

**Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant:
A New Model for Pre-Marriage Education based upon the Rite of Marriage**

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To Helen who has taught me sacramental marriage for more than forty years

Declaration

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

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Abbreviations

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i>
GDC	<i>General Directory for Catechesis</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
PME	Pre-Marriage Education
PSM	<i>Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage</i>
RM	<i>The Rite of Marriage</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Consilium</i>

Abstract

The Catholic Church has long proclaimed the importance of pre-marriage education for the benefit of spouses and of society. It requires that education on the Rite of Marriage be part of the immediate phase of pre-marriage education so that the bridegroom and bride may receive greater benefit from the celebration of the sacrament. The terms ‘sacrament’ and ‘covenant’, which are central to the Church’s teaching on marriage, lack meaning for many Catholics and particularly for the young.

The current emphasis on New Evangelization includes a call to find new ways to speak to an increasingly secular society. One challenge facing the Church as it seeks to clarify the meaning of marriage is to develop a new model of pre-marriage education which communicates the Church’s teaching on sacrament and covenant in a manner which speaks clearly and effectively to the culture of today.

This thesis develops a new model of pre-marriage education using the method of liturgical theology to identify the fundamental official meanings (theology) of the Rite of Marriage and to compare those meanings with the meanings couples derive from the experience of the rite. This study is limited to the Catholic Rite of Marriage as it is enacted within the Australian context.

Pre-marriage education provides an opportunity to assist couples to gain a greater understanding of the official meanings of the Rite. The thesis concludes that should the couple then choose to enact the Rite in greater accord with those official meanings, the communicative potential of the ritual can be enhanced.

This work has a direct application to pre-marriage education and also contributes to the reform and renewal of the sacramental theology of marriage today.

Chapter 1

Preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage: Encountering Christ's Mystery in Relationship

The new church of St Eugenia at Kungstradgarden in central Stockholm incorporates the cross of the old church of 1837. Gold for the regilding of the cross was donated by parishioners. Among the gold objects the people contributed were many wedding rings: old wedding rings that testified to lifetimes of love and honour, and newer wedding rings that witnessed to the pain and sorrow of broken marriages. All Christian marriage is linked to the cross, the great symbol of love, sacrifice, forgiveness and healing: indeed, "married love makes present among mankind the same divine love made visible in the redemption."¹ The search for ways to support and strengthen marriage has been an issue for the followers of Jesus since they were first called Christians at Antioch and the importance of meaningful, practical, faithful and theologically robust pre-marriage education cannot be overstated when it comes to the promotion of Christian marriage today.

1.1 The Topic Investigated in this Research

The juridical definition of marriage as a "covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, [and which] has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the

¹ "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage", Pontifical Council for the Family http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_13051996_preparation-for-marriage_en.html (accessed April 10, 2013). (Hereafter PSM), article 25.

baptized,”² has immense personal and social consequences. The Catholic Church teaches that “the well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.”³ It follows then that effective preparation for marriage is a critical issue for spouses and for human and Christian society.

Inspired by the Church’s official definition of marriage this thesis presents a model for more effective pre-marriage education emphasising the two key concepts of sacrament and covenant. It responds to Julie Hanlon Rubio’s call for a reinvigoration of the language of marital sacrament and covenant in theologies of marriage so that both imagination and commitment are inspired in those preparing for marriage.⁴ This thesis also seeks to “fine tune our traditional language about the nature and purpose of marriage and to do so in ways that reach the hearts and minds of couples today,” as called for by Australian pastor and theologian Anthony Mellor.⁵

A key aim of the thesis is to find ways to optimise the experiential learning potential of the marriage liturgy through more effective pre-marriage education. It will suggest that explicit education about the marriage liturgy supports and complements the learning that is implicit in the experience of the rite. The goal here is similar to that which Kathleen Hughes sets herself in *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament*, namely, to assist worshipers “to understand and love the liturgy more, to participate more thoughtfully

² "Code of Canon Law" http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/___P43.HTM (accessed April 21 2014). Can. 1055 §1

³ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium Et Spes*)" http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed April 1, 2013). (Hereafter GS), article 47.

⁴ Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Marriage as a Covenant and Sacrament," in *Promoting and Sustaining Marriage as a Community of Life and Love”: A Colloquium of Social Scientists and Theologians* (Creighton University, Omaha NE: 2005), 2.

⁵ Anthony Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," *Liturgy News*, no. September (2011): 5.

in its celebration and to embrace the commitments they make to a way of life and to a vision of God each time they say ‘Amen’”.⁶

The goal of the thesis aligns well with what Kevin Irwin has identified as a central task of liturgical theology, as applied specifically to marriage, namely, to connect (a) the experience of God and the Gospel values celebrated in the liturgy (*theologia prima*), through (b) systematic reflection on the liturgy (*theologia secunda*) to the implications of (a) and (b) for daily living (*theologia tertia*). In this approach the rule of prayer (*lex orandi*) informs both the rule of belief (*lex credendi*) and the rule of Christian living (*lex vivendi*).⁷

The thesis explores the development of a pre-marriage education model which educates participants in the rite of marriage, including the doctrine of marriage and family implicit in the rite, and guides couples to take an informed and active part in the marriage liturgy by emphasising their roles as ministers of the sacrament to each other. It helps couples to understand more fully the choices they may make (in concert with their presider) from the range of liturgical actions and texts that are currently available.

