

Changes to religious views of marriage



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Marriage

Marriage today is looked at in a very different way to that of past years.

Modern day interpretations on marriage and the way it is understood have changed greatly. But being viewed differently does not mean that marriage is valued less. Marriage, traditionally, was seen as essential to bringing up a family and maintaining a home.

Recent secular changes in the definition of marriage are not something new for the Catholic Church. For the last hundred years or so the Catholic Church predicted that this would happen and has acted upon the threat it sees to this divine institution by endeavouring to clarify the issues involved by taking steps necessary to strengthen both within the Church and in society at large. Catholics live their marriages in secular society and while they believe that marriage is a Sacrament the fact that changes are and have occurred in civil marriages cannot be ignored. By ignoring these changes our societies social fabric would be even more weakened which could lead to marriage itself not surviving.

The central view point of how a Catholic understands marriage is by the realisation that marriage was created by God and man is cannot and should not try to change it. The state did not create marriage and whether governments get involved or not marriage would happen. Before any government came into being marriage existed, all through the centuries and in every culture ancient and modern. The creation of marriage was not just to provide tax or insurance benefits, something that governments and the courts seem to have trouble understanding. God created marriage to bring

together a loving couple in a sacred bond which would lead to the conceiving and to the raising of children in a stable family life.

A Catholic's perspective about marriage starts with the material facets of the matrimonial viewpoint. A marriage is to be faithful, it is to be permanent, and it is to be fruitful. It is for the benefit of the couple involved which is also called the unitive purpose and for the bringing up and education of children. A couple meets, falls in love, and hopefully get married sharing together their lives and bodies in sexual union. The desire for this sexual union is not just for pleasure alone, it is the seal of their love for each other and to open themselves to the possibility of children. Children then unify the couple into one body and family, hopefully.

Both individuals as well as society benefit from the Catholic view of marriage. Likewise, Catholics and their families too suffer from the results of divorce, and there have been studies which show that practicing Catholics try hard and make every effort for their marriages to work possibly because they realise that to remarry after a divorce may not be a possibility for them. Also, there is research which shows that a married couple receive the benefit of a good marriage because of their religious commitment. Their faith enables them to cope when difficulties occur as a source of moral guidance in their decision making and in being able to coping with conflict.

This Catholic point of view gives stability and constancy. In the society of today where truth is so relative Catholic families and marriages gain guidance and strength from following Catholic teaching. Without truth, we are unprotected and vulnerable and in the society of today there is no wish

for truth. *“ A person’s freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom”* (F. C., 11).

The basis to understanding Catholic marriage is provided by Scripture. Matthew 19 tells us that Jesus speaks of both marriage and of divorce, saying; *“ Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator “ made them male and female² and said, “ for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”* Clearly what Jesus is saying here is that marriage is equally exclusive and lasting, guiding us towards the Creation to see God’s purpose ‘ *from the beginning*’ .

Genesis 1: 27 says, *“ So God created mankind in his own image he created them; male and female he created them.”* God created all things therefore he is the author of marriage. Men and women are a part of God’s created order, created by him and for him. Part of that created order is marriage. Marriage was not created merely by man’s choosing. Men and women were made by God for each other, God made us sexually different to complement each other, a man is only whole in connection to a woman and female sexuality is only fulfilled in union to the male. God made men and women for relationship with each other.

Gaudium et Spes says:

“ man, is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, and he cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (G. S., 24).

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This truth is expressed allegorically in Genesis 2: 23, in which Adam says, “*this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.*”

Mary Healy in her book ‘Men and women are from Eden’, a study guide to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, says,

“ He recognised in Eve - unlike the animals - an equal, a person like himself whom he could love. That is, he saw someone whom he could give himself completely and who would receive and reciprocate his gift to form a union that would fulfil the very meaning of their existence” (Healy, 15).

The Church’s revitalisation was reinforced by Vatican II in a dual dynamic of Aggiornamento and Ressourcement, the up-to-dating and returning to earlier sources, traditions, and symbols of the early Church. Vatican II’s desire was enhancement and enrichment of the Church’s faith by communicating Christ’s Gospel message for the modern age and sought to communicate this by presenting a modern fusion of faith and reason to the world. The concept of personhood was the idea behind this synthesis. In his book “The Contemporary World.” Christian Marriage: A Historical Study, Haas speaks of the “*unfortunate tendency since the Council, however, for theologians to write as though there had been a radical break in the life and teachings of the Church which occurred with the Council.*” Adding, “*Because Gaudium et Spes uses the more biblical language of covenant rather than contract to speak of marriage does not mean the two are incompatible. Indeed, a covenant is itself a kind of contract. And the preconciliar magisterium spoke of marriage as covenant as well as contract*” (Haas, 340).

