

CATHOLIC MARRIAGE

By Daniel A. Lord S.J.

EVERYONE has heard, I am sure, the story of the elderly lady who, when the newly engaged girl came dashing in radiantly happy to announce her engagement, kissed her gently on the cheek and said, with a slow shake of her head: “My dear, you are very brave.”

That particular lady belonged, it is true, to another generation; her attitude was nevertheless distinctly modern. For to be in the fashion one must be more or less despairful about marriage. All our best writers are. Our best-selling novelist writes his yarn about the fiasco his hero and heroine made of what everyone knew to be a love match. Our widely discussed dramatist makes the slavery of wives and the restless bondage of husbands his favourite theme. Our syndicated writers ask themselves the question:

“Is marriage a failure?” and answer with an unequivocal yes. In fact, while in times past every good story ended with the stereotyped phrase: “They married and lived happy forever after,” nowadays ever so many popular novels begin with:

“They married and lived unhappy forever after.” And where our writers leave off, our judges in the divorce courts or on the juvenile bench begin, burying marriage under an avalanche of disapproval.

All of which goes to show that the most astonishing disbelief in marriage has crept into modern life. People continue to marry as gaily and as lightheartedly as *ever*, but one widely read author explains that simply enough. Nature, he says, with cruel and purposeful guile tricks unsuspecting young people, through moonlight and the perfume of June roses, dreamy music and bewitching eyes, soft flesh and the transient glory of blonde hair, into an unnatural and horrible state that no two persons in their right minds could be driven with lashes to embrace. That is, of course, only an expansion of the advice of that cynic, *Punch*, to those about to get married—” Don’t!”

WHO BELIEVES IN MARRIAGE?

“Does anyone nowadays believe in marriage as an institution?” youth naturally asks. Is the beautiful thing called love only a trick to lure victims into a rocky path that leads to the divorce courts? Has no one a good word to say for marriage or love?

That sane and considerate mother of the human race—the Catholic Church—after almost twenty centuries of experience with marriage as an institution, still cherishes it as one of Christ’s special sacraments, a sacred and beautiful thing.

Around marriage the Church throws all the beauty of exquisite ritual and ceremony.

The gates of the communion rail are opened; the bride, dressed in the white of a virgin, is granted the privilege of entering into the very sanctuary; the priest, in his most beautiful vestments, leads the bride and the groom to the foot of God’s altar; Mass is said for them; the Christ who honoured the wedding feast of Cana is brought down from heaven to bless them; the benediction which God poured out upon the holy couples of the Old Law is invoked upon them; and they go forth from the Church with special sacramental grace in their souls to make their new lives holy, happy, rich in God’s favour and in hope for the future.

The Church, which begins the life of a priest with the Mass of his ordination and receives the vows of its nuns before the altar, gives to the bridal couples as they start their married life the same high privileges. Marriage is so sacred that it can properly begin only at the altar. It is so beautiful that Christ can be invited to be the first guest at every Catholic wedding. The Church believes so intensely in the importance of marriage for the human race that the contract is signed and sealed with the sacramental blood of Jesus our Saviour.

ST. PAUL SPEAKS

For the Church remembers that St. Paul, who is often quoted for one phrase:

“It is better to marry than to burn,”

paid to marriage the final compliment when he compared the union of a husband and wife to the union of Christ and His Church.

“Husbands,” he writes to the Ephesians, “love your wives as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it.

He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hateth his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church. . . . This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.” (Ephes. v, 22-33.)

No higher compliment can be paid to marriage. It is a sacred union comparable to the union of Christ with His Church. The love that binds a husband and wife should have a tenderness like that of Christ, who died so willingly for the Church He had established. The unbreakable character of marriage is the same as that of the union which binds Christ to His Church all days even to the end of the world.

The Christians whom St. Paul was addressing had heard from the lips of those who had walked with the merciful Christ through the highways of Judaea of the astounding love that Christ had shown for the Church in His miracles, sacraments, promises, and death. So they must have looked on marriage with a reverent awe when they heard the stern Apostle compare the love of husband and wife to the love of Christ for His Church.

