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Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization

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McCarthy, A. (2016). *The Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization*. *Pastoral Liturgy*, 46(3), 13-14.

Ouellet, Marc Cardinal. *Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization*. Translated by Michelle K. Forras and Adrian J. Walker. Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015. 332 pages.

The focus of this substantial book on the theology of the Sacraments of Marriage and Eucharist begins with the difficulties facing marriage and families in our rapidly changing world. Where *Gaudium et Spes* outlined this as an area of pastoral imperative, Pope Francis has strongly supported these concerns by establishing the synodal process to examine the problems and possible solutions whose conclusions have not yet been published at the time of writing.

As a systematic sacramental theology this book is based on very thorough investigation of the patrimony upon which it is based. The long history of sacraments have taken varied paths and the Second Vatican Council called for a complete renewal of the understanding and the liturgical expression that would bring the faithful to more deeply understand and more richly express through liturgy the mystery of the revelation of God's self-communication to humankind. Ouellet sets out to form theology "from below" that uses the "new contributions in ontology, anthropology, linguistics, or semiotics"(9) and that then combines with a theology "from above" and so offers an integrated whole. The book progresses with the underlying premise that there is a "trinitarian logic that covers the kenotic and eucharistic gift of Christ" (13).

The developing understanding of sacraments having both Christological and ecclesiological dimensions is thoroughly examined in this book as the experience moves from something that is dispensed by the Church to something that is experienced communally with the embracing love and mercy of God.

Part One presents an understanding of the mystery-sacrament of marriage. The way that marriage and covenant is revealed through the Old Testament is explored and even though there are suggestions that the image of God is not always reflected in the ancient experience of marriage, the reality of marriage as a political engagement and connection that provides power is not really given credence. To be a bride is to be possessed by the bridegroom, for Israel to be the bride of God is to be owned by God and therefore protected by God. This can be problematic in a biblical foundation for the mystery of the sacrament in our contemporary world. The use of the New Testament in exploring the biblical nature of covenant and the nuptial symbolism can be more fruitful and Ouellet suggests that the paschal mystery is "the ultimate foundation of the sacramentality of marriage" (36).

The view of marriage within the Catholic Tradition is explored from the Fathers of the Church through to Vatican II. This is a very useful historical view which is always valued as an academic text. Marriage is therefore seen in the context of being the first sacrament, the way in which God created humankind to enter into the life of God through the creative union of woman and man through their own volition. Also, such a relationship also is part of the mystery of the incarnation and the indissoluble bond between Christ and his Bride, the Church. Finally, it is a relationship that draws from within the relationship the grace, the very life of God. Alongside this historical view, a thorough historical view of marriage as a cultural contract would also prove valuable as the confusion in our contemporary world could be excised with some clarity.

The ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the woman and man who come of their own free will, as fully baptised people into the life of Christ and the Church, to give themselves in marriage. The confusion amongst the clergy in regard to this position is made obvious by the liturgical expression. So many clergy insist that the bride and groom take the lower place (bottom step) and repeat their vows after the priest with their backs to the community of loving people who support them. While this might be pastorally necessary in some cases, if the marriage preparation, and particularly the liturgical preparation, takes place well and truly before the event, the vast majority of intelligent people are capable of being fully the ministers of the sacrament. Some small items of assistance, such as a card with the words held before them, might well express the symbolism of this incarnational event to the benefit of all who are involved. The priest blesses and officiates for the legal purposes of marriage but the rite is so badly presented in most circumstances that I have witnessed that it loses its meaning within the community.

The unfolding of "Part Two: The Theology of Marriage and the Sacramentality of the Church" and "Part Three: Triinity and Nuptiality: Toward a Eucharistic Theo-Drama of the Nuptial Mystery" is carefully arranged and considered in great detail, all valuable and reaching towards a conclusion that links the Eucharist and Marriage

through an understanding of the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church that is then mirrored in the spousal relationship.

In many respects this is beautiful, systematic theology that is grounded thoroughly in the continually growing understanding of the presence of God in the world. A criticism is the lack of inclusive language, in this third millennium surely that is a requisite of theology. That may be a translation issue but it is a neglectful stance. The other difficulty is that the theology expressed shows a complete remoteness from the lived experience of marriage in our contemporary world. The Church needs to nurture family life in ways previously unknown since we have been rocked by sexual abuse scandals that have driven people away. The interpretation of marriage by contemporary society is not just a problem, it is a reality and Christian marriage has to find its valued place.

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