, Mand. IV, 4.
28. It is a known fact which the Eastern Church admits, at least from the beginning of the Constantine era, that adultery can put an end to a marriage and free an individual for a new marriage — whose sacramentality therefore will be in question. This shows that marriage's indissoluble character does not depend on its sacramentality. It is also known that in the Church of England marriage is not included in the 'two sacraments ordained of Christ in the Gospel', but only in the 'five commonly called sacraments' which 'are not to be counted for sacraments of the Gospel' (25th Article of Religion). However, at the disciplinary level of marriage, the Church of England tries to keep — as does the Church of Rome — a very strict attitude. As we know, this attitude is more and more being attacked in the Roman Church, since the famous conciliar intervention on 29 September 1965, in which Bishop Elias Zoghby invited the Church of Rome to follow the practice of the Eastern Church, when marriage is broken by adultery. See for instance V. D. Pospishil, *Divorce and remarriage, towards a new catholic teaching*, New York, 1967; V. Steininger, *Peut-on dissoudre le mariage?*, Paris, 1970; P. Hoffman, 'Parole de Jésus à propos du divorce', *Concilium*, no. 55, pp. 49-62; P. Franssen, 'Le Divorce pour motif d'adultère au Concile de Trente (1563)', ibid., pp. 83-92. At the time of the Reformation conflicts, patristic claims casting doubt on the jurisdictional rigidity of the Western Church had already appeared (to justify Henry VIII?). See for example chapters xxii-xxvii of M. Bucer's treatise, *Du Royaume de Jésus-Christ* (Critical edition of the French translation of 1558, text established by F. Wendel, Paris/Gütersloh, 1954, pp. 162-230), or M. de Larroque, *Conformité de la discipline des Églises réformées de France avec celles des anciens chrétiens* (1678), new edition, Lausanne, 1846, pp. 369-428).
29. *Des chrétiens découvrent le nouveau rituel du mariage*, Paris, 1969 (quoted in *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 229).
30. S. van der Meersch, in P. de Loch and Th. Maertens, *Parole pour un amour. La nouvelle liturgie du mariage*, Paris, 1967, pp. 76f. For a similar statement from

- the Protestant side, see G. Barcsay, 'Trauung', *Handbuch für praktische Theologie*, Hamburg, 1970.
31. See R. Mouret, 'Le Rituel français du mariage', *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 185. The same applies for the new French ritual.
 32. Ibid. p. 191. Maertens thinks personally that to exchange rings in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit 'n'a pas sa raison d'être' (has no grounds) (in *Parole pour un amour*, p. 46).
 33. Th. Maertens proposes the following declaration: 'N—, do you want to be my wife? / Yes, I do. And you, N—, do you want to be my husband? / Yes, I do. I therefore give myself to you and take you as my wife. / I therefore give myself to you and receive you as my husband. / To love each other, to help each other and to remain faithful to one another, / for better or for worse, / in joy and in sadness, / in the service of our brothers' (ibid. p. 43). You will have noticed the nuance: the husband *takes* his wife as his wife, whereas the wife *receives* her husband as her husband. — It seems that the marriage 'liturgy' in the film *West-Side Story*, a reciprocal declaration of love, has much impressed Catholic liturgists (see N. le Bousse, 'Comment a été élaboré le rituel français du mariage?', *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 171; R. Mouret, art. cit., p. 189).
 34. Th. Maertens, op. cit., p. 44.
 35. Ibid., p. 44.
 36. R. Mouret, art. cit., p. 198. In an article of the same no. 99 of *La Maison-Dieu*, N. Le Bousse notices that cases become 'more and more numerous where the sacrament of marriage is celebrated without mass', p. 161.
 37. M. Gaudillière, 'Rituel et pastorale du mariage', *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, p. 204
 38. One should be able to follow the research presently being done in the Roman Catholic Church on the ethnological level: particularly on the *matrimonium in fieri*, i.e. the gradual entry into marital life (which should not simply be taken as a 'trial marriage'), and on the possibility of finding a justification for polygamy, a justification that, from the Christian point of view, would make it tolerable, if not desirable. We must ask ourselves if we are not in the process of forgetting the 'great mystery' of the union of Christ and the Church which is what gives Christian marriage its specific character. This same union could not condone polygamy since there is no Christ and *the Churches*, only Christ and *the Church*. We must ask ourselves if those involved in seeking a justification for polygamy have not forgotten that monogamy is not any more natural for Western whites than for Africans or Oceanians: it imposed itself after long and weary battles, and, as we know, is easily forgotten. On these subjects, see, for example, J. F. Thiel, 'Éléments d'anthropologie culturelle relatifs à l'institution du mariage', *Concilium*, no. 55, pp. 13-23; E. Hillman, 'Le Problème de l'évolution des structures du mariage chrétien', ibid., pp. 25-37, or the contributions of M. Hauben, A. Goïn and G. Horau in the collective work *Mariage et sacrement du mariage* published by P. de Locht in the 'Révisions' collection of the Centurion editions, Paris, 1970.
 39. Even in its 'missionary' expansion, the Word, in seeking to reach everything, does not justify just anything. The Word seeks and welcomes, but it also selects. It has two cutting edges.
 40. We have here yet another proof of the difficulty the Church meets when she de-emphasizes her baptismal discipline: A Church that baptizes everyone contradicts herself if she does not marry everyone.
 41. One can think here of I Cor. 7:12ff, where the Christian or non-Christian character of marriage is revealed not at the time of its constitution, but at the time when one of its partners is converted. If the other partner decides to continue their marriage despite — or perhaps because of (v. 16) — the first

- one's conversion, the marriage is inserted into the sphere of sanctification. If not, it can be broken by the non-believing partner.
42. I clearly mean 'as a rule'; for at the celebration of the marriage, nothing theologically prevents the father of the bride or the best man from giving the bride to the groom in the name of God.
 43. On this point – and only if marriage is understood to be the celebration of the wedding rather than marital life – it seems to me that we ought to approve the position traditional in eastern christendom. It is a known fact that some Roman Catholic theologians want to have the question left open for further discussion. See, for example, R. Mouret, art. cit., p. 180. Also regarding this problem see P. M. Gy, 'Le Nouveau Rituel romain du mariage', *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 99, in part, p. 133f.
 44. On the crowning of the bridegroom and the bride, see, for example, K. Ritzer, op. cit., in the index s.v. 'nuptial crowns'; P. Evdokimov, op. cit., pp. 180-211; A. Raes, *Le Mariage dans les Églises d'Orient*, Chevotogne, 1958, passim.
 45. P. M. Gy, art. cit., p. 133.
 46. N. Le Bousse, art. cit., p. 171, feels that it is 'for reasons of propriety on the wedding day' that one should refrain from mentioning death.
 47. Compare the wording of the Byzantine engagement liturgy, in which the priest, when placing the ring on the groom's finger, says: 'The servant of God N—, takes God's servant, N—, as his wife, both now and forever, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. And to the bride he says: 'The servant of God, N—, takes God's servant, N—, as her husband, both now and forever, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (A. Raes, op. cit., p. 55). I wonder if it is not because of the eschatological character of Christian marriage that tradition, at least the early one, only considers the first union as exemplary of Christian marriage, seeing in every remarriage a mere pastoral concession.
 48. We would thus unite what Tertullian seems to presuppose: that the eucharist of the Church is not transplanted into a nuptial celebration – even a Christian one – but that the Christian wedding is linked with the community's celebrations of the eucharist – presuming the couple has in advance satisfied the necessary conditions for a 'civil' marriage. See K. Ritzer, op. cit., p. 118, note 264/a.

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