Margaret Mary Kelleher’s methodology of applied liturgical theology has been utilised in this thesis in order to develop an effective ritually-based approach to pre-marriage education. The *Rite of Marriage* has been described and analysed here in order to identify the fundamental official meanings (theology) of the rite (Chapter 2). This ritual analysis undergirds the ritually-based pre-marriage education (hereafter PME) model presented in Chapter 3. It also helps inform the participant observation element of this research wherein the marriage liturgies of a small number of volunteers who had

⁶ Kathleen Hughes, *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament* (Chicago: LTP, 1999), 1.

⁷ Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1994), 46.

completed the pre-marriage education program were studied, and subsequent interviews with those ritual participants were undertaken in order to provide data which enabled the further refinement of the PME model (Chapter 4). The final chapter of the thesis presents conclusions of the research and recommendations for further research.

1.2 Sources/Literature Informing the Study

The relevant magisterial materials on pre-marriage education and on marriage as covenant and sacrament have guided the development of the pre-marriage education model presented here.

1.2.1 Pre-Marriage Education

In his 1981 Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (hereafter FC), John Paul II exhorted the Church to promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation including preparation to take an active and conscious part in the marriage liturgy. He stipulated that education on the marriage liturgy, including its liturgical actions and texts, should be included as part of the “immediate phase” of pre-marriage education so that the bridegroom and bride may receive greater benefit from the celebration of the sacrament⁸.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage takes up and reiterates the teaching of FC:

The immediate preparation for the sacrament of Marriage must find suitable occasions to introduce the engaged couple to the rite of marriage. As well as deepening the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family with particular attention to moral duties, in this preparation the engaged couple

⁸ John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio"
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html (accessed April 10, 2013). Article 66. The "immediate phase" refers to the weeks and months immediately before the wedding.

should be guided to take an informed and active part in the marriage celebration, and understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and texts (PSM #52).

The prominence that these documents give to the liturgy forms part of a common thread that runs through all of the relevant post-conciliar ecclesial documents beginning with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which Massimo Faggioli describes as the Second Vatican Council's most significant and consequential document because it has "rebuilt the vital connection between theology, liturgy and the life of the Church."⁹

1.2.2 Education, Evangelisation and Catechesis

This thesis presents a model for more effective pre-marriage *education*. The term 'education' occurs in the guiding ecclesial document, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, which explains that: "What is called *Preparation* in this document includes a broad and thorough process of *education* for married life which must be considered in the totality of its values" (PSM #10). Education in the sense utilised here is Christian education, which in the teaching of Vatican II:

does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person . . . but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced to the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of faith that they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth especially in liturgical action.¹⁰

The essential elements of this description are that growth and development of the human person are necessary, but not sufficient, components of Christian education; that

⁹ Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2012), 168.

¹⁰ "Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*)"
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html (accessed March 27, 2015). Article #2.

persons are *gradually* introduced to the knowledge of the mystery of salvation by guiding them from their current positions further into the mystery; and that the central place for learning how to worship is found in *liturgical action*.

The term ‘education’ as used in PSM, refers to a broad process of facilitating learning which encompasses evangelisation (including witness) and catechesis (including liturgical catechesis). The terms education, evangelisation and catechesis are closely interconnected but distinct. Evangelisation and catechesis are intimately related as they “integrate and complement each other.”¹¹ Evangelization “is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.”¹²

1.2.3 Witness

Witness is an element of evangelisation. The pre-marriage education model presented here is designed to be delivered by married persons whose lives witness to their commitment to sacramental marriage. Witnesses are Christians who, “in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good” (EN #21). Presenters of this material witness by sharing elements of their experience of married life with participants.

¹¹ John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae"
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html (accessed October 10, 2014). (Hereafter CT), article 18.

¹² Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi"
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html (accessed October 15, 2013). (Hereafter EN), article 24.

1.2.4 Catechesis

Of the many components of education it explores, the *Declaration on Christian Education* gives primacy to catechetical instruction. Catechesis is education: “an *education* of children, young people and adults in the faith . . . with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CT #18). This includes initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian married life. Initiating the hearers for particularly significant life events such as marriage requires special forms of catechesis for, “in such circumstances, people are disposed more than ever to seek out the true meaning of life.”¹³ The dispositions of those preparing for marriage provide a creative opportunity for catechesis.¹⁴

1.2.5 Liturgical Catechesis

The link between catechesis and liturgy forms a recognisable thread running through the relevant ecclesial documents: the liturgy is indeed “the privileged place for catechizing the People of God.”¹⁵ Catechesis is synergistically linked “with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ works in fullness for the transformation of human beings” (CT #23). GDC draws the task of liturgical catechesis from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*;¹⁶ it is to bring all of the Christian faithful to “that full, conscious, and active participation which is required by

¹³ Congregation for the Clergy, "General Directory for Catechesis " http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_dir-ectory-for-catechesis_en.html (accessed October 10, 2014). (Hereafter GDC), article 176.

¹⁴ Appropriate special forms of pre-marital catechesis are presented in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd pocket ed. ed. (Strathfield, N.S.W.: St. Pauls, 2000).(Hereafter CCC), article 1074.

¹⁶ "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) " http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed April 1, 2013).(Hereafter SC), article 14.

the very nature of the liturgy and the dignity of baptismal priesthood,” (GDC #85) which opens them to the possibility of transformation.

