J.M.J.

The Theology of Marriage
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The theology of marriage in the Catholic Church is rich and multi-faceted. In the modern world, marriage has been privatized, involving the man and the woman and perhaps their family. The theology of marriage found in the Church differs from this modern concept of marriage.

Marriage is more Than Just a Private Affair

In the theology of the Catholic Church, marriage is much more than an agreement, contract, or commitment between two people. We are made in the image of God, and since God Himself is a communion of three persons, we are thus built for communion.¹ Therefore, because we are made in the image of the Triune God, we will only realize our full humanity when in communion, and hence marriage furthers a man and a woman in becoming more fully human (FC 11). In addition, a husband and wife are called to give to each other total self-donative love (FC 11, 19, 20, 22, 32). This “total mutual self-giving” love (FC 19) is in imitation of the love of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.²

The sacrament of marriage is bigger and goes beyond the husband and wife and their family. Marriage is modeled on the union between Christ and His Church³ (FC 13, 19).

Moreover, marriage is a “participation” in that covenantal union between Christ and His Church (GES 48, FC 20), and “married love” is founded in, and strengthened by, divine love (GES 48–49, FC 57). Not only is marriage a “reflection” (GES 48, FC 50), “sign” (FC 13), “image” (FC 19), and “symbol” (FC 80) announcing to the world the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church, marriage is also a sign of the love of God for each individual (FC 20) and a testament to the presence of Christ in the world today (GES 48).

**Husband, Wife, and the Church**

Marriage is more than just a relationship between a man and a woman and their family, because the Church also plays a fundamental role in marriage. In order to properly understand itself, the family must see itself in light of the Church (FC 49). The family is not insular and alone; rather, the Church reaches in and guides the family (FC 49). The grace from the sacrament of marriage stays with the couple throughout their marriage (FC 33), and the familial relationships are built up through the Church by way of the family members’ reception of the sacraments (e.g., the Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation) (FC 50, 21, 33). Not only does the Church play a role in the family, but the family plays a role in the Church, especially through its sharing in the mission of the Church (FC 49).

**The Two Shall Become One**

Marriage is not simply two single individuals living in an exclusive committed relationship (cf., FC 6). The husband and wife are not meant to be two independent self-sufficient individuals. Rather, the husband and wife are meant to complement each other (FC 13).
Through marriage, man and woman become “one flesh” (FC 19), and “where the flesh is one, one is the spirit” (FC 13). Marriage is more than just a partnership, it is meant to be a union on all levels, a union “of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul” (FC 19). It is a union that should become richer and deeper as the marriage progresses (FC 19). This union of husband and wife is meant to also develop into its own “community of persons” (FC 17–18). Furthermore, the family is not meant to be just a community, but is also meant to be an individual domestic Church within the larger Church (FC 21, 49).

**Marriage and Society**

The sacrament of marriage has within it a social and community element (FC 68). Married couples are meant to teach the world about marriage (FC 20). In addition, married couples are called to witness to and serve life (FC 28). One way to do so is through having and raising children. Children are a living "Amen" to God, rather than a contraceptive "no" to life (FC 30, 32). Through marriage and the family its members are brought into the larger family of humanity and the Church (FC 15).

Society itself affects the family. The family is not alone and unaffected by the external context in which it is situated. The trials and troubles which confront married and family life are directly related to the external structure (i.e., the broader society) in which the family is situated: "Without the Cross [we] cannot reach the Resurrection", and therefore "sacrifice cannot be removed from family life" (FC 34). In turn, families are themselves called to influence and interact with society.

Marriage is the foundation of the family (FC 14), and the family is the central building block of society itself (FC 42, 46; GES 47, 52). Parents are the primary educators of their
children (FC 36; GES 48) and the family is the “first school of the social virtues” (FC 42), and by acting as such the family builds up society (FC 36–38, 42). Furthermore, families are called to interact with schools and educators (40), participate in “social service activities” (FC 44), care for the less fortunate (FC 47), and defend and promote “the rights and duties of the family” through “political intervention” (FC 44). In addition, the family enriches society. Parents are providing to the world spiritual gifts through their children (FC 28).

**Conclusion**

The family is not meant to be “closed in on itself” (FC 64), but rather it is called to be involved in a dialogue with society. Marriage is an icon of the Trinity, and it stands as a sign of the bond between Christ and His Church. Hence, marriage serves as a witness, teaching society about God and the Christian Faith. Rather than being a private, insular affair, in Catholic theology marriage is understood as the cornerstone of society. In addition, married couples and their families are meant to interact and influence society, through the education and upbringing of their children, their care for others, and their engagement in politics and other social concerns. From the Catholic perspective, understanding the role of the family in society is important because “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” (FC 88).
References

