

What is catholic marriage religion essay



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In this chapter I will first attempt a definition of marriage and more specifically Catholic marriage; I will then review existing literature on the topic and present different views about cohabitation, reasons why people get married, expectations about marriage among Maltese individuals, the changes in marital traditions and also the Cana Movement.

From the beginning of the second century to the middle of the 20th Century the catholic tradition institution, viewed and modelled marriage as a procreative institution—a stable, social and religious institution in which a man and a woman became husband and wife to procreate children. Their procreative activity, which defined marriage, included not only to the creation of a child but also to the development of motherhood and fatherhood and the fabrication of a functioning adult. Since the parent's life expectancy was not long beyond the early adulthood of their children, marriage was therefore easily defined as lifelong. In truth this procreative institution is the result of a contract in which, according to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, “ each party gives and accepts a perpetual and exclusive right over the body for acts which are of themselves suitable for the generation of children” (Canon 1081, 2) (Lawler. M , 2001)

The Second Vatican Council's “ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” describes marriage as a “ communion of love” (No. 47), “ an intimate partnership of life and love” (No. 48). Love between the spouses was declared by the council to be the very essence of marriage. The council underscored its preference for an interpersonal union model by making another important change in the received tradition. Marriage is founded in “ a conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent” (No. 48). The legal

word contract gives way to the biblical word covenant, a word saturated with overtones of mutual steadiest and personal love, qualities that are now applied to marriage. (Lawler. M , 2001)

Adrian Thatcher in his book ' Marriage after Modernity: Christian Marriage in post modern times' describes marriage as a universal institution which theologically speaking is given with creation itself, ' But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. 7For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; 8And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh' (Mark 10: 6 – 8). He explains that marriage is an 'eminently human love', a love that brings together ' the human and the divine'. Therefore married couples are capable of being simultaneously recipients and mediators of that relational love of God which led to the creation of the world and restored through Christ.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains marriage as a sacrament of Matrimony in which ' a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, it is by its nature regimented for the good of the spouses and the education and procreation of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the solemnity of a sacrament.'

It is very interesting to note how ' romantic marriage' has only been common in the west for quite a short period of time. In fact according to sociologist Anthony Giddens (1997), modern ideas of romantic marriage had not been common or accepted even as late as the 1500's. On the other hand religious institutions saw marriage as pragmatic solution to unhealthy sexual

emotions and not something to be done for affection, romance or satisfaction.

Attitudes towards marriage

Without any doubt people's own family life experiences is major influence on their multidimensional development, and hence different people have different views, expectations and reasons for marriage.

One's home is the starting point, for one to learn about marriage, this is because parents continuously teach their children what partnership involves and what it's like by following in the footsteps of their parents' marital relationship . In fact Toben and Joanne Heim (2000) think “ that where you come from and your family history lies beneath just about every issue you'll face in your entire marriage – not just in the first year” (p. 17). The quality of the one's parents' marital relationship and also the quality of attachment to one's parents' and siblings is influenced by the adjustment in marital relationships . Azzopardi (2007).

The effect of parental conflict and divorce on children's attitudes toward marriage has been examined by a number of researchers. Some studies have shown that children of divorced parents: do worse than those in intact families in several aspects of their development (Dowling & Gorell Barnes, 1999; 2000) are fearful and anxious about their own future marriage (Schwartberg, 1981; Sorosky, 1977) and have a negative view of marriage (Kelly, 1981; Long, 1987). Also Children from broken homes, predominantly daughters, are less interested in marriage (Booth, Brinkerhoff, & White, 1984) and have low expectations and evaluations of marriage (Long, 1987).

On the other hand some research has indicated that it is not parental separation and divorce per se that influence expectations of marriage but it is family integration (Coleman & Ganong, 1984).

In the study by Kalter (1987), Grych and Fincham (1990), and Markland and Nelson (1993), which involved college students, found that conflict and inter-parental hostility is a key feature influencing young adults' expectations of marriage. It was therefore concluded that children who are exposed to such conflicts seem to form pessimistic impressions of marriage. In contradiction Muench and Landrum's (1994) research suggest that family dynamics play an important role in expectations of marriage formation. " Therefore, even though some people's expectations of happiness and success in marriage may have been tainted by prior experience (divorced parents), they still strongly desire having a positive marital and family relationship" (Jones & Nelson, 1996, p. 173). Similarly, Coleman and Ganong (1984), and Jones and Nelson (1996) did not find significantly different attitudes towards marriage between low and high conflict background individuals. These different results suggest for the requirement for further research on the subject.