The transformative potential of the liturgy is neither automatic nor magical: the proper disposition of participants is essential, as SC explains “in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain” (SC #11). The PME model, presented in Chapter 3, supports couples who seek to develop proper dispositions to bring to their marriage liturgies.

1.2.6 The Importance of Personal and Social Contexts

Evangelisation and catechesis occur within a particular personal and social context:

Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, *adapted* [emphasis added] to the different situations constantly being realized . . . (EN #29).

Paul VI reemphasised the need for adaptation of evangelisation later in the same document, noting that: the methods of catechesis “must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned” (EN #44).

In its section on “Preaching the Gospel in the Contemporary World”, the *General Directory for Catechesis* also gives due emphasis to context: it stresses the need “to foster in pastors and catechists a greater consciousness of the necessity to keep in mind the field in which the seed is sown, and to do so with the *perspective of faith and mercy* [emphasis added]” (GDC #14).

1.2.7 Relating New Evangelisation, Education and Catechesis

John Paul II highlighted the importance of context in his call for a “New Evangelisation”, that is, new in ardour, new in method, and new in expression, as it seeks to proclaim the same Gospel message to an increasingly secular culture.¹⁷ Rino Fisichella, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, notes that adapting methods to new social and cultural contexts remains the central challenge for Catholicism, explaining: “the ‘new evangelization’ points to a different modality of fulfilling the same, identical and immutable command of Jesus to his Church, to bring the Gospel to all people. . . .*What is changed . . . is the mode of expression by means of which the same message is shared, in order to correspond better to the changed social and cultural context* [emphasis added].”¹⁸ This thesis investigates new ways that the revealed truth of marriage as sacrament and covenant may be more suitably presented and better understood today.

Exploring fully the connection between marriage preparation and the New Evangelisation requires significant research which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, some key linkages between PME and New Evangelisation are relevant here. PSM contends that effective pre-marriage education can be an evangelising experience for couples and, after marriage, the couple in their daily living out of the sacrament can provide a witness which itself contributes to the New Evangelisation (PSM #2,10). In challenging theologians to articulate the Church’s vision of marriage in powerful ways

¹⁷ John Paul II, "To the Assembly of Celam in Port-Au-Prince - Haiti (March 9, 1983)" http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1983/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830309_assemblea-celam_it.html (accessed April 1, 2013).

¹⁸ Rino Fisichella, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, trans., G.J. Woodall (Balwyn, VIC: Freedom Publishing, 2012), 63-64.

Rubio connects the same two aspects of evangelisation: “Christians will be energized in their faith and others will be moved to pay attention.”¹⁹

In 1988, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II stressed the importance of repairing the Christian fabric of society in countries like Australia where that fabric has been eroded by processes like indifference, secularisation and atheism. He acknowledged that this repair process “will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel”.²⁰

There is a tendency for participants in pre-marriage courses to view topics like those covering communication and conflict resolution strategies as extremely useful relationship skills quite separate from considerations of marriage as sacrament and covenant. A challenge for pre-marriage educators is to ensure that the topic of marriage as sacrament underpins and suffuses all of the other elements of the course. This may help couples to grow into the integrated approach to life of which John Paul II wrote.

In his treatment of New Evangelisation and the sacraments, Donald Wuerl deals with baptism, confirmation, Eucharist and reconciliation (which he endorses as *the* “sacrament of the New Evangelization”).²¹ Wuerl’s listing does not include marriage which has much to contribute to the New Evangelisation. He does, however, point to a need for research and teaching on core concepts like sacrament which have “little meaning

¹⁹ Rubio, 3.

²⁰ John Paul II, "Christifideles Laici " http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html (accessed May 15, 2013). Article 34.

²¹ Donald Wuerl, *New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2013), 56.

for the practicing Catholic and the fallen-away Catholic in a culture where rationalism prevails.”²²

In her work on how the celebration of the liturgy is both catechetical and educative, Veronica Rosier makes a similar point: “Liturgical celebration always lies at the heart of liturgical catechesis. This presupposes that catechesis flows from and returns to liturgy, and, in turn, moves people to new insights for conversion and commitment to evangelisation.”²³ According to Debra Dean Murphy catechesis occurs performatively within the liturgy, not didactically apart from it: which “makes all the more urgent the need to pay more serious attention to preparation for and reflection on the church’s worship.”²⁴

In his study of the integral relationship between liturgy and evangelisation, Timothy O’Malley concludes that: “liturgy is a privileged performance of evangelisation, one in which our humanity comes to experience the reality of God through visible signs.”²⁵ Liturgy *can be* “a privileged performance of evangelisation”, but the disposition of the participants is a vital issue. It follows that preparation for the celebration of the marriage liturgy should be placed at the heart of pre-marriage education on marriage as covenant and sacrament to enhance the possibility that the fruitful participation of couples in the liturgy will allow them “to experience the reality of God through visible signs.”²⁶

²² Ibid., 77.

²³ Veronica Rosier, "The Spirit and Power of the Liturgy: Understanding Liturgical Catechesis," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 83, no. 4 (2006): 402.

²⁴ Debra Dean Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," *Theology Today* 58, no. 3 (2001).

²⁵ Timothy P. O'Malley, *Liturgy and the New Evangelization: Practicing the Art of Self-Giving Love* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2014), 24.