So to Catholics marriage is a sacrament, symbolizing beautifully in the love of husband and wife the tenderness with which Christ regarded His spouse, the Church. While to others marriage may become a mere civil contract as prosaic as the making of a will or the taking of a partner into one’s grocery business, to Catholics it is a holy thing, a contract that Christ has transformed into a channel of untold grace for mankind. The Catholic Church believes firmly in the possibilities of so sacred an institution.

And never far from the mind of the Church is the remembrance of the Madonna holding against her heart her infant Son; or that other memory of the Holy Family, the blessed trinity of earth, Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus, setting the world the pattern of happiness in the home.

In every bride the Church sees a potential Madonna who will mother God’s little ones against her heart. In every bridegroom it sees another Joseph. And when together the young couple build their little home, the Church prays that it will become another Holy House of Nazareth.

ROMANCE AND REALITY

The Church has been called in scorn an idealist, as if that were something to be ashamed of. It is an idealist. A leader that is not an idealist is no leader at all.

The work of a leader is to lift his followers above the low levels they might reach and the ordinary deeds which they might accomplish without him and to make them scale difficult heights and achieve splendid things under his guidance. So the Church, true to its duty of leadership, points out to mankind, not the levels which ordinary men ordinarily can attain, but the splendid heights to which they can aspire and, under its guidance, actually reach. It does not say that everyone will reach the lofty ideals of Catholic marriage. It says: “There are the possibilities for deep happiness, disinterested usefulness, and the blending of joy and holiness. Make those possibilities real. Here is what the union of Christ and the Church symbolizes for married people. Remember and live up to this.”

Yet, for all its ideals, it neither ignores nor dodges facts. It knows from the experience of centuries the facts about marriage and holds them up insistently before the young couple who come seeking its blessing. Marriage, it insists, is one of the most difficult of vocations. Two people of possibly quite different temperaments and tastes, each with a well-developed personal character and a will that craves obedience from others and loathes submission for itself, are bound together for life in the most intimate relationships. They see each other under the most trying as well as the most favourable conditions. The strong hero who wooed the maiden with irresistible strength develops a thumping headache or a continued grouch, and he is just a trifle less heroic than a small boy with the mumps. The lovely maiden who always looked like a fresh-blown rose takes to bedroom slippers, an easygoing dressing gown, curlers and a mask of cold cream.

The beauty and the gallantry that were so thrilling during the courtship and the honeymoon seem pretty second-rate, often enough, under the cold light of the living-room lamp or the relentless sun that beats down on the family car picnic-bound.

Love is blind, right enough, but it begins to recover its eyesight about the time the bridal bouquet is thrown into the rubbish bin and the groomsman notices the first soot speck on his dress gloves. And when the bridal dress is converted into a serviceable evening gown and the bridal suit makes its first appearance at the office, the romance has settled down to the routine of real life, and love becomes very keen-eyed indeed.

The things that love sees with its newly regained vision may not be very terrible or very glaring. They may be merely a matter of the irritating way in which he breaks open a soft-boiled egg; they may be far more terrifying, for behind a lovely smile may hide a shrewish tongue. Perhaps it has not occurred to the bride that married life will mean getting along on less than she actually had when she lived at home or cashed her own pay cheque. For the groom it may mean a suddenly restricted latchkey or a very limited control over his own purse. Whatever it is that open-eyed love finds, it is often as small but as effective as the dime that obstructs the view of the sun or the irritating cough that makes it so difficult for us to hear the symphony orchestra.

BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Because men and women marry men and women, marriage will always have its man-and-woman limitations. Nothing that mankind does ever remotely approaches perfection, and perfection is not to be demanded or expected of marriage. Man's pictures fall far short of the landscape they represent; his books only feebly record the great throb of life; his work as a lawyer *or* a woman's skill as a musician seldom becomes more than passable; he makes allowances for the carelessness or human frailty of his business partners and employees; she expects of her friends only a limited sympathy and understanding.

Marriage is a contract between men and women who are never superlatively good at anything they attempt and who bring to the contract neither the patience of horses nor the perfect justice of angels. The men and women who expect marriage to be flawless are the very same ones who make mistakes in everything they do, and who, before any enterprise, make allowances for the mistakes that are bound to mess it up.