The media have also been attributed with the power to influence people's expectations

of marriage. However, there is yet to be evidence for this claim. (Segrin & Nabi, 2002, p. 247). Vexen Crabtree explains that marriage consists of many parts. The first is the legal contract, which according to him is the " bare bones of what a marriage is ". Nevertheless at the end of the day it is our cultural expectations that give marriage more meaning than merely a

contractual agreement. He further explains that our upbringing including our culture and stereotyped ideas portrayed in the mass media together with society create unconscious ideal roles that we are under pressure into filling.

In fact Rev. Rebecca Densen (2001) states:

“ Marriage partners are also bombarded with role expectations and stereotypes of what it means to be a ‘ husband’ and ‘ wife’. In general these ‘ roles’ are detrimental to the relationship. People simply cannot fit into pre-set moulds (...). Healthy relationships on the other hand are entered into and maintained by individuals’ free and loving ongoing choice”.

Also it is very important to note how according to the Constitution of Malta in the second article it says that (1) The religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion. Therefore one can argue how the laws of one’s country reflect and reinforce a citizen’s perception of an orderly environment and every citizen is bound to abide by them

Religious and Traditional Influences

Without a doubt religion plays a major role in how a marital relationship is conducted. Although the importance to religion is declining and the Maltese no longer base their life on a singular moral view, religion still plays a major role in the establishment of ideals (Tabone, 1994). The 1999 European Values Survey (Abela, 2000) reveals that in spite of the reported secularization (Tabone, 1987) 80% of the Maltese give religion third priority, following the family (first) and work (second).

Women generally value religion over work, “ whereas men give second importance to work, women give priority to religion” (Abela, 2000. p. 45).

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Tabone (1994) argues that in spite of traditionalism and institutionalism the church still has a great impact on the individual. In fact, almost all Maltese individuals are baptized, and attend catechism, they receive their first Holy Communion, receive confirmation, and generally marry in the Church.

Tabone continues that regardless of their faith (p. 295). About 75% of all marriages are sacramentalised in church (Archdiocese of Malta, 2003; L-Orizzont, 2004). Consequently Malta's culture, tradition, and social life relation to religious activity may point out how the Maltese may find it hard to separate from the religious familiarity in one's life.

Nevertheless, it is quite evident that values could be changing especially amongst the Maltese youth. In one recent survey conducted by the University Chaplaincy in 2009 on the subject of religious practices among University students, 91% claimed to be Catholics. With regards to confession, 36.7% never receive this sacrament. 68% report to attend mass on a regular basis, while 32.4% rarely or never do. With regards to religious beliefs the highest percentages were for belief in God (93.5%), Jesus the Son of God (81.2%), Mary, the mother of God (78.4%), The Holy spirit (75%), The Trinity (74.8%), God the creator of all that exists (74%). A lower amount of participants responded yes, in relation to their belief in Afterlife (68.5%), The incarnation of Jesus (67.1%), The Virginity of Mary, the mother of God (65.4%), Heaven and Hell (65.4%), The Devil (63.9%).

When asked about morality, 62.9% state that Abortion is always morally wrong, 43.8% said that divorce is morally wrong, 14.7% see contraception as morally wrong. 24.0% state that pre-marital sexual intercourse as prohibited and 73.5% approve of premarital cohabitation. Moreover 9.5%

wrote that abortion can be carried out in the case of a disabled child, while 56.7% said that divorce should be legalised in Malta and 44.3% have practised sexual intercourse in the past year. Another verification of declining religiosity is the 2006 Sunday Mass Attendance Census (Inguanez, 2006) which revealed an 11% fall in church attendance among the Maltese since 1995. So the question of why one still chooses to marry in the church remains.

As cited in a qualitative study carried out by Azzopardi (2007) all the couples saw marrying in the church as an automatic and unquestionable construction. Many influences were seen throughout the interviews including Cultural and extended family influences. They did not reflect on the true understanding of a Catholic marriage and its distinctive requirements. In fact when asked some of the couples stated “ I’m doing it to make him happy” or “ my parents would have thrown me out”, Therefore in this study the construction of marrying in the church emerged as one of the tensions between secularism and traditionalism. Most of the participating couples, viewed marrying in the church as a public statement of their commitment as opposed to a sacramental union. Also narratives about the visual and lavish aspects of Maltese weddings sustain the idea. In fact in 2002 €17.5 million was spent amongst 2240 weddings, bringing the average wedding expenses to € 7900 (L-Orizzont, 2003). On the other hand during the interview many couples admitted that if it was up to them, they would have done nothing of the kind.

Cohabitation

Marriage is an institution which can join together people's lives in a wide range of behaviours including those economic and emotional. In many Western cultures, marriage usually leads to the formation of a new household uniting the married couple, with the married couple living together under the same roof, often sharing the same bed, however in some other cultures this is not the tradition, and opt for cohabitation (Paul, 2006).