²⁶ The thesis acknowledges that it is a theological fallacy to assume that the liturgy might fix all of the problems of marriage. However, it does endorse the argument that “the liturgist, the catechist, the priest and the bishop [and the pre-marriage educator], must seek concrete strategies for allowing the liturgical life of the church to evangelize in all of its fullness.” Ibid., 50.

1.2.8 Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant

According to the introduction to the *Rite of Marriage*, catechesis for marriage should include “the teachings on marriage and the family, on the sacrament itself and its rites, prayers, and readings.”²⁷ There is a large and rich corpus of material on the historical development of our current understanding of marriage as sacrament and covenant which is not directly relevant since the focus of this thesis is upon the current rite. Gerald O’Collins and Mario Farrugia outline an understanding of marriage by tracing the historical development of the sacrament and they also acknowledge the validity of presenting marriage in terms of how it is celebrated in Church life today: “The post-Vatican II reformed rite of Christian marriage sets out beautifully the Catholic view of this sacrament.”²⁸ This thesis focusses on our current understanding of the sacrament of marriage as it is celebrated in Church life today.

The most relevant magisterial materials on marriage as covenant and sacrament are those promulgated by the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar papal, curial and episcopal documents. The key conciliar texts are *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter referred to as SC), *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter GS), and *Lumen Gentium* (hereafter LG).

1.2.9 *Gaudium et Spes*

Bernard Cooke notes that GS “was not the final word, but it remains a most important word about Christian marriage.”²⁹ GS demonstrates both continuity and development with respect to Catholic teaching on marriage. In GS the Council reaffirmed

²⁷ *The Rite of Marriage : English Translation* 2nd ed. (Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1984).(Hereafter RM), x.

²⁸ Gerald O'Collins and Mario Farrugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 293.

²⁹ Bernard Cooke, "Casti Connubii to *Gaudium Et Spes*: The Shifting Views of Christian Marriage," in *Marriage in the Catholic Tradition: Scripture, Tradition and Experience*, ed. Todd A. Salzman, Thomas M. Kelly, and John J. O'Keefe (New York: Herder & Herder, 2004), 114.

traditional teaching that marriage is a divine calling involving irrevocable, personal consent and that marriage has profound implications for the well-being of the couple, their family, and for human society as a whole (GS # 47,48).

GS developed and enriched our understanding of marriage by describing it as an intimate partnership of life and love.³⁰ In its personalistic approach and in its language GS represents a development from the juridical language of former documents to a more personal emphasis upon “covenant, partnership, and personal relationship.”³¹ GS’s emphasis upon partnership and the equal personal dignity of wife and husband heralded a move towards equality and away from the patriarchal emphasis of previous documents.

In a significant development GS altered the primacy formerly given to the procreative aspect of human sexuality and gave at least equal value to the unitive dimension of marital sexuality, resulting in the understanding that marital sexuality is noble and worthy and contributes to the personal and spiritual growth of the couple. It is in this more mature and positive understanding of human sexuality that GS is “most discontinuous with previous church teaching.”³²

The conciliar documents provide many rich insights into marriage and family life which Gaillardetz and Clifford identify as the foundation for a new generation of theological reflection, not only in the magisterial texts, but also in the work of a growing number of lay theologians, many of whom have reflected upon their own lived experience of marriage.³³ Cooke,³⁴ Fiorenza,³⁵ Gaillardetz³⁶, Roberts³⁷, Rubio³⁸, Thomas³⁹ and

³⁰ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium Et Spes*)". art. 48.

³¹ Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Secrets of Vatican II* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2012), 106.

³² Cooke, 113.

³³ Gaillardetz and Clifford, 110.

³⁴ Cooke.

Lawler⁴⁰ are prominent examples of lay theologians who have made significant contributions to the field and whose work has informed this thesis.

The Australian episcopal conference document, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently asked Questions*, conveys the magisterial material in a form that is readily accessible as is clearly demonstrated by the definition of marriage which introduces the booklet: “Marriage is a divine calling by which a man and a woman give themselves to each other in a life-long partnership. It is an opportunity to experience the beauty of human love, a love that mirrors the love of God. It is a path to holiness, to being saints.”⁴¹ This document is important because it reflects the theological context within which this study takes place.

1.2.10 Sacrosanctum Concilium

Advances in sacramental theology which occurred immediately prior to Vatican II influenced the development of SC,⁴² which then prompted both significant reform of the liturgy and further developments in sacramental theology. Particular reference is made to

³⁵ Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Marriage," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

³⁶ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 2002).

³⁷ William P. Roberts, "Towards a Post-Vatican II Spirituality of Marriage," in *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville: Liturgical 1996).

³⁸ Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2003).

³⁹ David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983).

⁴⁰ Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2002).

⁴¹ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* (Canberra: 2007), 3.

⁴² Especially the key work of Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx.

marriage in SC's chapter on "The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals" where it emphasises that the faithful should understand the sacred signs:

Because the sacraments: are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it. ... [The sacraments] do indeed impart grace, but, in addition the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs . . . (SC #59).

SC's emphasis upon the importance of the faithful's understanding the sacramental signs is of particular relevance in terms of maximising the PME course participants' potential to be instructed by the sign, nourished and strengthened in faith, and empowered to express that faith in all of their relationships.