There are two traditional purposes to the theology of Catholic marriage: the first is for the continuance of humankind through the reproduction and reciprocal love of the husband and wife. This first was deemed foremost by the Church from late middle ages up until Vatican II, with the shared love of husband and wife coming second. In Canon 1013 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law states:

1) *“ The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children. Its secondary end is mutual help and the allaying of concupiscence.”*

2) *“ The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which acquire a particular fitness in Christian marriage by reason of its sacramental character.”*

Catholic tradition today is once again seeing as of equal importance both the goods and the ends of marriage. This was a huge change and paradigm switch. Canon 1055 of the revised Code of Canon Law 1983 affirms this switch:

“ The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children, has, between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (Kainz, 2015).

In 1930 Casti Connubii was issued by Pope Pius XI in response to threats on marriage. Interestingly, Haas informs us that, *“ The evils threatening*

marriage which he mentions in the encyclical sound remarkably contemporary: contraception, abortion, sterilization, adultery, trial marriages, cohabitation, religious mixed marriages, and divorce” (Haas, 341-342).

Haas also says that these errors come from the modern misinterpretation that *“ marriage is not a divine institution but rather a human institution established by the arbitrary wills of human beings” (Haas, 342).*

In Casti Connubii 5 the doctrine of matrimony is defined as immutable and inviolable, it says:

“ And to begin with that same Encyclical, which is wholly concerned in vindicating the divine institution of matrimony, its sacramental dignity, and its perpetual stability, let it be repeated as an immutable and inviolable fundamental doctrine that matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by man were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it but by God, the Author of nature, and by Christ Our Lord by Whom nature was redeemed, and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves. This is the doctrine of Holy Scripture; this is the constant tradition of the Universal Church; this the solemn definition of the sacred Council of Trent, which declares and establishes from the words of Holy Writ itself that God is the Author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness” (C. C. 5).

The Council Fathers of Vatican II *“ were debating the texts on marriage and the family... there was considerable discussion as to the nature of the text*

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and the language which would be used in it” (Haas, 344). The issue of the “ hierarchical ordering of the ends of marriage was very much in the background” (Haas, 344). Gaudium et Spes was issued in a “ less technically, philosophical, theological, and juridical vocabulary in teaching about regulating marriage” (Haas, 345).

Vatican II intentionally declined to classify marriage goods. Instead, Gaudium et Spes declares, without subordinating or reducing one to the other, that love and faithfulness are the two goods of marriage (G. S., 47-48). On the other hand Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine did not do this giving instead the importance of the good that the relationship itself of the spouses in marriage gave to society. The Church’s teaching made genuine progress, Vatican II made the straightforward move from the legalistic idea of marriage as a contract to the more biblical interpretation of marriage as a covenant. This definition conformed more with the modern, individualized and current belief but also looked back to the early fathers teaching of the Patristic and Medieval times and also to scholastics such as Aquinas.

Gaudium et Spes expresses what is at the heart of marriage:

“ As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.” “ For as God of old made himself present to his people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now Saviour of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of Matrimony” (G. S., 48).

The married couple, especially if they are Christian and their children, this family unit represents the image of the Trinity, of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is mirrored in the family, husband, wife and children, in two ways. The Trinity is reflected in marriage by being a communion of love between equals, commencing with the husband and wife and then spreading to all other family members. Then, as the Trinity is love and lifegiving, so a loving married couple brings forth and cherishes their children. Again, Gaudium et Spes states:

“ Families too will share their spiritual riches generously with other families. Thus, the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all men Christ’s living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all members of the family assist one another” (G. S., 48).

About our modern times, Pope St John Paul II says in Familiaris Consortio that *“ there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realising the truth of God’s plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one’s own selfish well-being”* (F. C., 6). This *“ family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can be and should do.” “ The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is”* (F. C., 17).

We are told by John Paul in *Familiaris Consortio* that families are to “*become what you are*” (F. C., 17). He also tells families that:

“ the family must go back to the “ beginning” of God’s creative act, if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization in accordance with the inner truth not only of what it is but also of what it does in history... the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfilment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God.... . Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God’s love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride. Every particular task of the family is an expressive and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission” (F. C., 17).