A cohabiting couple is ' a co-resident man and woman, living together within a sexual union, without that union having been formalised by a legal marriage' , (Gordon, 1995). " Cohabitants" could be engaged couples, common-law husband and wife, or singles living together in a romantic relationship. As said before at present many individuals are opting for cohabitation as opposed to marriage. One can distinguish between 2 types of cohabitation: ' pre-nuptial' and ' non- nuptial' cohabitation. ' Pre - nuptial' refers to people who plan to marry and live together first. The latter refers those who live together but do not intend to marry (Thatcher. A, 2001) There are also those who cohabit out of convenience. A growing amount of literature is focused on how and why partners come to cohabit. According to one study, when asked why they began sharing a household, many people reported that they entered it without much thought (Manning & Smock, 2005). Another study found that when asked the same question, most reported that they wanted to spend more time together and that it was more convenient than living apart (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, in press). Some individuals report using cohabitation as a way to test the relationship before marriage, although this type of cohabitation represented only a small

minority in one study (Rhoades et al., in press). Many cohabiting individuals report that they plan to marry their current partner (Brown & Booth, 1996).

The Church of England report, titled 'Something to celebrate' states further reasons for cohabitation, these include reaction to the clear failure of traditional patterns of partner selection, courting, marriage and setting up home, the ability to avoid or delay conception through reliable contraception, the wish to avoid promiscuity, the wish to avoid the possible consequences of being married, such as the cost of a legal divorce or of a grand wedding. Other reasons include peer pressure; saving on rent; or waiting to conclude higher education. (Thatcher A, 2001). Hence I question why people go into all the trouble of getting married in the church when they could easily cohabit without any problems.

In reality it is more "problematic" to marry in the church as opposed to cohabiting or marrying civilly. According the Maltese Marriage Act Chapter 255 , "Catholic marriage" means a marriage celebrated in accordance with the norms and formalities of Canon Law or with a dispensation therefrom granted by the competent organ in accordance with Canon Law; In fact the Catholic Church together with the law teaches that for one to marry in the church one of the partners must be a baptized Christian . Both partners do not have to be Catholic in order to be sacramentally married in the Catholic Church, but both must be baptized Christians (and at least one must be a Catholic). Non-Christians cannot receive the sacraments. For a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic Christian, permission is required from his or her bishop. A Catholic can marry an unbaptized person, but such marriages are natural marriages only and not sacramental marriages. The Church, therefore,

discourages them and requires a Catholic who wishes to marry an unbaptized person to receive a special dispensation from his or her bishop. Still, if the dispensation is granted, a non-sacramental marriage is valid and can take place inside of a Catholic church

Legal prohibitions on marriage between close blood relatives are prohibited by the church. Before 1983, marriages between second cousins were prohibited. Today, second-cousin marriages are allowed, and, under some circumstances, a dispensation can be obtained to allow a first-cousin marriage. However the Church still discourages such marriages.

If one of the partners, Catholic or non-Catholic Christian, has been married before, he or she is free to marry only if his or her spouse has died or he or she has obtained a declaration of nullity from the Church. The sheer fact of a divorce is not sufficient to prove the nullity of a marriage. During marriage preparation, you must inform the priest if you have been married before, even in a civil ceremony. They must also be of opposite sex . Marriage, by definition, is a lifelong union between one man and one woman. The Catholic Church does not recognize, even as a civil marriage, a contracted relationship between two men or two women.

Finally it is a myth that some Catholics only see the inside of a church when they are “ carried (at Baptism), married, and buried.” But since marriage is a sacrament, and for the sacrament to be properly received the Catholic partners in a marriage must be in good standing with the Church. This not only means normal Church attendance but also avoidance of scandal, for example cohabitation.

Furthermore research about married couples has shown that they enjoy a better standard of living than single individuals (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Hirschi, Altobelli & Rank, 2003). They also have better physical and psychological well-being (Schoenborn, 2004; Williams, 2003). Additionally children are most likely to succeed when brought up in a happily married couple. (Amato & Booth, 1997; Mc Lahahan & Sandefur, 1994; Ford, Goodman & Meltzer 2004)

The Change in Marriage Values and Traditions

In Thatcher's (1999) book titled ' Marriage after Modernity – Christian Marriage in postmodern times' David Lyon refers to the term ' modernity' to the " social order that emerged following Enlightenment". This includes the many changes that occurred from the mid – sixteenth century onward in all fields. As a result of all the changes based on science, economy, democracy or law, modernity is continuously questioning all the conventional ways of doing things. As a result he explains that " it unsettles the self; if identity is given in traditional society, in modernity it is constructed". Without any doubt marriage is entangled in the changes signified by the transition from ' modernity' to ' post modernity' as it is a historical and social institution.