SC called for the marriage liturgy to be "revised and enriched in such a way that the grace of the sacrament is more clearly signified and the duties of the spouses are taught" (SC #77). The reform and renewal of the liturgy and of sacramental theology since Vatican II has led to a paradigm shift in fundamental understandings of the sacraments, a shift from receiving the sacraments "as holy *things* to sharing them as graced *events* revealing the active presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ amidst an assembled community of faith".⁴³ The common notion of "receiving the sacraments as holy things" has proven very resistant to change and is another indicator that more attention needs be given to the importance of celebrating the sacraments well if they are to serve as opportunities both for liturgical catechesis and for evangelisation.

⁴³ Bruce T. Morrill, "Christ the Healer: A Critical Investigation of Liturgical, Pastoral, and Biblical Sources," *Worship* 79, no. 6 (2005): 482.

In marriage both the wedding ritual, and the lifelong intimate partnership of life and love of the married couple, reveal the active presence of the spirit of the risen Christ; that is, both are sacramental. Lawler emphasises the link between the two:

Once a man and a woman have proclaimed their love for one another in a marriage ceremony, they have then to proclaim it in a married life. Their married life is the ongoing sacrament of marriage which, specifically as Christian marriage reveals, makes explicit and celebrates in a universally accepted social institution the steadfast love of God for God's people and of Christ for Christ's church.⁴⁴

1.2.11 Marriage as Covenant

The covenantal love of the married couple both mirrors the covenantal love of God for God's people, and Christ for the Church, and reveals or reflects that love to the world. 'Covenant' is a biblical concept recalling the solemn promises God made to Noah, Abraham and David, and to Moses and the people of Israel at Sinai: "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Ex 6:7). It recalls the promise that Jesus made to his followers: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor 11:25). Covenant is a notion which goes far beyond the juridical language of contract, especially when applied to the sacrament of marriage.

In a seminal paper, Paul Palmer contrasts contract and covenant to explicate the appropriateness of the latter term with respect to marriage: "Contracts are secular affairs and belong to the market place; covenants are sacral affairs and belong to the hearth, the temple, or the Church."⁴⁵ He reviews early Christian terminology to demonstrate that Vatican II was true to its principle of *ressourcement* in its replacement of contract with

⁴⁴ Michael G. Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1995), 210.

⁴⁵ Paul F. Palmer, "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?," *Theological Studies* 33, no. 4 (1972): 639.

covenant and he presents a definition of Christian marriage as, “a graced covenant of love and fidelity between two baptized believers which, when ratified or sealed in the flesh, has God as author, witness, and guarantor of the indissoluble bond.”⁴⁶

Noll provides a more nuanced and more recent definition of covenant in relation to marriage which touches upon the link between covenant and communion, the depth of the commitment involved, and the thorough preparation required:

To covenant is to commit oneself radically and solemnly. Together the husband and wife commit themselves mutually to create and sustain a climate of personal openness, acceptance, trust and honesty that will nurture intimate community and abiding love . . . such a profound commitment calls for mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity coupled with *solid preparation* [emphasis added].⁴⁷

The documents of Vatican II present a rich and lofty view of the possibilities of marriage as sacrament and covenant. Rubio cautions against over-idealising and romanticising marriage noting that there is grace in the human brokenness that is part of every marriage. She writes that men and women “can find sacrament in the self-giving love of marriage and in reaching out to others in need, but also in the messiness, failures, infidelities of their own lives”.⁴⁸

1.2.12 Meanings of the Rite

The revised *Rite of Marriage* called for by SC certainly offers the potential to signify more clearly the grace of the sacrament and to teach more clearly the duties of the spouses. However this potential is limited to the extent that the range of public and private

⁴⁶ Ibid., 640.

⁴⁷ Ray R. Noll, *Sacraments: A New Understanding for a New Generation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third 1999), 84-85.

⁴⁸ Rubio, 19.

meanings that participants attach to the rite often contradicts the official meanings. Jan Michael Joncas contends that the “communicative potential of religious meaning is fostered when private meanings derive from or at least don’t contradict the official and public meanings”.⁴⁹ Covino⁵⁰, Hughes⁵¹, Fleming⁵², Mellor⁵³, Morrill⁵⁴ and Rubio⁵⁵ all share Joncas’ concern regarding the disparity between the official meanings of the Rite and the range of public and private meanings that participants bring to it. Their research has proven useful for informing this aspect of the thesis.⁵⁶

Austin Fleming identifies seven components of the *Rite of Marriage* which present opportunities for effective marriage preparation.⁵⁷ Fleming’s analysis demonstrates how each of these ritual elements can contribute to pre-marriage education and provide opportunities for evangelisation. His work represents an instantiation of the intention of PSM to give considerable attention to the rite of marriage during the immediate stage of preparation for the sacrament.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Benedict XVI emphasised the pedagogical effectiveness of the liturgy in helping the faithful to enter more deeply into the

⁴⁹ J. Michael Joncas, "Ritual Transformations: Principles, Patterns, and Peoples," in *Toward Ritual Transformation: Remembering Robert W. Hovda* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2003), 54.

⁵⁰ Paul Covino, "Christian Marriage: Sacramentality and Ritual Forms," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999).

⁵¹ Hughes.

⁵² Austin Fleming, "Marriage Preparation and Wedding Liturgies," in *The Changing Face of the Church*, ed. Timothy Fitzgerald and Martin F. Connell (Chicago: LTP, 1998).

⁵³ Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?."

