

Holy Matrimony, the Church, and the Mystery of the Gospel
Holy Matrimony as Gospel Re-Enacting: Addendum Two
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Introduction

How is marriage a sacrament? What makes a marriage, Holy Matrimony? What is the sacramental grace imparted by the Holy Spirit to the couple? What role does the Gospel play in marriage? How does marriage reflect the Gospel? What kind of love is the love that keeps a marriage together?

Holy Matrimony as Sacrament

The 1928 Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament, “An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same and a pledge to assure us thereof.” *The 1928 Book of Common Prayer* reflects the standard understanding of sacrament as accepted as first proposed by Augustine and received by the Reformational churches of the sixteenth century, however, these Reformed churches believe that only baptism and the Lord’s Supper are Biblical sacraments.

By contrast, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed the seven sacraments as decreed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563): baptism and Lord’s Supper with confirmation, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage, and Holy Orders also added. Thereby, the Roman Catholic Church defines a sacrament as:

Succinctly put, sacraments are visible signs chosen by Christ and celebrated ritually in the community of the Church to draw the Church into an experience of Christ's paschal mystery by means of liturgical actions enacted through the power of the Holy Spirit under the agency of the Church's ordained ministers.¹

Sacramental signs bring what they promise, in other words, the sacraments impart grace. The sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are physical, visible signs ordained by Christ for the encouragement, uplifting and spiritual comfort of the people of God in order to experience the presence and love of God. Scripture proclaims that the Holy Spirit takes material objects: water, bread, and wine, infuses them with grace, so that by the partaking of them, we experience Jesus, and are made holy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, these outward physical signs lead us into the experience of inward, spiritual truths of the Christian life.

The sacramental signs of Holy Matrimony are first, the priest/*minister* who affirms that both the man and the woman as baptized believers and who performs the ceremony/*form* according the proper rites of the Church Catholic. Second, the couple who mutually confer upon each other the Sacrament of Matrimony by freely expressing their *intention* as heartfelt consent before the

¹ “Sacramental Theology” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Gale Research Inc; 2nd edition, 2002), found at [encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sacramental-theology), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sacramental-theology>; accessed October 14, 2019.

Church. Third, the grace imparted gives spouses the power to love each other with the same grace with which Christ has loved His Church, therein the *material* principle, the nuptial blessing of the priest.² Last, this grace of the sacrament perfects the human love of the spouses and strengthens their indissoluble unity as it sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.³

In the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox churches of the East,⁴ Anglo-Catholic and high church traditions, marriage is affirmed as a sacrament of the church by which divine grace imparted to the couple who have entered into covenant union by the blessing of the Church Catholic's ordained clergy. A typical nuptial blessing will include words such as these:

"Look now with favor on these your servants, joined together in Marriage, who ask to be strengthened by your blessing. Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit and pour your love into their hearts, that they may remain faithful in the Marriage covenant."⁵ The priest or bishop asks for God's help in their relationship enabling them to "love, honor and cherish each other" that their home might be "a haven of blessing and peace."⁶

"The sacraments themselves are not the source of grace, in the sense of originating grace or giving rise to this spiritual power. Grace derives from God and the fully divine Christ alone."⁷ It's important to note that sacramental grace is not a quantity dispensed, but a Person known, loved, and experienced—Jesus Christ. In the marriage ceremony, the couple submits their relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord and asks for his guidance, strengthening, and empowerment to live lives that will glorify God and be an example of Christ's cross-bearing, sacrificial love.

Marriage was not considered a sacrament in the strict sense during the Patristic period or in the early medieval era. The word, "*sacramentum*," was first used by St. Jerome in the Latin Vulgate to translate the Apostle Paul's Greek word, "mysterion," or mystery, in Ephesians 5:31-32, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."⁸

²A sacrament is recognized by the Church Catholic to be valid and genuine when certain minimum requirements are met. These requirements contain these four signs: proper form, matter, minister, and intent.

³"Matrimony," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 889, 1219.

⁴"The practice of counting the sacraments was adopted in the Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholics. It is not an ancient practice of the Church and, in many ways, it tends to be misleading since it appears that there are just seven specific rites which are 'sacraments' and that all other aspects of the life of the Church are essentially different from these particular actions. The more ancient and traditional practice of the Orthodox Church is to consider everything which is in and of the Church as sacramental or mystical."—"The Sacraments, Volume Two: Worship," The Orthodox Church in America website: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/the-sacraments>; accessed June 01, 2019.

⁵Liturgy Office England and Wales, <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/OCM-Nuptial-Blessing.pdf>; accessed June 01, 2019.

⁶1979 *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1990), 431.

⁷Joseph P. Wawrykow, "The Sacraments in Thirteenth-Century Theology," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, eds., Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 222.

⁸The Apostle Paul uses the word, "mystery," in Ephesians 5:32, and five times in other places in the Letter (1:9; 3:3; 4, 9; 6:19), and in every case, the word means "God's hidden purpose that has now been revealed in Christ" (Clinton Arnold). By example, "He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to

At the time of Jerome, the Latin word, “*sacramentum*” meant a soldier’s oath of allegiance with implication that the loyalty being expressed is also a dedication to that particular Legion’s Roman god. *Sacramentum* did not carry the theological connotations later developed in the late Middle Ages. In Jerome’s time, the Latin word, *sacramentum*, certainly did not convey the medieval idea of imparting grace.