To gain an understanding of what marriage a look at its teleology is necessary. In his book, Haas says, “*One understands what a thing is by virtue of what it does, by virtue of the end to which it is ordered*” (Haas, 349). Marriage, as with any given thing, could possibly have other endings which what is needed then is to look at what is sufficient to delineate that ending. In looking at marriage, Haas again says, “*if one looks at the ends of marriage in terms of child, mutual support, and a remedy for concupiscence, it is not too difficult to identify the one which most adequately explains the institution of marriage*” (Haas, 349). Many relationship can uphold and deliver shared assistance and care, such as two siblings, whether they are brothers or sisters, two friends sharing accommodation at a university or college, even same-sex partners or any who choose to live together. So, marriage is not essential for care and support .

The Catechism states that, *“ By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory”* (C. C. C., 1652). And, *“ The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life”* (C. C. C., 1653).

Haas also acquaints us with what Aquinas instructed: *“ The child is the most essential good of marriage, second is faith, and third the sacrament”* (Haas, 350). In saying this he is not trying to minimise faith and sacrament but *“ merely affirms that what is most essential to marriage among its goods is the child. It most adequately, in the final analysis, explains why people get married and what is unique about the institution of marriage”* (Haas, 350).

People can be very muddled about what marriage is all about. Mostly they think of marriage as the framework for sexual activity to occur. *“ but the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition teaches that sexual activity is hardly an end in itself. It is ordered toward an end beyond itself which is still intrinsic to it and ultimately makes sense of it”* (Haas, 350).

A family can be made up by the variety of people it contains; husband and wife, parents and children, and of various family members. Every family has the task of living faithfully together the life of their family relationships constantly making the effort to cultivate a realistic community of persons. A family cannot live or grow or complete itself as a community of persons

without love. God's grace, given through the marriage sacrament and through baptism makes this self-giving achievable. All family members are called to love one another and to live with one another in that bond of family love. A family should not *"live closed in on itself, but remains open to community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others as well as by a consciousness of its responsibilities towards the whole of society"* (F. C., 64).

There is also the obligation on the family to serve life. First this is done by having children, and secondly in educating those children. A married couple's love must be always open to having children, they have the responsibility to make sure their children are given a proper education especially in those things that are most important in living a happy and contented life. This is done by their teaching but more importantly by their example.

In *Redemptor Hominis* Pope John Paul says:

"Man, cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it" (R. H., 10).

The aim and purpose of marriage is living in a close relationship with others which shares by God's grace in the Perichoresis of the Trinity whose individuality of persons is upheld in the indwelling of each Person in the Others. In marriage, a couple become a spiritual union of persons by their relationships, by their intimacy and understanding, fully present to and fully known and loved by the other. This couple's strong love will build a strong

and loving family and a strong and loving community. Closeness, mutual affection and self-giving should be the aim of any family. As God lives in Perichoresis so should we on earth.

My conclusion is that we now live in a contraceptive society, sex is now detached from producing children and has become a way of amusing yourself and having fun, it is no longer seen as the reserve of marriage. Today marriage, has lost its importance, its permanence and its exclusivity. Our modern society now accepts same-sex marriage and many other once unthinkable relationships as logical and acceptable additions. In a society that is predominantly pleasure seeking then all forms of living together would seem to be equal and valid. There is not much hope of turning this around until as a society, through our own personal fulfilment, we begin to put to rights what is best for all our citizens. These aims can bring with them conflict but opposition can be overcome. The only way to personal fulfilment is in conforming oneself to Christ. Sex is a God given gift, it lets human beings to take part in the work of creation and in the work of the new creation as a sacrament, our society needs to alter and refocus.

Fundamentally, marriage is concerned with the producing and the nurturing of children, and this can only happen when the married couple are heterosexual. Having children and bringing them up brings a married couple joy and happiness, they become one and a biological bond is created in working together to create a new life. Same-sex couples cannot achieve this, they may well form an emotional and a spiritual union but it is not possible for them to reach a biological bond. As a couple, they can bring up children, but they cannot produce those children biologically. In trying to change the <https://assignbuster.com/changes-to-religious-views-of-marriage/>

meaning of marriage, all that will be done is to confuse its meaning. So, it would become, instead of a complementary bond of the joining together of husband and wife to bring forth and raise new life, instead of a complementary bond of the joining together of husband and wife to bring forth and raise new life it a linking of friends which would easily break up once either parties' emotional needs are not fulfilled. To change the essential meaning of marriage is a fundamental mistake because marriage is too important to allow changes to take place.