⁵⁴ Bruce T. Morrill, "Performing the Rite of Marriage: Agency, Identity and Ideology," in *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2012).

⁵⁵ Rubio.

⁵⁶ See Chapters 3 and 4 below.

⁵⁷ Fleming, 53.

mystery of the Eucharist. He enunciated the principle that: “The best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.”⁵⁸ This principle applies also to marriage; the best catechesis on the sacrament of marriage, is the marriage liturgy itself, celebrated well. Consequently, the potential for effective pre-marriage education is maximized when the liturgy as presented in the text of *The Rite of Marriage*, provides the primary subject matter for education on marriage as sacrament and covenant.

The magisterial literature, with its consistent emphasis upon the power of the liturgy to catechise and to evangelise, supports the contention of this thesis that well-crafted and engaging pre-marriage education, which uses the power of the *Rite of Marriage* both to teach and to evangelise, has the potential to reinvigorate the sacramental celebration of marriage and to enact ritually a theological foundation for the sacrament as it is lived out daily.

1.3 Parameters of the Study

1.3.1 Adaptation to Personal and Social Context

The PME model developed here presents marriage as sacrament and covenant in a form adapted for couples who present for group pre-marriage education in the contemporary Australian cultural milieu. Mellor describes these couples accurately:

Typically at least one partner has attended Catholic schools. Usually they have lost contact with regular Church practice. Frequently they are not parishioners. They have chosen the church building (not the parish community) because it is ‘pretty’ or ‘traditional’ or convenient for the photos and the wedding reception...It is unusual for couples not to be living

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, "Sacramentum Caritatis"
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis_en.html (accessed April 5, 2013). Article 64.

together. Some couples have already borne children together or have children from other relationships.⁵⁹

Benedict XVI acknowledged the challenge and opportunity found in pre-marriage education, explaining that marriage can be “a great missionary opportunity because today - thanks be to God - many people, even those who do not go to church often, still want to marry in church. It is an opportunity to make these young people face the reality of Christian Marriage, sacramental Marriage”⁶⁰; which is why this thesis focusses on the reality of Christian Marriage as it is expressed in the rite.

In *Familiaris Consortio* John Paul II acknowledged that the faith of those who present for Church marriage exists in different degrees and that some couples present for motives which are social rather than genuinely religious (FC #68). Ideally, the Church should embrace and support these couples rather than reject them since, “as the Second Vatican Council teaches, *the sacraments by words and ritual elements nourish and strengthen faith* [emphasis added]” (FC #68).⁶¹

John Paul II envisaged the immediate stage of marriage preparation in a similar way to the journey of faith undertaken in the catechumenal process (FC #66). This would involve a long term commitment within a particular parish community. Mellor acknowledges the practical difficulty of this suggestion in the light of Australian pastoral

⁵⁹ Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," 4. There are exceptions. Mellor notes that couples who have walked a different path need to be celebrated.

⁶⁰ "Meeting of His Holiness Benedict Xvi with the Priests of the Diocese of Albano" http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060831_sacerdoti-albano_en.html (accessed April 10, 2013).

⁶¹ “However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage” (FC #68).

experience of couples who present for marriage.⁶² Even the requirement to participate in brief, Church sanctioned pre-marriage programs as a condition for the celebration of sacramental marriage within the Catholic Church, can itself be a barrier. Morrill notes that couples are often so incredulous of this condition, which they perceive as an intrusion into their personal autonomy, that they choose to have their wedding officiated by some other minister or civil celebrant.⁶³

PSM specifies that pre-marriage education should help couples to prepare for their marriage liturgy, learn the essential characteristics of Christian marriage, and learn “how to preserve and cultivate married love later, interpersonal marital communication, the virtues and difficulties of conjugal life, and how to overcome the inevitable conjugal ‘crises’”(PSM #46). Given that some couples are reluctant participants in pre-marriage courses, the limited time constraints of these courses, and the fact that “Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant” is one topic among many in a comprehensive course, an essential issue becomes how to cover the topic effectively in the time allocated to it.⁶⁴

This study is limited to the Roman Catholic Rite of Marriage as it is celebrated in the contemporary Australian cultural milieu. Within the time constraints of the PME course, the model for providing education on marriage as sacrament and covenant, developed here, focusses on covering the imperatives of PSM in a way that resonates with the reality of the personal and social situations of the couples who typically present for pre-marriage education. Its approach of faith and mercy (GDC #14) aims to ensure that the

⁶² Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," 4.

⁶³ Bruce T. Morrill, "Sacramental-Liturgical Theology since Vatican II: The Dialectic of Meaning and Performance," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 67, (2012): 11.

⁶⁴ The PME course with which the author is involved allocates approximately one hour of a 10 hour course to the topic “Marriage as Covenant and Sacrament”.

revealed truth of marriage as sacrament and covenant may be more suitably presented and better understood by couples attending the course.

1.4 Methodology

This thesis aims to develop a novel and effective approach to pre-marriage education which focuses on marriage as sacrament and covenant by application of the methodology of liturgical theology to the text and actions of the *Rite of Marriage* in order to maximise the formative action of the Rite itself.

Liturgical theology provides an appropriate methodology for this thesis to employ because its guiding principle - *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*⁶⁵ - allows the connection to be made between the formative action of the Rite of Marriage, the beliefs of the couple and their faith community about marriage, and the ways in which both the couple and the faith community understand the sacrament of marriage to be lived out daily.

