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Who Gets Married?

RT. REVEREND JOHN C. KNOTT*

In this world of advertising slogans and propaganda euphemisms, names and titles do not always mean what they appear to mean. The word Peace does not have the same significance to the Communist mind as it does to the Western man. The average American barraged by distorted advertising which claims that 400-plus horsepower in an automobile engine is designed for safety or that a new shaving cream will also relieve the seven-year-itch becomes understandingly cynical about words and their significance.

However, in the spirit of Christian simplicity may we suggest that the title of [this article]—"Who Gets Married?"—be taken at its face value. We are concerned today with the "who" of married people for the purpose of contrast. Actually, it represents a rather remarkable change in emphasis from topics and titles assigned at previous National Catholic Family Life Conventions.

Even a cursory glance at past proceedings will show that the major emphasis has been on the "what" of marriage. What is marriage; What is Christian marriage? The answers come back: marriage is a contract . . . marriage is a sacrament . . . marriage is an institution . . . marriage is a vocation. The Canon Law of marriage has been explained, the moral law of marriage from a Catholic viewpoint has been delineated.

What are the purposes of marriage? The primary purpose of marriage is . . . the secondary purpose of mar-

riage is . . . the relationship between the two is . . . the heresies of the past in regard to the purposes of marriage are . . . the distortions of the present are . . .

What are the forces opposing the achievements of the Christian ideal of marriage? Here are the present sociological pressures under which the Christian family must operate. Here are the false philosophical and theological concepts infiltrating their minds and affecting their attitudes and consequently their habits.

WHO GETS MARRIED?

The obvious answer to a simple question like "Who gets married?" of course is: people get married. People, of course, are human beings. This is true whether you are speaking in Connecticut or Texas. The answer to the question: "Who is a human being?" is not nearly as obvious as it may seem on the surface because here we are dealing with a mystery. We could very well explore the findings of modern psychiatry and psychology, which sciences can afford us many insights into the nature of the human person. In recommending this, I would also suggest that we explore the implications of the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of man. Theology can also offer its insights. Today I would like to refer to the basic course of theology that all of us have had in the Catechism. One of the first questions asked there is: "What is man? What is a human being?" The answer comes back rather easily and gli bly that a human

being or man is a creature composed of body and soul and made to the image and likeness of God. For our purposes I would like to refer briefly to two points in this definition. One is that every human being is a creature and, secondly, that he is made to the image and likeness of God.

That a human being is a creature means simply that he is the product of the gifts of love of other persons. God, conjoined with the gifts of love of human parents, gave him, the creature, the first gift of love he needed which was the gift of life. If it hadn't been for those three gifts of love of the Divine Person and two human persons, the creature would not have been born. He comes into the world dependent on the continued gifts of love of other persons, first and always of God; then, his human parents complemented by the gifts of love of brothers and sisters. No matter how long he lives, no matter how successful he becomes in society, no matter how well educated, how financially secure, how honored by his fellowmen, this creature is always going to remain one thing, a creature dependent on the gifts of love of other persons with one basic hunger about him; this is the hunger and need to be loved. This need to be loved is most apparent in the young child and possibly most easily met at that level. But there can never come a time in the growth and development of a human being when he can say that he no longer needs other persons. No matter who he is, he is always going to need at least the Person of God to answer the basic appetite, the need for love.

But if every human being is a creature with a basic need of being loved, he is also made to the image and likeness of God. "God," St. John says, "is love." If the human being is made to His image and likeness, he also

has one other need and this is the need to love, the need to give of himself to seek the good and happiness of someone else, even at the sacrifice of himself; in short, as they say in psychological circles, he has the need to be needed. This is a source of tension in the human being; that he is a creature with the need of being loved and yet, since he is made to the image and likeness of God, there is always in him the drive to do for someone else. In the natural order, the development of maturity is really the growth away from being loved towards loving. This is equally true on the supernatural level. Growth in sanctity consists in a growth away from self toward God.