The Church is not like the average young couple, who come to the altar assured that after the tremulous "I will" will come an unending daydream of limitless happiness in which she will always be the fairy princess whose face does not get red or her nerves frayed even over a gas range, and he will always be her splendid knight riding up on his charger to bring her violets, compliments, and the lamb chops which he never forgets to order.

The Church knows that marriage is as difficult as human nature; more difficult, in fact. It is as difficult as two human natures trying to adjust angles to curves and human loves to human limitations. The Church looks the facts in the face and asks of marriage no more than mankind asks of other human relationships, namely, that it do what it is expected by God to do, as beautifully and as adequately as we humans ever do anything.

LOVE'S UNION

For marriage can be a marvellous romance, the beginning of something wonderful, almost incredibly beautiful. With all its human limitations, it is a splendid adventure of two souls who, as they unite their hands in solemn contract, enter upon an agreement the effects of which may be eternal for themselves and as lasting as the earth itself for the human race.

Love, whatever biologists may care to say of it, makes a man and a woman so important to each other that they cannot any longer live alone. They need each other to complement their individual lives. They hardly dare to face the future deprived of the sympathy, affection, courage, and help which they will find in each other's company. If they are truly in love, they do not need nature or the Church to teach them to make their vows binding for life. That is their natural impulse; anything less than life seems altogether too short for the term of their partnership. So their love impels them to promise each other a lifetime of fidelity and mutual help. The instincts of the human heart, quite independently of the written laws of God or of the Church, tend to make this marriage contract a contract for life.

GOD SHARES HIS POWER

As for the future of the human race, their contract is of tremendous importance and significance. Into their hands has been placed the very existence of whole generations. Their contract involves the peopling of earth and the filling of heaven with precious souls. For God has given to His creatures a share in His astounding power of creation. He could form bodies, as He formed the body of Adam, from the slime of the earth. Instead, by a splendid act of generosity, He shares His creative power with His creatures and gives to each young couple, facing life so bravely at the moment of marriage, the wonderful power of bringing into the world His sons and daughters.

A mother holds her baby in her arms, looks up to God, and knows that she, by months of suffering and patience, has co-operated with Him in making and bringing into the world a little body housing a priceless soul. A father stands above his new-born son resting in the arms of his wife and knows as he picks him up and weighs him tenderly that he has shared with God the Father His very fatherhood; for this mite of humanity, immortal in destiny, is truly his son. Mother and father together have cooperated with God in the astonishing creation of a human being.

It always overawes us when we pause long enough to realize that God shares His power so liberally with us, His creatures. We marvel that He shares with His priests the power of forgiving sins. We marvel when we realize that as they speak the words of consecration the bread in their hands becomes the body of the Saviour. And through marriage God allows His creatures a power very like the power of creation itself. More than that, He seems to stand waiting for the co-operation of those whom He has made. He looks to men and women to give Him children who will, when their turn comes, carry on the government of His world and who will one day be citizens of His eternal kingdom.

Since men and women have so vast a power, on which depends the future existence of the human race and the filling of heaven itself, we can better understand why God and the Church regard marriage as so sacred and serious an institution, why Christ honoured a wedding with His first miracle and raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, and why the Church throws around it every safeguard that her inspired wisdom can devise. Life is a sacred thing, and marriage is the gateway to life; eternity is the prime concern of time, and marriage is God's way of bringing into the world the souls that are to share His eternity. Marriage is as sacred, then, as life and as important as human souls.

THIS WAY HAPPINESS

In spite of all its trials, marriage promises to the young couple happiness in abundance. There is the first happiness of home making and the supreme joy that comes when they look upon their firstborn and know it to be theirs. Strength comes of working out together life's problems and of "halving sorrow and doubling joy by sharing them." Pride thrills them as their sons grow strong and their daughters charming. Courage springs from knowing that they do not work nor walk alone. Then, when their work is largely done and their children go off to found their own families or give themselves to God, they feel the calm happiness of turning their faces towards heaven with the sense of a gathered harvest, full granaries, and their Master waiting to bless them for a crowded and useful life.

