

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

2015

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

In general terms marriage is a rite of passage that formalises the desire of two competent adults to form their relationship into a lasting, exclusive commitment.

In Christian terms, marriage or married life is a vocation; a state of life in which one man and one woman are called by God to form a communion that enriches and fulfils their essential human nature and becomes a living expression of the love of God for humankind.

A RITE OF PASSAGE

- The time: couple required to be over 18 years.
- The place: a Church
- The participants: public ceremony-vows made in public, two witnesses, families, friends, priest or minister
- The charter: Orthodox, Catholic, regard marriage as a sacrament- ‘efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us’.

A RITE OF PASSAGE

- The set form: use of symbols-recitation of marriage vows, exchange of rings, lighted candle, scripture readings, drinking from the chalice, joining hands for vows, nuptial blessing, signing the marriage contract, saying of prayers, bride wearing the veil and wearing white.
- Role relations: move from children to adults to married couple, to parents, to being equals.

INFORMED BY SCRIPTURE

God created them in his image... male and female; he blessed them and said to them to be fruitful and multiply.

(Gen 1:27-28)

The Lord said, it is not good for man to be alone, I will make him a helper and a companion.

(Gen 2:18)

The Lord formed woman and brought her to the man. The man said, this at last is flesh of my flesh... this is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one.

(Gen 2:22-24)

A RITE OF PASSAGE

- The transformation: now these two singles from two separate families are united in love and in marriage form a new Christian family in which husband and wife are responsible for each other and their children.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

- A sacred life long commitment.
- Mutual relationship of love and sacrifice.
- In the Catholic and Orthodox churches, marriage is one of the sacraments.
- A monogamous, indissoluble faithful relationship
- A covenant relationship - a model of the love which Christ has for God's people
- A vocation
- The foundation of the family and the Church

INFORMED BY SCRIPTURE

Christianity's understanding of Marriage is informed by Scripture.

That men and women are intended by their creator to live as companions and helpmates in a mutually life-giving relationship.

INFORMED BY SCRIPTURE

This particular reference from the Hebrew Scriptures is reflected in the words of Jesus in Mark 10, Matthew 19 and the apostle, Paul in Hebrews 13, Ephesians 5.

‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female”, and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.’

(Matthew 19:4–6) (Mark 10:5-12)

INFORMED BY SCRIPTURE

Paul stresses the ethic of faithfulness in marriage:

“Marriage is to be honoured by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery.” (Hebrews 13:4)

INFORMED BY SCRIPTURE

Christianity's understanding of marriage is informed further by Paul's writing.

Paul's emphasises commitment and mutual service as essential to the nature of marriage, encouraging husbands and wives to *nourish* and *tenderly care* for one another as Christ does for his Church (Ephesians 5:21ff). Again the centrality of LOVE to celebrate the positives of a close loving relationship (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

In this respect marriage expresses the shared Christian belief in the living, faithful relationship that exists between Christ and the Church.

SIGN OR SACRAMENT

One of the key points of difference between Christian Churches with regard to marriage is whether marriage is sacramental in nature or not. i.e. whether it confers *grace* upon the participants.

The Oriental and Latin Churches understand marriage as a sacramental union; in which husband and wife are united not only by their own commitment but by a sacred bond created by God.

The grace proper to the sacrament of marriage perfects the love between husband and wife and strengthens their commitment to one another. (CCC 1641)

SIGN OR SACRAMENT

It is for this reason that these Churches encourage the faithful to celebrate marriage within the context of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the community of the faithful (*the sacramental and living Body of Christ*).

Eastern Orthodox Christians believe marriage is a sacred mystery and a sacrament. The link between husband and wife is closely aligned to the relationship between Christ and the church.

The Orthodox Church recognises the important role of the Holy Spirit in the marriage ceremony. The use of the crowns and the cup of wine are markers of the change of status for the bride and groom from single to married.

SIGN OR SACRAMENT

The Churches of the Reformation and the independent Evangelical Churches do not regard marriage as a sacrament. In part this is due to a different understanding of grace as the sole means of salvation.