The idea of a sacrament imparting grace was not theologically developed until the beginning of the twelfth century by Hugh of St. Victor (1120-1141), “A sacrament is a physical or material element set before the external senses, representing by likeness, signifying by its institution, and containing by sanctification, some invisible and spiritual grace.”⁹

Theologian, Peter Lombard, wrote *Sentences* (1150), the first major theological work to give a definitive number to the sacraments: seven. Also, Lombard defines a sacrament as something properly understood as receiving grace from God. “Something can properly be called a sacrament if it is a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and exists as its cause. Sacraments were therefore instituted for the sake of sanctifying as well as signifying”¹⁰

Lombard was the first to include marriage in the list of seven sacraments in *Sentences*, Lombard’s ideas were later developed and made a fixture in sacramental thought by Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1274): “I answer that, A sacrament denotes a sanctifying remedy against sin offered to man under sensible signs. Wherefore since this is the case in matrimony, it is reckoned among the sacraments.” Aquinas accepted Lombard’s list and this list of seven was formally affirmed by the Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1545-1563).

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony developed as a doctrine over the centuries as the Church Catholic grappled with it’s responsibility as a community of grace ministering to everyday people living difficult, everyday lives. The Church through the sacraments touches each and every member with the person, Christ, at every key moment in their life: birth (baptism),

us the mystery of His will,” (Eph. 1:8-9). The mystery that was hidden, but now revealed, is that Christ died to make Jew and Gentile one people in God and he united himself to them as one Body. Paul is not using the word, “mystery,” as something hidden that cannot be explained. In fact, the reverse is true, Paul declares that God’s redemptive purposes are fully known in Jesus Christ. Therefore the word, “mystery,” is not referring to a sacrament which imparts divine grace to a married couple, but to the union of Christ with his beloved church. The word, mystery, in 5:32 is referent to “Christ and the church,” not the “leave and cleave” passage in v. 31. Paul sees in the creation mandate of Gen. 2:24 (v. 31) a physical illustration that as a married couple is united in body, soul, and mind, Christ and the church are united in Spirit. Therefore, Eph. 5:31-32 is not discussing the sacrament of marriage, but our union in Christ. Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 394. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* [The Anchor Bible] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 749. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 42* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990), 381. Ben Witherington, III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), Logos Edition.

⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis IX, 2, The Christian Theology Reader*, ed., Alister McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 298.

¹⁰ Peter Lombard, *Sentences, The Christian Theology Reader*, ed., Alister McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 299.

confirmation (adulthood), matrimony (marriage) and/or vocation (ordination), Eucharist (everyday life), reconciliation (relationship with God and others), and last, Holy Unction (death). Development of doctrine was a term used by John Henry Newman and other Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians influenced by his work to describe the manner in which doctrinal teaching has become more detailed and precise over the centuries, while later statements of doctrine remain consistent with earlier statements of faith and Biblical truth. Thus, the concept of Holy Matrimony, according to its supporters, is consistent with what the Church Catholic has always taught.

Marriage as Holy Matrimony

What is Holy Matrimony? How Is Holy Matrimony different from marriage? Matrimony is from the Middle English, the word developed in the the 14th century. The word, "matrimony," entered the English as a derivation of a Latin word through the French, "*matrimoine*." The Latin, "*Mater*," for "mother and "*mony*" the Latin suffix which refers to a state of function or role, "*matrimonium*." Thus, the root meaning of matrimony suggests "the action or state of that makes a woman a mother." The term highlights the idea of reproduction and procreation as centerpiece to the marital bond.¹¹

Many of us recall as a children, marriage eligible, young ladies being asked, "Are you ready to get married and have children?" The idea of an extended time of childlessness due to choice was not even an idea conceived in most young couples' minds. Marriage and children went hand-in-hand. After the introduction of birth control substances this expectation of "married and have children" changed significantly. Contraceptive birth control delayed children and even promoted the idea of childless marriages.

The concept of Holy Matrimony re-establishes the connection between a wife and motherhood as the Church affirms the original blessing of marriage found in the Book of Genesis, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" (1:28.)

During the European Reformations,¹² Protestants and Roman Catholic debated the number and nature of the sacraments. In the sixteenth century, marriage and Holy Matrimony began to be distinguished: marriage was civil and matrimony was church blessed. Matrimony meant that the solemnization of the marriage bond by a priest had been performed for the couple. Grace is conferred upon the couple as the church blesses the union and renders its support of their relationship.

The Roman Catholic Church began to drop the word, "marriage," for the phrase, "sacrament of matrimony" to separate itself from Protestant insistence that marriage was not a sacrament. The Council of Trent refuted the European Reformations' teaching that no special grace was imparted during the marriage ceremony:

¹¹ Scott P. Richert, "The Difference Between Matrimony and Marriage." Learn Religions, Aug. 22, 2019, [learnreligions.com/what-is-matrimony-542851](https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-matrimony-542851); accessed October 17, 2019.