All that has here been said of marriage indicates quite clearly that the Catholic brings to it a viewpoint singularly beautiful and singularly his own. Unbelievers quite naturally look with suspicion on marriage and question it. For that matter, they look with suspicion on life itself, for which marriage is the gateway, and shrug their shoulders at the idea of immortal souls. It would be surprising if they appreciated the tremendous power sanctioned through marriage. They do not admit a Creator, and hence they can hardly be expected to understand what is meant by the creature's sharing in His act of creation. Life to an unbeliever is a meaningless, purposeless jumble, and he regards with necessary contempt the institution which carries life on.

If to him life has any purpose, it is the mere gratification of fleshly instincts, with the concomitant bringing forth into the world of a race as transient as the butterflies of a summer day, a race that does its silly dance macabre on the brink of an open grave. Why should unbelievers regard with reverence an institution that propagates life when life to them is only the brief interlude between deaths? They cannot see anything very sacred in the bodies that are so closely kin to animals, and they admit no immortal soul designed by God for an unending heaven.

A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

Catholics cannot talk with unbelievers about marriage in the same terms; for they fundamentally disagree with them about life itself and the meaning of life; and marriage is the door through which life enters the world. For Catholics, children have their importance because of their souls—souls so precious that Christ died for them. Unbelievers, who deny souls and question the value of Christ's death, would be illogical if they regarded children as having an eternal value.

Most men and women marry. God and nature intended that they should. The future of the human race depends upon their responding to this perfectly natural impulse. Fortunately for the human race God gives a large number of Catholics the higher call of consecration to His service, and they take the vow of chastity, which makes them one of the greatest safeguards of Christian marriage. That vow of chastity taken by thousands of men and women is one of the most splendid contributions to the sanctity of marriage. Young men and women, surrounded by temptations before marriage, remember that it is possible for human beings to be pure even to the extent of taking a vow of chastity, and that gives them courage to fight their passions. Married men and women, when they find their affections or thoughts wandering, draw inspiration from the priests and nuns who have vowed to go through life in complete detachment from the joys of marriage. Catholic consecrated chastity is one of the strongest bulwarks protecting the sanctity and security of marriage.

THE SIN AGAINST YOUTH

Since most men and women are expected to marry, youth is largely a preparation for the day when they will take a partner for the great work of life. They are actually waiting, perhaps unconsciously, for the love that will make them eager to marry, to found a home, and to give God the children for which He is waiting.

Because of this the Church insists so strongly on the purity of its young people. Youth is the period of preparation for marriage; the purity of young people is the guarantee of future happy marriages. They must not turn to base purposes the power that God gave them for high and sacred ends. They may not squander their power of love on chance acquaintances or casual corners when that love is meant some day to be the greatest natural influence in their lives. Even in their thoughts they must regard themselves and those whom they meet as sacred and the power that God meant to be used through the sacrament of matrimony as a splendid and holy thing.

If the modern world is guilty of any heinous sin against the race, that sin is the sin against youth. Deliberately, viciously, it has set itself to persuade young people that there is something essentially amusing or funny or unimportant about the waste of love and the misuse of God's communicated power. It presents love as a light and trivial thing that can be squandered or flung away without regret; what was once called sin is not important; the silly and sinful loves towards which youth feels drawn can be admitted without harm. In the new order of things, self-restraint is out of date, and promiscuous kissing, the sacred signs of affection, the beautiful intimacies of married life, are thought quite allowable to the unmarried.

But a new order of things cannot diminish either the sacredness of marriage or its importance for the future of the world. And an attitude which makes love common, even where there may be no serious sin, is an attitude that does terrible damage to the human race. Young people who fling their love and the signs of love to every chance corner are killing the possibility of their ever loving deeply and truly. Young men come to marriage soiled and sullied, asking and expecting of the girl they marry a purity that they themselves are not able to give. Young women, even when they stay clear of the depths, allow their love to become staled and themselves to become shopworn by yielding to any passing fancy that may attract them.

