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The Theology of Marriage, from the Second Vatican Council Onward
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The Union of Man and Woman

In the Sacrament of Marriage, a man and a woman enter into an indissoluble union.\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §1614–1615. Available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. Accessed March 29, 2019; for the sake of completeness, it should be noted that the sacramental marriage becomes indissoluble once it is consummated, e.g., Bevil Bramwell, The World of the Sacraments: The Catholic Theology of the Sacraments (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 417 (citing and quoting the Code of Canon Law, §1141).} The union is indissoluble because it is modeled on the union between Christ and His Church.\footnote{Bramwell, The World of the Sacraments, 448.} Since Christ will never break the union between Himself from His Church,\footnote{e.g., After His resurrection Christ told His eleven remaining apostles, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).} the marriage bond uniting husband and wife cannot be broken (except by death).\footnote{Bramwell, The World of the Sacraments, 416–417.} Moreover, Christ specifically taught that “what God has joined together, no human being must separate. . . . Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:9–12).

In this union brought about by the Sacrament of Marriage, the two become “one flesh.” Modern Catholic theology continues to hold to the words of Christ: “‘the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:8). Because the soul ‘animates’ the body,\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church, §364.} and the soul is the “form” of the body,\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church, §365.} and “the human body is the expression of the soul”,\footnote{Bramwell, The World of the Sacraments, 412; Roch A. Kereszty, Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology, 3rd ed. (Staten Island, NY: Fathers and Brothers of the Society of St. Paul, 2017), 441.} and furthermore the human person is both body and soul (i.e., the human person is a...
“composite being, spirit and body”); therefore this “one-flesh” union is at the level of both the body and the soul. Likewise, it is a union at all levels of the human person; one of the ends (i.e., purposes) of marriage is that the two form a union of “one heart and soul,” that the two form a “union . . . of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul.”

“Where the flesh is one, one is the spirit.” Married life is meant to be one shared life, rather than two separate individual lives.

Two Individuals, One Flesh

As mentioned above, human marriage is modeled on the union between Christ and the Church (the Body of Christ). Our individuality is not lost through our membership in the Body of Christ. ‘We are not joined to Christ in some type of hypostatic union.’ Neither is there some sort of Hegelian-type movement (i.e., where our individuality disappears as we collapse into God). Israel had been referred to as the spouse of God, and then this imagery was taken up into the New Testament with regard to the Church. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and this

8 Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2516 (emphasis added); see also, St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologicae, First Part, Question 75, Article 7 (e.g., “the soul by the nature of its essence can be united to the body, so that, properly speaking, not the soul alone, but the ‘composite,’ is the species.”).


10 John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, §19.

11 John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, §13 (quoting Tertullian).

12 Bramwell, The World of the Sacraments, 417.

13 Kereszty, Jesus Christ, 431–438.

14 I know I have seen this idea in a book or article, but for this revised version of this essay (post-coursework), I cannot find the exact source/citation for this idea; but see, cf., Kereszty, Jesus Christ, 431–438; Henri de Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, translated by Michael Mason (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999), 120–122.

15 cf., Kereszty, Jesus Christ, 301–307; put perhaps another way, the idea of ‘exitus’ and ‘reditus’ (coming forth from God, and then returning to God; with the coming forth seen as positive/good, and the returning seen as positive/good/joyful), should not be corrupted or misunderstood to mean that the ‘returning’ would erase our individual identity.
helps us correct for any inclination we might have to mistakenly see our individuality disappearing through our membership in the Church/Body of Christ, and it helps prevent us from mistakenly failing to see a distinction between Christ (the head) and us (the body).  

Similarly, the unique individual identity of the husband and wife does not disappear pursuant to the marriage union. In the classic Catholic “both, and” approach (e.g., ‘Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man’), the husband and wife are both two unique individuals and one flesh, joined at the level of the heart and soul. Furthermore, there is no marriage in heaven (the death of a spouse ends the marriage).  

**Made in the Image of God, Self-Donative Love, and Complementarity**

Humans are made “in the image and likeness of God.” God is a communion of three Persons, with the Father giving everything, including His Divinity, to the Son and holding

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16 I know I have seen this idea in a book or article, but for this revised version of this essay (post-coursework), I cannot find the exact source/citation for this idea; but, *cf.*, Kereszty, *Jesus Christ*, 431–438; de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 120–122.

17 Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, 7:1–3 (“Do you not know, brothers and sisters – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.”).