Marriage then might be defined as a union of two human beings in a lifetime relationship in which gifts of love will be given by one according to the needs of being loved that is part of the nature of the other. The marriage manuals are always talking about adjustments . . . the financial adjustment . . . the "in-law" adjustment . . . the sexual adjustment . . . the tooth-paste adjustment . . . and so very few of them give needed emphasis to the basic adjustment away from the demands of self toward the gift of love to another according to his or her needs. This is why marriage is the business of adults because the mark of an adult is one who knows how to love and is willing to pay the price of love.

Our young people (and older people, too) want to and have a right to know how they are made. They need to understand some of the implications of the interplay of the needs of loving and being loved for their own happiness, the happiness of others and the glory of God. The Church, as the custodian of the treasury of Faith, can unlock some of the secrets

*Text of a keynote address delivered by Rt. Reverend John C. Knott, Director, Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, at a National Catholic Family Life Convention held in San Antonio, Texas.

of creation and can begin to paint in more glowing and vivid colors the glory of the Christian vision of man in his relations with others of the human species, especially in the vocation of love that is marriage. Parents with an eye to their essential role of leading their offspring to the independent status of the adult person, able and willing to love, will more consciously strive to sharpen the image and likeness of God in their children and thus prepare them better for the business of life, both temporal and eternal.

This is the business of education whether it be preparation for marriage or preparation for a living, whether it be formal education or more familial education. The engaged couple usually knows that they are in love. They do not always know how to love well, each other and God; since love is based on knowledge, each needs first an understanding of how to love himself.

UNIQUENESS OF THE HUMAN BEING AND THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Every marriage is a relationship between two human beings in which gifts of love will be given according to the needs of the one being loved. In this sense, all marriages are the same. In another very real sense, all marriages are different because it is a union of two unique persons. This is again another fact of creation that needs spelling out.

Each human being is not just *an* image and likeness of God with a gift of love but is the unique image and likeness of God with a particular gift of love that no one else in the world has but this person. At the moment of creation, God gave a part of Himself and made it to be this person and gave to him a unique capacity to love, a unique personality. As a creature,

each human being is born lonely; in a sense, lives a lonely life and dies a lonely death. It is also true that each human being has his own particular ache, his particular loneliness, his unique need of being loved. Marriage then becomes a lifetime relationship in which unique gifts of love will be given by one according to the unique needs of being loved that is part of the nature of the other person. Consequently, it is important for two people entering into marriage to have an understanding, first of all of themselves and, secondly, of the other partner. The strategy of love is not just in giving but in giving according to the needs of the one being loved. The giving is made even when there is no gratitude or appreciation or even recognition shown by the receiver. It is also part of the strategy of love to understand that if we all have needs of being loved, we also have needs of being needed. Sometimes the best gift of love is just the willingness to be loved by another in order that the image and likeness of love that is in the other might have a chance to express itself and develop. There are two elements in love: one is the giver; the second is the receiver. To whom is more gratitude due? To the one who gives we are inclined to say "thank you" and show appreciation, but I suggest that perhaps gratitude should also be shown to the receiver because if he hadn't been willing to receive this other person could not have given.

In human terms, we could say that one of the great purposes of marriage is the perfection of the personalities involved. In spiritual terms, we can say that the role of the married partner is to perfect the image and likeness of God that is in himself by the constant giving according to the needs

of being loved that is part of the nature of the other partner. Equally, that it is his or her role to bring out and perfect the image and likeness of God that is in the other partner by a willingness to receive according to the way gifts are given. In other words, when a man becomes a husband he does not cease to be a man or become less of a son or brother, but he takes on a brand new role which is to be the image and likeness of God, the Vicar of Christ as it were to this other human being. And when a wife takes on the role of wifeliness or wifehood she does not cease to be a daughter or become less of a sister or a woman but now takes on a brand new role, that of becoming Vicar of God, Vicar of Christ, to her husband.