It is perfectly natural that a world that thinks slightingly of marriage and simply forgets its sacred character should think conduct before marriage unimportant. Experience shows how important it is. The young man and woman who bring to marriage a fresh, unspoiled love and hearts that have not grown old in sin, who realize the sacredness of marriage and the greatness of their responsibilities and privileges, have everything in their favour. Marriage for them should be and probably will be happy. They can look into each other's eyes without seeing there the troubled remembrance of sinful loves. They can some day look into the calm faces of their children and ask them to lead sweet, clean lives without the

fear that their children's scrutiny may discover the fact that they are asking what they never practised. People who regard love lightly before marriage are likely to regard it lightly after marriage. If an errant affection is lawful before, it will be lawful after. If love was squandered on anyone who asked for it, on the boy one met at the dance or the girl whom one took home from the party, it will not be so likely to be content with the monotony of one partner in the narrow confines of a restricting home.

FOOLS RUSH IN

Marriage is so serious and important a thing that rushing into it on a day's acquaintance is one of the most striking instances of how insane human beings can become. A susceptible young man meets a girl who looks so pretty as she listens in rapt wonder to his words of wisdom that one perfect afternoon with her at the seashore convinces him that she is the only woman fit to share life's trials and tribulations with him. He forgets that a seashore is not exactly like a bungalow and that he is not even sure whether the peaches-and-cream complexion is nature's gift or art's contribution. Nevertheless they dash off, buy their marriage licence, and, without any real knowledge of each other, bind themselves for life.

No wonder that such impromptu marriages end wretchedly. A man who would take into his business, on equal terms and with full responsibilities and privileges, the attractive stranger who talked so entertainingly in the smoking room would rightly be committed to the care of his relatives. Yet we see young men and women actually giving more care and attention to the selection of a motor car or a golf partner or a hat than they do to the choice of a wife or a husband.

At least a three weeks' delay before marriage is demanded by the wise old Church. Impetuous youth must wait until the banns have been read, much as it may chafe at the delay. There is something pathetically funny about the young people who so deeply resent the three weeks' delay imposed by the Church. Three weeks in which to test love that must last through life seems unbearable; yet nuns spend six months of probation and at least another year of novitiate before they are permitted to take the first temporary vows of religion.

THE TRAGEDIES OF YOUTH

If Catholic young people stopped for just long enough to realize that the marriage they are entering is for life, that the glamour of courtship and honeymoon lasts for a day, while marriage lasts for years, they would hesitate before bolting wildly into marriage. For anyone with any experience at all knows how really seldom a boy or a girl marries the first person he or she has fallen in love with. Oh, the terrible tragedies of seventeen-year-old boys and girls who are so desperately in love that their parents seem like veritable tyrants when they are not all enthusiastic about an immediate wedding! They are so deep in the drama of their love that they grow sick with chagrin and thwarted hope when cruel delays keep them back from turning their drama into life. Then, after the lapse of six months or less, the "great love of their lives" has been forgotten or swallowed up in a new love quite as consuming, quite as hopeless, quite as certain of lasting forever. When this happens, as it does in almost every case, they do not thank the parents whose wise delays kept them from turning a charming comedy into a terrible tragedy. They are only hurt and chagrined once more to find that their parents and the priest they consult are not impressed with the new but again absolute necessity of rushing headlong into marriage.

Time is not always to be measured by days. In the case of acquaintanceship before marriage it is measured in opportunities for really knowing the person who is to sit across the breakfast table, occupy the same small house, and share one's sympathies, trials, joys, and sorrows for the rest of life. We do not get to know anyone at a dance or a weekend house party, or even in six months of friendship during which party manners and the sweetest smiles alone are allowed to appear. We only know people when we see them off-guard in their own homes.

A girl can tell pretty much how the man will treat his wife if she finds out how he treats his mother. He is not likely to be sweet and considerate to the woman he marries if he snubs his mother, disregards her feelings, sacrifices her consistently to his caprice, and is utterly selfish and sullen in her house. By seeing a girl's attitude towards the home in which she has lived from infancy a man can tell quite clearly the attitude she will take towards the home he hopes to give

her. If her present home is a mere lighting perch where she pauses in flight as she dashes to and from the places that really interest her, if she is sulky and bad-tempered at home, candidly hates housework, and throws all she can of it on the shoulders of her mother, she will not make much of a wife. In her own little flat she is not likely to be content to “stick around all the time”; she will not develop a sudden and charming sweetness and contentment after years of discontent; unwashed dishes will not take on a sudden splendour in her own sink nor will she be any more cheerful over her own little gas range than she was in the family kitchen. Marriage does not work any miracles in dispositions, and we only know dispositions when we see them without the defences of studied politeness and a careful guard. The lovers’ defences are oftenest down in their own homes. Study that polite youth or that sweet maiden there.