¹² Cater Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, Second Edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

If any one saith, that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelic law, (a sacrament) instituted by Christ the Lord; but that it has been invented by men in the Church; and that it does not confer grace; let him be anathema.¹³

As the status of the European State churches declined in the 19th century, sacramental churches made a stronger and stronger distinction between marriage which was considered a civil rite by governmental authorities and Holy Matrimony, a sacrament of the church.¹⁴ In same manner, as so-called same-sex marriages, are increasingly adopted as law throughout the West, churches are grappling with how to define and distinguish Christian marriage from civil marriages. More and more sacramental churches are emphasizing the need for the church's blessing, and thereby, wholly using the term, Holy Matrimony, when referring to marriage.

Although most Evangelical and Protestant churches do not refer to marriage as a sacrament many of these churches retain many characteristics of a sacramental ceremony, and therefore maintain an "implicit sacramentality" to the covenant of marriage.¹⁵ The fact, that wedding vows are exchanged, the imagery of Christ and his church is maintained, and that marriage was instituted and ordained by God, and that an ordained minister is administering implies a sacredness to the ceremony and the institution that only Christ and his church can provide.¹⁶ Therefore, Evangelicals offer many pastoral insights into the institution of marriage that are at times overlooked by other traditions. One such insight is the concept of marriage as "gospel re-enacting."¹⁷

Holy Matrimony as Gospel Re-Enacting

What is New Testament marriage? The Apostle Paul says that marriage is to be a reflection to the world—be a model—that is, a tangible sign and symbol, of Christ's sacrificial, unconditional love for his people. In others words, our marriages, our relationship of husband and wife, are to visibly display to the world Christ's love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace. "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

In other words, people should be able to see in real life the Gospel before their very eyes modeled before them in the union of man and wife. "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."¹⁸ In the Gospel, we will recognize that our spouse is fallen and flawed, that our spouse is a sinner in need of grace and that each spouse has received saving forgiveness bestowed by a loving Saviour.

¹³ The Council of Trent, Session Twenty-Four, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony, Canon I.

¹⁴ "Matrimony," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 889.

¹⁵ Brent Waters, "Marriage," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, eds., Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 522.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Timothy J. Keller and Kathy Keller, "Cultivating a Healthy Marriage, Parts 1 & 2" [audio lecture], April 1, 2005.

¹⁸ Timothy J. Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (Penguin Publishing Group), Kindle Edition, 44.

If Christ forgave and granted mercy after such a great sacrifice to our spouse, how could we do less for our spouse? We should forgive our spouses and hold no grudges, understand failure and insensitivity, be patient with faults and gladly make sacrifices to meet our spouses physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Scripturally we are reminded that marriage is not about our wants, needs and desires, it's about loving your spouse sacrificially, loving him or her forgivingly, loving him or her unselfishly, loving him or her for the total benefit of the other person. As Tim and Kathy Keller remind us, "The Christian teaching [concerning marriage] does not offer a choice between fulfillment and sacrifice but rather mutual fulfillment through mutual sacrifice."¹⁹ Let your marriage be as the Kellers describe, "a gospel reenactment."²⁰

The Roman Catholic Pope, Benedict XVI, agrees with Presbyterian pastor, Timothy J. Keller, that marriage is the Gospel lived out.

The theme of marriage ... deserves special attention. The message of the word of God may be summed up in the expression found in the Book of Genesis and taken up by Jesus Himself: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Mk 10:7-8). What does this word say to us today? It seems to me that it invites us to be more aware of a reality, already well known but not fully appreciated: that matrimony is a Gospel in itself, a Good News for the world of today, especially the dechristianized world.²¹

The Apostle Paul reminds us the the living in the shadow of the Cross means living a sacrificial life placing Christ first, and by his enabling grace, serving others by this grace, as himself served. Jesus set aside the privilege's of being fully God, condescended to us in our distress and become incarnate in human flesh serving us to the point of death, death upon the Cross (Phil. 2: 3-8).

Conclusion

Therefore, when your spouse fails to love you as he or she should, or they are perpetually overlooking your needs, or they are insensitive to your desires, let the Gospel fill your heart with love for them. Allow the sacrament of grace to empower you to love them as Christ loved you in the Gospel. Jesus loved you even when you ignored him, his Word, and his grace. Jesus sought you, laid down his life for you, while you were only thinking of yourself. Since Christ loved you in grace, you can love your spouse in grace. Like Jesus, you see and know all the flaws and faults of your mate, and yet you will love them deeply anyway. That's "gospel re-enacting."²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰ Timothy J. Keller and Kathy Keller, "Cultivating a Healthy Marriage, Part 1" [audio lecture], April 1, 2005.

²¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Homily for the Mass for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops," October 7, 2012 quoted in Scott Hahn, *The First Society: The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Restoration of the Social Order* (Emmaus Road Publishing), Kindle Edition. Introduction.

²² Keller, *Cultivating*, 2005.