It is the remains of the original sin of pride that must be guarded against else this unique relationship in every marriage can result in distortion. The husband called to perfect his wife can easily see this as a challenge to reform her and re-create her to his image and likeness. The wife interested in the perfection and improvement of her husband may attempt to refashion him to *her* image and likeness. This demand to be like God can destroy this love relationship between two unique persons.

SEXUALITY OF A HUMAN BEING AND THE SEXUAL UNION IN MARRIAGE

In answer to the question: Who gets married? It can be stated without fear of denial that human beings and unique persons get married. It can also be safely asserted that men and women get married. It may be true that boy meets girl and girl meets boy but for marriage it should be a man marrying a woman, or vice versa—as more frequently happens. This presents the challenge (we don't have

problems anymore): the challenge of sex.

If ever there was an age that needed a clear exposition of the facts of creation in regard to sex, it is this one. Primarily this is because ours is a transitional age, caught between the heresy of the past and a distortion of the present. There is as much ignorance about sex today when everyone talks about it as there was at the beginning of the century when no one talked about it. In either case, the Christian notion of sex has been lost in the shuffle.

The sexual heresy of the past has a Protestant version and a Catholic one. The Protestant version is part of our national culture and has its roots in New England puritanism. It also had its greatest growth in that section of the country. But we have not been selfish. We have exported it throughout the nation. The puritanical attitude is that sex is kind of shameful, not nice and certainly not respectable. And since we're a nice, respectable family, we don't have that nonsense in our house.

The Catholic version of the sexual heresy is part of our spiritual inheritance. There is a Catholic form of puritanism called Jansenism. This is a heresy condemned by the Church that had its flowering in France in the 18th century, particularly in the intellectual circles of the universities and seminaries. About that time the Irish were having more of their troubles and half of the Irish clergy was going to Spain for an education and the other half was going to France. Those who went to Spain came back unscathed; those who went to France came back saturated with Jansenism which has affected much of our Catholic thinking and attitudes in regard

to sex, love and marriage. To the Jansenist, sex is a dirty shameful thing. It is colored with guilt and with sin. It is bad before marriage but suddenly with the saying of a few words, and sprinkling a little holy water, it becomes permissible. To the Jansenist, marriage was permitted and sexual relationships were tolerated because there might be a worse evil.

Both Puritanism and Jansenism seem to have their roots in a misconception of God's creation. We read in the Book of Genesis that God created the Universe in six days and on the seventh day He rested. To the Jansenist and Puritan, it must have been on the seventh day when God was resting, and apparently sleeping, that this whole business of sex crept into the human picture. In the American Catholic you have too often a shot-gun marriage between the puritanism of his national culture and the Jansenism of his spiritual inheritance. Around the whole skeleton in the closet has descended a conspiracy of silence. We don't talk about it within the sanctity of the home and certainly not within the hearing of the innocent ears of young children.

By way of reaction and going to another extreme—and all heresies are extremes—we have the distortion of the present regarding sex. It has been made to be most dominantly a physical appetite and strictly a recreational matter between two people. Advertising sells everything from cigarettes to coffins with a physical display of sex. Movie ads exploit it; cheap literature wallows in it. A revolt against the cheapness, the sordidness, the neuroticism and the decadence of sex has already set in and may develop such proportions that it will result in another heresy, a denial of the body.

Research shows that many of our Catholic young people have develop-

ed two codes of morality: one they parrot back to their parents and teachers; another one according to which they live.

There is a Christian concept of sex that says against the heresy of the past that sex is good because it is made by God. It is sacred because it is concerned with life, either with the initiating of it, as in the birth of the baby, or in the completion of creation as in the marital union. Against the heresy of today that says it is but a physical thing, the Christian notion insists that there is a mystery to sex; that a man is not a man because he has a certain type of physical reproductive system. His biology does not make him a man; it merely indicates the fact that he is a man. He is also a man emotionally and spiritually. Sex is a mystery which colors his total personality. The same applies to a woman.