THE UNCROSSABLE BAR

Almost any lack of common interest may, with mutual patience and the blessing of children, be bridged except the fundamental disagreement on religion.

When the Church legislates about mixed marriages, its motive is not a selfish one. Of course the record of mixed marriages is open to all who read; they are the greatest source of loss to the Church both of the Catholic parties to the marriage and of their children. AU-important as this is to the Church that loves the faith of its members, yet the Church goes beyond this consideration and thinks of the unhappiness which mixed marriages so often bring to the parties concerned.

Catholics who marry Catholics may find unhappiness. But Catholics who marry non-Catholics are opening for themselves much greater possibilities for unhappiness. And this is true for purely natural reasons. It is true that only a marriage between Catholics can begin at the altar, with Christ offered up for them in the Nuptial Mass and the blessing of God and the Church formally given to them as they kneel before the priest. The absence of this deprives the young couple of much supernatural help. But that is not precisely the point.

Religion is so fundamental a thing that difference here means the widest separation of minds and sympathies on a large group of essentials. If the non-Catholic is a Protestant or a Jew, he gives his allegiance to a system which denies flatly beliefs which the Catholic holds to be essential. That means that in the family, whenever the subject of religion comes up, there must be either deliberate and skilful avoidance of the subject or disagreement and dispute. If the non-Catholic is simply an unbeliever, the things nearest and dearest to the heart of the Catholic mean absolutely nothing to him. Again silence or controversy are the only alternatives, and peace must be maintained by dropping out of the couple’s mutual life the very thing most vital to the Catholic. Christ, the soul, eternity, the Church, the sacraments, are subjects simply taboo in their home.

LONELINESS

Loneliness is never easy to bear, but the Catholics who marry non-Catholics will face long and dreary periods of loneliness. They rise on Sundays or holy days and go off to Mass alone. Alone they kneel at the altar rail. They must find a time for confession that will not interfere with the plans of their partners. Christmas and Easter and the great feasts have an entirely different meaning for them, and they must keep their true celebration to themselves. Alone they go to Benediction or to the parish Mission. Even the social life of the parish is hardly open to them, for their non-Catholic husbands and wives would not feel at home in a thoroughly Catholic gathering. A Catholic triumph occurs; tact and consideration for the convictions of the other or the fear of precipitating a controversy keeps the subject locked up in the Catholic’s mind. A difficulty or misrepresentation is broadcast in the papers; the Catholic and the non-Catholic, because of tradition and instinct, find themselves on different sides.

Then, as the children come, new difficulties ruffle married life. If the non-Catholic party remembers the solemn promises made before the wedding and keeps the plighted word, the Catholic is indeed spared much pain; there is none of the quarrelling and heartbreak that comes to a Catholic when, because of relentless opposition, the baptism of the child is long delayed, his First Communion made difficult, and his Catholic education positively forbidden. But under the best of conditions the whole religious side of the child’s life, so vital to the Catholic, means nothing to the non-Catholic, and one of

the most beautiful bonds that unite parents, sympathy in the education and training of their children, is simply missing. Baptism, which to the Catholic is an act of tremendous importance, is more or less unimportant to the non-Catholic. The beautiful and solemn moment of the child's First Communion is without real significance to one of the parents. Though the question of Catholic education may find the non-Catholic yielding, none of the real reasons that make the Church keep God in its schools are either known or understood by him. And as the child grows, he begins to regard his non-Catholic parent with bewildered astonishment; he is taught that certain things are essential in their religious importance, while all the time he sees that they mean less than nothing to his own father or mother. A new rift has come to split the family.