Luther disputed the notion that grace in any way relied upon the co-operation of the human person. Salvation relied only on the faith of the Christian, which was itself an undeserved gift of grace from God.

ORIENTAL & LATIN

An expanded understanding of the Oriental and Latin Churches' teachings on the nature of marriage rests on four characteristics.

CONSENT ; UNITY ; FIDELITY ; FERTILITY

CONSENT

All Christian Churches require that the parties to a marriage must give their free consent, without impediment.

They differ on what constitutes a serious impediment.

Whilst all agree that consent requires mutual self-commitment without reservation Catholic doctrine precludes those who have been validly married from re-marrying whilst their previous spouse survives.

CONSENT

The Latin Catholic Church also recognises canonical impediments that other Christian Churches do not.

Latin doctrine teaches that marriage and holy-orders are mutually exclusive. Marriage is regarded as an Ecclesial order in its own right.

This is contrary to the practice of marriage in the Oriental, Reform and independent Churches.

UNITY

All Christian Churches acknowledge that a particular bond exists between two married persons.

Only the Latin and Oriental Churches believe that this bond is established by God.

This belief in the divine origin of this bond is central to the Catholic doctrine that the bond of marriage is indissoluble.

UNITY

This doctrine of indissolubility is the foundation of what the Latin and Oriental Churches describe as the Domestic Church.

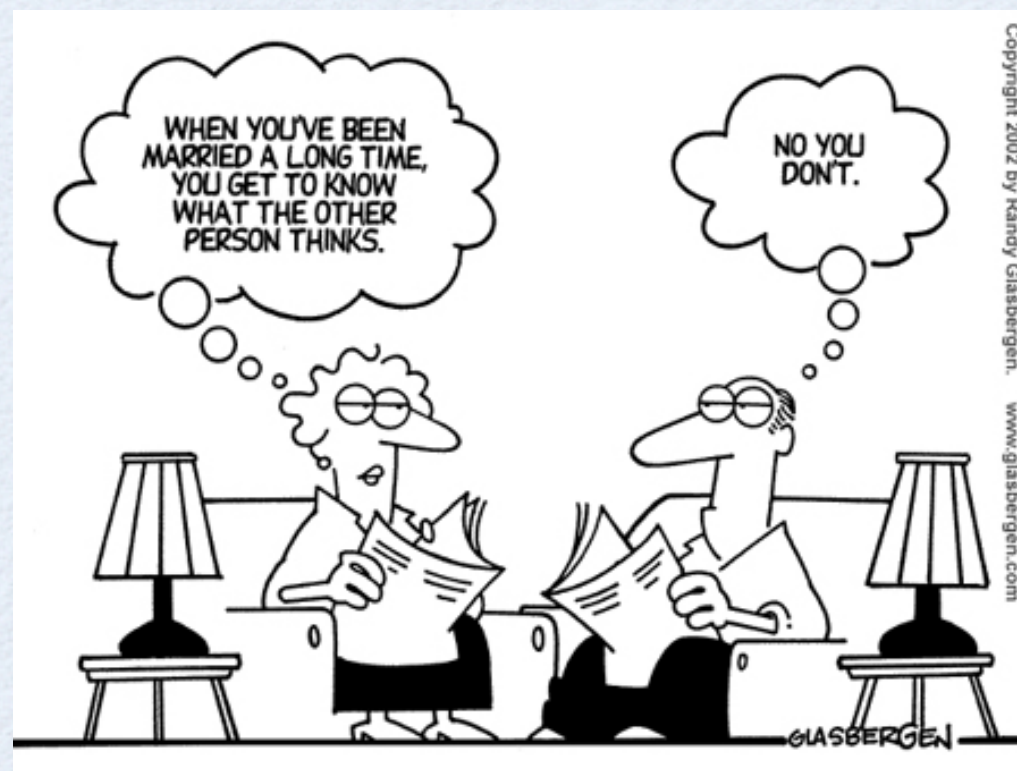
The marriage and subsequent family life of husband and wife stand as a witness to the fidelity of Christ to his Church.

Husband and wife form a communion that is in all respects a living representation of the Body of Christ.