The physical gift of sex is good in itself but not by itself. The gift of one body to the other that is a human thing must be expressed as a total gift of one person to another; the mind thinking, getting to know; the will choosing what is good; the heart understanding, now expressed in the gift of one body to the other. The Christian notion simply is that in his sexuality a man is made to the image and likeness of God; that he gives his gift of manliness back to God as a gift of love by giving it to his wife according to her needs of being loved as a woman. In turn, she gives her gift of womanliness back to God as a gift of love by giving it to her husband according to his creature needs of being loved. Sex as a human thing must be bound up with love, otherwise it becomes merely this physical appetite which in time becomes destructive of the human relationship between two persons.

It is equally important to see sex not only in its human relationship but also in its relationship with God. He is the alpha and omega of sex, the beginning and end. Every man, by reason of his manliness, is meant for paternity. It is his share and participation in the creative love that we ascribe to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity. Every woman, by reason of her womanliness, is meant for maternity. It is her share and participation in the creative love of the First Person, God the Father. Pope Pius XII shortly before he died referred to the First Person as the Mother-Father-God. To the First Person we ascribe all creative love. In a sense He designates half of it for human consumption and gives it to the man—manliness, meant for paternity—and the other half to the woman—womanliness, meant for maternity. Every man is meant to be a father whether he is married, single, or a religious. And every woman, by reason of her womanliness, is meant for maternity, in whatever station of life. Some are called to initiate creation as in the father or mother of a child. Every human being by reason of his or her sex is called to at least perfect the order of creation through the gifts of manliness and womanliness, at least in the psychological and spiritual order.

In regard to sex, two things are needed by our people today. One is a Christian vision of sex so that they see its connection with God. Secondly, there is needed an awareness of the reality of sex so that they can begin to understand the depth and strength of this drive and instinct. Our teenagers need this understanding because they are living in a sexualized age. Our married people need it, that they

might use the gift of sex for their own happiness and the perfection of others and the glory of God. Through the proper use of sex they then achieve the double purpose of marriage: the making of each other better lovers of God and the giving to Him more lovers of Him in their children.

MAN REDEEMED AND REDEEMING

In creation God gives us human life through which we can enter into a love relationship with another human being. Through grace, God gives us His own life, enabling us to enter into a love relationship with Him. Because of grace we can love and be loved by Him.

The presence of grace essentially changes not only the love relationship between a human being and God but also that between two human beings. Two baptized Christians entering into the sacrament of marriage enjoy an essentially different relationship than the unbaptized married couple next door. In externals, both couples may seem to be the same—same street, same mortgage, same economic status, same number of rooms, even the same number of children. But with the Christian couple, every gift of love one partner makes to the other is not only a human, unique or sexual gift, but also a gift of God. They become channels of the life of God to each other; they were priests to each other at the moment of their wedding; they remain priests to each other their whole lifetime through.

They, with God, give human life to their children. Through their continued gifts of love they perfect that life and continue the process of creation. But living the life of grace they

also give God to their children. Too many parents who would be horrified and angry at charges of malnutrition and maltreatment of their children in the natural order, are yet starving them to death in the spiritual order because of sin in their own lives.

As Christ on the Cross secured grace for all of us, so married people secure grace for each other and parents secure it for their children. We are talking about man redeemed but also redeeming.

CONCLUSION

So, human, unique and sexual beings get married—that's who. But they are also redeemed, called to live with each other, not only in the natural order of love but in the supernatural order, directly with God. If they are willing to throw away their spiritual birthright of love-union with God, it is oftentimes because the earthly "mess of pottage" is more attractive. Perhaps we in the teaching Church will be judged more severely by God than they because *our failure to show God in His beauty is greater than their failure to see Him.*

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