NO COMMON VIEWPOINT

Religion is not the only subject that divides the minds and hearts of the parties to a mixed marriage. The very nature and meaning of marriage is subject for disagreement. The last twenty years have seen outside the Church the most astonishing change in the attitude towards marriage. To the Catholic, marriage is a sacrament; to the non-Catholic it is merely a civil contract or a religious ceremony without real significance. To the Catholic it is something that cannot be broken but must last as long as both parties are alive; to the vast majority of non-Catholics it is something that may be terminated by the very simple act of the divorce court. To the Catholic the primary purpose of marriage is to bring children into the world, and the frustration of this purpose is grievously sinful. Is it necessary to point out how widespread is the belief, expressed sometimes as freely by ministers as by unbelieving scientists, that one is quite free to have children or not, just as one chooses and the circumstances of the case warrant? And if one party wants children and the other does not, the misunderstandings, bitterness, strife, and actual split that follow are known only to a priest, who has heard the heart-broken stories of Catholic husbands and wives married to non-Catholic partners.

CHRIST'S MARRIAGE LAWS

For the Catholic, almost alone in this modern world, sees marriage, not through the eyes of some experimenter, but through the eyes of Christ Himself. And Christ's statement about divorce was certainly unmistakable and almost brutally outspoken. "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark x, 11, 12). Clearer words were never spoken, and in the face of them our courts grinding out divorces on any sort of pretext, from badly boiled eggs to adultery, are a direct denial to the Christianity of the law. Those who perform the marriage ceremonies of divorced people will have a hard time explaining to Christ just how they fail to co-operate with what He called by the unpleasant name of adultery.

The justification given to this clear setting aside of Christ's command is always the same: He could not have understood modern conditions; He was legislating for another age and for conditions far less difficult than ours. To say that Christ did not understand modern conditions is simply to deny that He was God or to say that the New Testament was something not intended for all mankind but for a handful of Jews living in Palestine.

As for our times being so much more difficult than those in which He lived, the fact is that He was flinging the gauntlet directly into the face of His contemporaries. Even had He been merely a human legislator, He could have seen all about Him the effects of easy and universal divorce. The divorce mills of Rome ground more furiously than the divorce mills of modern Paris or Mexico. Divorce was a common practice among the Jews. Even had He been merely a man, wisdom and experience would have shown Him that divorce had utterly failed to give happiness to the human race. The one hope He could see lay in a law that would make marriage a sacred and unbreakable union. Had He been merely a wise and experienced man He would have laid down this law.

But He was more than man, and He was making a law that would fit into His complete plan for the uplifting and sanctification of the human race. We can guess the astonishment of His times and how startling was the doctrine He preached from the fact that even His disciples answered Him with an aghast "Then it is not expedient to marry!" His contemporaries were quite as unwilling as the divorce-mad moderns to accept His law that man and wife are one flesh united in a bond that only God can break.

DENYING LIFE TO LITTLE ONES

No one is obliged to marry. God and nature left that quite clearly a matter of free choice. But when one pronounces the marriage vows, one accepts inescapable obligations. A man and his wife, it is true, may take a vow or agree to live as virgins, but if there is no vow or no intention to practise self-restraint, they must accept whatever children God sends them. Strange, isn't it, that children, who since the dawn of history have been regarded as the greatest blessing given a married couple, should now be regarded with suspicion and dislike? Perhaps it is not so strange; pagan, pleasure-loving generations in Greece and Rome formed something of the same conspiracy which has been launched so vigorously through the world today to keep children out of God's universe.

Our space is too short to allow us even to touch on the reasons which have made the Church fight so vigorously against this conspiracy. The conspiracy aims to persuade people that a crime against God and their own nature is quite permissible and justifiable. The false principle of which the Jesuits have been accused is being used now by the enemies of morality. They say that birth control is morally right simply because it is useful and expedient. A thing that is bad may, it seems, become good because it serves a good purpose; or the end justifies the means. Because the poor seem materially poorer when they have many children, because by children the rich are deprived of the leisure they might otherwise have, the thing which Roosevelt called race suicide is permissible!