Aidan Kavanagh argues that the official worship of the Church is *the* fundamental source of Christian theology: “a liturgical act *is* a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral and foundational kind”.⁶⁶ The theological consensus is probably that, while there has been a recent rediscovery of the practice of the early Church which did develop theology from liturgy, the relative authority of the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* and how they influence each other remains a topic of lively debate.⁶⁷

Irrespective of that debate, liturgical theology is a legitimate and accepted field of theology for which Robert Taft offers a powerful and compelling justification: “Liturgy is

⁶⁵ Kevin Irwin makes the critical connection between the liturgical experience, reflection upon it, and the everyday life of the individual or couple - *lex vivendi*. Irwin, 46.

⁶⁶ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 89.

⁶⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 188-189.

an object of theological investigation because it is just as much an expression of belief as are the verbal monuments of tradition (patristic writings, theological treatises, conciliar decrees, even the Bible)".⁶⁸ Indeed, Louis-Marie Chauvet reminds us that marriage was accepted as a sacrament because of "the importance that the Church attributed to [it] in its liturgical practice (an excellent example of the adage '*lex orandi, lex credendi*')."⁶⁹ Liturgical theology provides a well-developed body of theory and practice centred on the Church's liturgy, of which the Rite of Marriage is an important part.

Liturgical theology gives a central place to ritual meaning since "meaning is constitutive of human beings, culture, and all kinds of social institutions".⁷⁰ Because meaning is constitutive of social institutions including marriage, this thesis investigates the meanings of marriage that are developed through pre-marriage education and the experience of liturgy celebrated well.

For Alexander Schmemmann, "liturgical theology is the elucidation of the meaning of worship".⁷¹ The task of liturgical theology has been clarified and made explicit by those who have followed Schmemmann. Taft cautions on seeking meaning in text alone: "Note that it is not the text, but the entire ritual that communicates this meaning, this *theologia prima*".⁷² In other words liturgy is primarily performative; the fullest meaning of liturgy is realised only in its celebration.

⁶⁸ Robert Taft, "Liturgy as Theology," *Worship* 56, no. 2 (1982): 114.

⁶⁹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, "Sacrament," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1411.

⁷⁰ Margaret M. Kelleher, "Liturgy : An Ecclesial Act of Meaning," *Worship* 59, no. 6 (1985): 485.

⁷¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans., Asheleigh Moorhouse, 2nd ed. (New York: Faith Press, 1966), 14.

⁷² Robert F. Taft, "Mrs Murphy Goes to Moscow: Kavanagh, Schmemmann, and "the Byzantine Synthesis"," *Worship* 85, no. 5 (2011): 405.

Another facet of meaning and liturgy is developed by Kelleher in her identification of a task of liturgical theology as “that of critically reflecting on contemporary liturgical praxis for the purpose of objectifying and judging the horizon or world of meaning made public in that horizon”.⁷³ This is particularly relevant to the marriage liturgy where misalignment may exist between the official meaning of the rite and many of the public, meanings.⁷⁴

Kelleher proposes a method for facilitating the identification and evaluation of the world of meaning made public in the celebration of liturgy and pertinent elements of Kelleher’s⁷⁵ methodology have been utilised to guide the gathering of data in this thesis which interrogates both liturgical performance and official texts and documents. This has involved participant observation⁷⁶ of a small number of celebrations of the Rite of Marriage followed by interviews with the ritual participants, and an analysis of the *Rite of Marriage*. Comparison of the data gathered allows for the identification of alignments or contradictions in the meanings that are apparent in liturgical praxis,⁷⁷ and contributes to the development of pre-marriage learning experiences on marriage as sacrament and covenant.

⁷³ Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," *Worship* 62, no. 1 (1988): 24.

⁷⁴ Joncas, 54.

⁷⁵ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method."

⁷⁶ Clare V. Johnson, "Researching Ritual Practice," *Studia Liturgica* 35, (2005): 214-218. Johnson relates Kelleher's adaptation of participant observation for the study of Roman Catholic liturgical rituals to the origin of the methodology in anthropology.

⁷⁷ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 19.

1.5 Marriage: an Issue of Universal Concern

The bishops of Vatican II placed marriage and family first in their list of subjects arousing universal concern and prayed that the ideals proclaimed by Christ might lead all Christians, and enlighten all humankind, as they searched for answers to the complex questions that surround marriage and the family (GS #46). Fifty years on the Church still searches for answers to those complex questions as it prepares for the second session of the Synod of Bishops on marriage in 2015. The ideals proclaimed by Christ shine through the *Rite of Marriage*, and it is to that luminous text that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

A Theology of Marriage as Revealed by the Rite of Marriage

The ritual celebration of Catholic marriage is often accompanied by confusion and a perceived contradiction of the actions and symbols involved. One possible source of confusion and contradiction can be identified in a perceptible disparity between the official meanings of the Rite of Marriage and the range of public and private meanings that participants bring to it. Greater awareness of the official meanings of the rite may result in a reduction in ritual confusion and produce a deeper and more meaningful ritual experience for those celebrating the sacrament of marriage. One way to promote greater awareness of the official meanings of the rite is to present these official meanings in a form that speaks clearly to those undertaking pre-marriage education courses.