Peter Hodgson states that although modernity has given us many gains such as rationality, freedom, dialogue, human rights, subjectivity etc... It's has also resulted in a series of crises including cognitive, historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, economic, sex and gender. In fact :

" The sexual revolution has exposed the repression deeply ingrained in Western culture and Christianity, but it has also led to a great deal of

freedom of sexual practice beginning in adolescence, much of it destructive, and it has rendered problematic all of the established sexual institutions, including the nuclear family and marriage...there is also a gender crisis - the beginning of the ending of patriarchy as a way of organizing male- female relations and distributing social power.”

To add on undoubtedly marriage is one of the ‘ established sexual institutions’ which have been affected by the crises of modernity.

” The sexual crisis unmask the linkage of religious beliefs with sexual repression and calls into question the authority of scripture on issues vital to human sexuality, while the gender crisis is disrupting long established ways of imagining divine power and presence, namely in androcentric and patriarchal terms” (Hodgson, Winds of the Spirit p. 62).

Consequently Hodgson believes that the above mentioned crises resulting from modernity have led to the absence of God in postmodern consciousness.

According to Françoise Zonabend, a French anthropologist, the instability of the marriage institution is due to the increasing number polygamous marriages between women, The divorces and remarriages, the free unions and the common law marriages which are on the increase in Western societies, also point to the vulnerability of the institution and show above all that the functions that have been ascribed to marriage-the transfer of goods, the sexual division of labour, the solidarity between the relations, rearing of children-cannot be the consequence of any natural imperative. Therefore we can only call for a rethinking of the universality and durability of marriage.

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In an article by Don S Browning titled ' Christian Ethics and the Family debate: An Overview' it is stated that there are many different reasons for these crisis's that are happening in today's Western Society. He explains how many Conservatives, neo-conservatives, and some neo-liberals highlight the importance of cultural values; they claim that values have changes and largely for the worse. As an example Neo-liberals for instance David Popenoe and Robert Bellah, and also historians like Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone, place emphasis on the rise of Enlightenment individualism.

Conservatives such as James Dobson claim modern society is more immoral and does not respect marital, family, and parental commitments as before. Moreover demographers such as Ron Lesthaege and Larry Bumpass talk about individualism to explain the escalating family fragmentation.

Additionally deteriorating economic conditions and decreased welfare support for the family crises are blamed by many Marxist, liberal, progressive, and many liberal-feminists. Max Weber, Alan Wolfe and Jürgen Habermas stress the spread of technical reason as the causative factor. They explain how technical reason can mean two different things: one being market logistics enter the private lives of families and as a consequence replace family loyalties with an ethical-egoist and cost-benefit mentality. The other reason can be stated in bureaucracies which take over family functions and as a result make them dependent client populations.

The Economy also plays a role in this change. In fact economists Diane Reglis and Victor Fuchs describe how during the 1980s and 90s economy has been declining and this shift has influenced families negatively. Accordingly many social changes are caused because of these economic changes like

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Legal changes: the legal recognition of domestic partnerships, divorce and the trend toward the deinstitutionalization of the family which all account to the shift in family values.

One can also mention Psychological factors. In fact Frances Goldscheider and Linda Waite, state that the family crisis results from the fact that men's commitment to housework and child care has not been in line with women's opening into the salary economy. Evolutionary psychologists go on to reveal how evolutionary forces have created uneven reproductive strategies between males and females. They point out that males of most mammalian species procreate as widely as possible with a range of females however do not become concerned in the care of their offspring.

The Cana Movement

The Church organizes marriage preparation course with the hope of increasing

Catholic values among Maltese families. Courting couples preparing for marriage

attend the compulsory marriage preparation course as indicated by the Church. The

course aims to help couples in their preparation for the sacrament of marriage to arrive

at a better evaluation of their relationship and their commitment to each other, and to a

Christian marriage. It consists of eight group sessions addressing eight different topics

from a Christian perspective. The courses are organized through one of its voluntary

Organizations, the Cana Movement, which was set up to promote Catholic family life among the Maltese. For my study I chose people participating in this course as they without doubt intend to marry in the Catholic Church.

Marriage education is widely practiced within the Catholic communities. In Malta the

marriage preparation course is a compulsory step for those choosing to marry in the

Church. One of the course's aims is the teaching of a realistic framework of marriage

with the hope of reducing unrealistic expectations in various areas of married life.

However, the multi-vocal bombardment of ideals from tradition, culture, and media might impede the courses from having the desired effect.

On a much larger scale, Stanley et al. (2006) carried out a representative survey across

four American states and found participation in premarital courses to be associated with lower levels of conflict, higher satisfaction and commitment

in marriage, and reduced the chance of divorce. It is suggested that participation in premarital education such as the Cana movement generally benefits couple relationships over time.