When the earliest book of the Scriptures was written, God gave us the story of the first recorded instance of this crime, branded it once and for all as a horrible thing, and struck dead the man who perpetrated it. For it takes the noblest natural power that God has shared with man, the power of creation, and turns it into a means of mere sensual pleasure. It lowers wives to the level of harlots and knocks down the barriers raised for youth by the fear of the consequences of sin. It is, according to the best physicians, the cause of nervous disorders, cancers, and mental disease. And, like all noble things perverted, it leads to spiritual unhappiness. Where the husband and wife are deliberately shutting out of their lives their responsibilities to the human race, depriving God of the human souls which He expects to obtain through human marriages, and shutting the door of life in the face of unborn children, they can hardly expect that their marriage will be happy or sacred in the eyes of God or men.

In fact, if before marriage a couple agree to such a course, they are not, in the eyes of the Church, really married at all. Marriage is a contract, and a contract is not valid if the primary purpose of that contract is violated by those who make it.

THE GLORY OF CHILDREN

Of course children are often a trial and always a responsibility. Nothing that is precious or important is cheaply had or easily kept. Men can only stand reverently before the anguish which the birth of a child costs the mother. The agony through which she passes is in proportion to the importance of the soul which she is bringing to life. Christ paused to pay tribute to the woman who, while she was in labour, mourned, but who saw her sorrow turned into joy when her child had been born into the world. Because of their travail and because of the courage which they display through it, mothers have been regarded as heroically splendid.

Of course the education of children means that the father must deprive himself of luxuries and often of necessities, and that the mother must give her time and thought and leisure with unstinted devotion, cut down her legitimate opportunities for pleasure, and, often enough, see her beauty fade and her youth slip by too swiftly. If what they were doing was giving life to purposeless creatures of time, unimportant puppets of chance, animals not so much more perfect than their cousins or brothers the apes, no one would dare to ask them to make these sacrifices for the sake of the children. But since their children are so precious that Christ holds them in His arms, that God the Father adopts them as His own children at the baptismal font, that the Holy Ghost chooses their bodies for His dwelling place, and that they will live immortal citizens of God's kingdom, nothing is too much to expect, no sacrifice is too great to make for these astonishing objects of God's love.

A HAPPY ROAD THROUGH LIFE

What, then, shall the young Catholic man or woman think of marriage? Simply this: Catholic marriage is God's own sacrament, sacred as is the union of Christ and His Church. It is God's way of sharing with mankind His astonishing creative power. It can be and often is the union of two hearts who love each other at first

passionately, then sympathetically, then with the affection of kindred interests, and finally with quiet gratitude and understanding. It is the union of two wills which strengthen and support each other against the trials and disappointments of life. Because of this union two people gain the strength that one of them alone would not possess; they find greater depths of happiness and lesser depths of sorrow. It is the splendid avenue by which little children enter the world to take up life in the antechamber to God's heaven. It is the foundation of that home which God meant to be the training school for morality and holiness, the drill grounds of His little soldiers, the strong fortress against evil and sin.

After all, the best viewpoint from which to look at marriage is not that of the young couple looking forward towards marriage while all the brightness of the morning sun covers with false colours and hides under dazzling light the roughness of the road and the spearpoints of the enemy. The best viewpoint is that of the old couple who, just before they hear the Master's summoning call, look back along the road they have travelled. Was it rough? It did not seem nearly so rough when they were leaning heavily upon each other. Were there threatening enemies in the way? They faced these enemies with stronger courage because they fought side by side.

And who are those stalwart young men swinging so confidently along the same road? One of them holds a baby on his left arm, while his right circles the waist of his wife. One wears the habit of a priest. Another stops on his way to minister to the sick and wounded. One, alas has strayed from the straight road, but even now turns back towards it because of the remembered vision of his father and mother. These are their sons marching on their way to God. And who are these girls, one of them looking so like the Madonna, the other wearing the habit of a nun? They are their daughters, sweet and pure and lovely in a world that needs fair womanhood.

Then, as the voice of the Master sounds softly calling them, they turn with clasped hands, this old couple, to go towards Him. But as they go, they look with calm, undisturbed, fire-tempered love into each other's eyes and know that life has been holier, sweeter, more courageous because of the vows they took before the altar on the day of their wedding. Then, with the calm confidence of those who have lived well and achieved nobly and left behind them the record of crowded lives, they pass into the presence of that Christ who was the first guest at the wedding feast, the Lover of little children.

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