



Sacrament of Matrimony

Matrimony is the marriage contract between Christians raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. The theological and dogmatic treatment of this sacrament does not look very much to its main features of unity and indissolubility which are basic characteristics of all marriage in natural ethics; they are rather premisses, though of course they attain greater significance and depth and stability in marriage as a sacrament. The fact, then, that these features take up a considerable amount of space in Church documents must not be allowed to hid the theological content of this sacrament which comes to us from revelation and belongs to the supernatural order. As a sacrament matrimony is entirely oriented on man's supernatural goal. Matrimony and Holy Orders are the two sacraments which not only serve the individual in reaching this goal but are there for the benefit of the community. Matrimony is there for the mutual help of the spouses and the increase of the people of God. Devotion to his twofold end is the way of salvation for married couples, a way sanctified by the sacrament. 'Yet she shall be saved through childbearing; if she continue in faith, and love, and sanctification, with sobriety' (1 Tim:2:15).

The mutual sacrifice and devotion of husband and wife is a true picture of Christ's sanctifying sacrifice and devotion to His Church. 'Matrimony has its significance in the first place from Christ who took the Church as his bride at the price of his own blood. And also because when he offered his life as the price of her ransom, he stretched out his arms in an embrace of supreme love. And thirdly: as Eve was formed from the side of Adam while he slept, so the Church was formed from the side of the dying and dead Christ, as the two chief sacraments poured from his side - the blood of redemption and the water of absolution' (Albertus Magnus).

It is only from this point of view that one can understand the Church's unceasing struggle against any attempt to see marriage as something unholy or something merely profane, of no concern to religion. The campaign began with those countless rigorist or dualist sects in early times and in the Middle Ages; it defended the religious nature of marriage against the Reformers for whom it was just a civil affair; it represented the demands of the Church in matter of matrimonial

legislation in various countries and defended the indissolubility of the marriage contract and the sacrament in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

Since marriage is also of the greatest civic significance, jurisdiction in matrimonial matters was one of the commonest causes of differences between Church and state. Since this is solely a question of dogmatic view- points, the relevant documents are omitted. For the same reason Church documents dealing mainly with matrimonial morality are omitted.

The Church Thus Teaches: Marriage is willed by God and was raised to a sacrament by Christ. It is therefore good but may not be put before the state of virginity. The sacrament of matrimony consist of the marriage contract, so that for Christians the contract and the sacrament are inseparable. Therefore marriage comes into the legal competence of the Church. The Church may establish impediments, including diriment impediments which invalidate a marriage and forbidding impediments which make marriage illegal. She may determine the form and rite to be observed. Matrimonial Causes fall to ecclesiastical courts. The purpose of marriage is the increase of the people of God and mutual help for the partners in loyalty and love. The sacrament gives married people a claim on the graces necessary to their state.

Only monogamy is valid. A new marriage is allowed after the death of one party. Marriage is indissoluble, even in cases of adultery. An unconsummated marriage can in certain circumstances be dissolved by the Church. Once it is consummated, a separation only is possible; the marriage bond cannot be dissolved.