18 Gospel of Mark 12:18–25 (“Some Sadducees [ . . . ] came to him and asked him a question [ . . . ] Jesus said to them, ‘[ . . . ] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.’”)

19 Gospel of Matthew, 22:23–30 (“The same day some Sadducees came to him [ . . . ] Jesus answered them, ‘[ . . . ] For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.’”)

20 Gospel of Luke, 20:27–36 (“Some Sadducees [ . . . ] came to him [ . . . ] Jesus said to them, ‘Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.’”)

21 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §41.

nothing back,\textsuperscript{23} and the Son gives Himself back to the Father.\textsuperscript{24} It is this total self-donative love that husband and wife are meant to signify and emulate.\textsuperscript{25} It is especially meant to be manifested in the marital embrace, where the husband gives himself to his wife (holding nothing back), and the wife gives herself to her husband (holding nothing back). What was meant to serve as an image of the Trinity\textsuperscript{26} is reduced by contraception (and any other sexual act that is not open to life) to the use of the other for pleasure. Contraception prevents the total gift of self from occurring, corrupting what was meant to be an icon of the Trinity, and in doing so the spouses (one or both) treat the other as an instrument, a means to an end (i.e., pleasure).\textsuperscript{27}

Although individually and outside of marriage we are whole persons and not “half-made or incomplete”\textsuperscript{28} in their union as husband and wife they are meant to “perfect one another”.\textsuperscript{29} Each human being is in the image and likeness of God as an individual, but this image of God is also reflected in marriage.\textsuperscript{30} Man and woman as husband and wife are a communion of persons, and this mirroring of the communion of Persons in the Blessed Trinity is enabled through the

\textsuperscript{23} cf., Kereszty, \textit{Jesus Christ}, 412.
\textsuperscript{24} cf., Kereszty, \textit{Jesus Christ}, 415; it should also be noted that this “communion of the Father and Son takes place in the Holy Spirit” \textit{(Kereszty, Jesus Christ, 429)}.
\textsuperscript{27} cf., Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 417–418.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, §372.
\textsuperscript{30} Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 412, citing and quoting John Paul II, \textit{Mulieris Dignitatem}, §7; cf., Genesis 1:27 (“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”)
complementarity of the man and woman.\textsuperscript{31} “[M]en and women share in human nature in
different ways”,\textsuperscript{32} and the different “perfections of man and woman reflect . . . the infinite
perfection of God”,\textsuperscript{33} especially when the different “perfections” of man and woman are unified
together in marriage.

\textbf{Family and Children}

Not only is the relationship and self-donative love between the Father and Son meant to
be mirrored by the husband and wife, but marriage also mirrors the communion of Persons in the
Blessed Trinity in that just as the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son”,\textsuperscript{34} in God’s
intended design children proceed from the love between the husband and wife and their gift of
self to the other. In fact, marriage is ordered toward children.\textsuperscript{35} Through the sacrament of
marriage the husband and wife are “aid[ed] and strengthen[ed]” in their roles as father and
mother, which is providential given that they are specifically tasked with the education of their
children\textsuperscript{36} and the fostering of each child’s vocation.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{31} Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 412–414.
\textsuperscript{32} Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 413; here, it is again helpful to remember that “the
human body is the expression of the soul”, and therefore man and woman are not simply and
only different at the physical level, but rather man and woman are qualitatively different at the
very core of their being, that is, “a man’s body and soul differ from a woman’s body and soul”
(Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 412).
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, §370; Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 412–414.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, Part One, The Profession of Faith, Section Two, The
Profession of the Christian Faith, the Nicene Creed (Vatican Website). Available from
\textsuperscript{35} Paul VI, \textit{Gaudium et spes} [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world] (Vatican
Website. December 7, 1965), §48, 50. Available from
of the Sacraments}, 449.
\textsuperscript{36} Paul VI, \textit{Gaudium et spes}, §48; Bramwell, \textit{The World of the Sacraments}, 449.
\textsuperscript{37} Paul VI, \textit{Lumen Gentium} [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] (Vatican Website. December
21, 1964), §11. Available from
of the Sacraments}, 449.
Conclusion

Through the Sacrament of Marriage, a husband and wife enter into an indissoluble union, and they become “one flesh” on both the level of the body and the level of the soul. In addition, through the Sacrament of Marriage the husband and wife live out their being made in the image and likeness of God, and their union is meant to mirror the communion of the Blessed Trinity. Marriage is oriented towards children, and the Sacrament provides grace to the husband and wife to carry out their special obligations that come along with their parental roles.
References