FIDELITY

The basis of a Christian marriage therefore is a free and complete giving of oneself without reservation.

By definition this means that marriage entails an exclusive commitment from each partner to the other in an intimate union.



FIDELITY

This level of intimacy means that neither husband nor wife hold back any part of themselves from this relationship.



Catholic doctrine teaches that this complete self-giving is not a conditional or temporary state. Fidelity to one's partner is a total and permanent condition.

FIDELITY

In upholding this commitment husbands and wives are called to practice the virtues of patience and humility.



FERTILITY

‘be fruitful and multiply’

The Latin and Oriental Churches proclaim that marriage is by its very nature, ordered to the creation of new life.

The Latin Church in particular teaches that marriage must always be open to the possibility of new life, an expectation reflected in its marriage vows.

FERTILITY

Not all Churches take the same stance on this particular point.

Whilst all regard children as a gift and blessing from God some proclaim it is the right of husband and wife to choose when or whether to have children.

However, most agree that a stable and loving marriage is the proper context in which to raise children.

THE INDIVIDUAL

The significance of marriage in the life of the individual rests on the scriptural understanding that husband and wife are no longer two but one. There is a structure of their lives as a couple, parents, children.

Each partner in the marriage makes a commitment to place their whole self in the hands of the other; to consider the other in all that they do. It elevates the mundane to the supernatural.

The Christian does not lose themselves in marriage; they become a part of something that enriches their life beyond self-interest. It is a way of holiness. Their relationship should reflect the everlasting love that God has for the Church through Christ.

THE COMMUNITY

As the ‘body of Christ’ the Christian community is relational. They affirm their Christian beliefs and the central beliefs about marriage are made clear through the rite itself.

The selfless love that husband and wife are called to live out is *challenging* and *demanding*.

The Christian community is called upon to acknowledge, support and encourage the couple in this commitment; the human conditions of suffering, joy and bereavement. To pray for them and to give witness to the unconditional love of God. The marriage vows “for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part”.

EXPRESSION OF BELIEF



The language of the various marriage rites identify wedding rings as symbols of fidelity and unity. The exchange of rings does not effect the marriage, it symbolises the commitment to a new and significant relationship.

The crowning ritual of Oriental Christians is symbolic of the belief that in marriage husband and wife share in the glory of God's kingdom and undertake the sacred responsibility to bring about the kingdom in their '*domestic Church*'.



EXPRESSION OF BELIEF



The Nuptial Blessing or Solemn Blessing (*Latin and Oriental Churches*) expresses the belief that men and women are intended by their creator to live in loving union and are united together in a sacramental bond created by God.

*Stretch out now your hand
upon your servants, whom
you have joined together.
Unite them in mind and wed
them into one flesh.*

Greek Orthodox

*By your plan man and woman
are united and married life has
been established... keep them
faithful and let them be living
examples of the Christian life.*

Latin Catholic

EXPRESSION OF BELIEF

When a couple marry in the Christian Church, the ceremony speaks of love, permanent commitment, fidelity, openness to children and perseverance in good time and bad.

It is these qualities which make marriage a unique relationship.

There is no other human relationship which requires so total a commitment between two people.

SHAPING A RESPONSE

(a) Outline ONE significant practice within Christianity drawn from the following:

- Baptism
- Marriage ceremony
- Saturday/Sunday worship

Essentially the outline question asks you to say in general terms what the practice is.

At its most basic what is marriage? (Without reference to any specific elements of the practice or sources of teaching)

Marriage is a rite of passage in the Christian community as it is in the secular world. The characteristic that sets it apart is the belief that God calls men & women to form a lasting union that reflects the love of Christ for the Church. In this way Christian marriage is a vocation through which Christian men & women are drawn to live out more fully their essential human nature and grow in holiness.

SHAPING A RESPONSE

(a) Describe the significance for the **individual** of ONE of the following Christian practices:

- Baptism *more detail*
- Marriage ceremony *specific characteristics*
- Saturday/Sunday worship

(b) Explain the significance of the practice outlined in part (a) for the Christian **community**.

*Show the relationship
- how or why*