In articulating official ritual meaning, particular attention needs to be given to the actions and symbols of the rite. Judith Kubicki has identified an approach to promoting ritual awareness which is applicable to the rite of marriage:

While catechesis can assist in unpacking the many layers of meaning generated by symbolic activity, it cannot reverse or eliminate the confusion or contradictions that result from disregard for the power and meaning of symbols within the context of liturgical rites. If recognition comes more readily through symbolizing activity than discursive speech, then any attempt to promote the worshipping assembly's awareness of Christ in their midst can succeed more readily by attending with thoughtful care to how symbols are celebrated.⁷⁸

In an effective pre-marriage education course close attention must be given to the symbolic activity of the rite of marriage to encourage couples, as ministers of the

⁷⁸ Judith M. Kubicki, "Recognizing the Presence of Christ in the Liturgical Assembly," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 4 (2004): 837.

sacrament, to attend with thoughtful care to how the symbols are utilised within their own marriage liturgy.

Margaret Mary Kelleher's methodology of applied liturgical theology, drawn from principles developed by systematic theologian Bernard Lonergan,⁷⁹ aids in the identification of liturgical confusions and contradictions. She writes: "data from official texts and documents provide a basis for comparison with data from liturgical performance and allow one to detect conflicts, variations and new meanings that are appearing in liturgical praxis."⁸⁰ Kelleher suggests that liturgical texts and official documents should be read with the following kinds of questions in mind:

What order of events is set out? What rubrics, roles and distinctions are established? What meanings are offered for ritual symbols? What choices are allowed? What restrictions are given? What ritual goals are identified? Do any of the symbols in the rite being studied appear elsewhere in the church's ritual system? What similarities and differences can be identified?⁸¹

Kelleher's approach will guide the description and analysis of *The Rite of Marriage* (RM) undertaken here so that the fundamental official meanings (theology) of the rite can be identified and so that an effective ritually based approach to understanding the sacrament of marriage can be promoted in pre-marriage education courses.

The *Rite of Marriage* approved for use in Australia derives from Vatican II's general call for the reform of the sacred liturgy and its specific call for the marriage rite to be revised and enriched (SC #77). The revised rite incorporates the new formulations of the doctrine of marriage which the Council proclaimed. In its introductory section on "The

⁷⁹ See, for example, Bernard Lonergan, "Metaphysics as Horizon," in *Collection*, ed. F.E. Crowe (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967).

⁸⁰ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

Importance and Dignity of the Sacrament of Marriage”, the rite gives prime place to four doctrinal principles which it exhorts priests to bear in mind when giving “instructions to those preparing to be married and when giving the homily during the marriage ceremony” (RM #5).

The four principles expounded in the introduction to RM summarise the relevant teachings of Vatican II:

1. Married Christians both signify and participate in the mystery of fruitful love that exists between Christ and Christ’s Church. They thus help each other to attain holiness in their married life and in the welcoming and rearing of children; and have their own special place and gift among the people of God (LG #11).
2. Marriage is established by the covenant of irrevocable, personal free consent that the spouses give to and receive from each other and which commits them to unconditional fidelity and permanence (GS #48).
3. Christian couples are therefore required to strive to develop their marital relationship with undivided love which is caught up into divine love (GS #48, 49); and,
4. Without in any way considering the other purposes of marriage of less account, the spouses must be open to the procreation and education of children (GS #48, 50) (RM #1-4).

The Introduction to RM also identifies four key ritual elements to be stressed during the celebration of the marriage liturgy: the liturgy of the word, the consent of the parties, the nuptial blessing, and the reception of Holy Communion. The Introduction emphasises that the rite should normally be celebrated during Mass, as the Eucharist above all else, “is the source of love and lifts us up into communion with our Lord and with one another” (RM #6). John Paul II emphasised strongly the relationship between marriage and

the Eucharist writing: “The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage . . . in this sacrifice of the New and Eternal covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed” (FC #57).

National statistics are not currently available on the numbers who choose to celebrate the rite during the church’s ideal context; that is, within the Eucharist. However, anecdotal evidence reveals that celebration of the rite during Mass now occurs on a minority of occasions because either the bride or the groom is not a Catholic and because many of the wedding guests are not Catholic.⁸² A decline in the frequency of nuptial masses may also be related to the declining and low rate of Mass attendance in Australia overall: in 2011 about 12.5% of Australian Catholics attended Mass on a typical weekend, a decline of 6% compared with 2006.⁸³ When only one in eight self-identified Catholics attends Mass on a typical weekend, and attendance is skewed towards the elderly, it would be surprising if more than one in eight opted for a Nuptial Mass.

These figures support the contention that pre-marriage courses need to offer the possibility of new evangelisation. Effective and engaging preparation for, and participation in, the rite of marriage can invite couples to unite life and the Gospel more fully and to practise in marriage that integrated approach to life of which John Paul II wrote.⁸⁴

⁸² Three priests consulted all reported that a minority of couples celebrate their marriage with a Nuptial Mass. Their experience ranged from a high of one in three celebrations during Mass to a low of one in fifteen. Records from the Brisbane Cathedral Parish show that, of the 189 marriages celebrated in 2013, 18 involved a Nuptial Mass; that is, fewer than one in ten.

⁸³ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Pastoral Research Online*, no. 6. [http://www.pro.catholic.org.au/pdf/Pastoral%20Research%20Online%20Monthly%20Newsletter%20\(September%202013\).pdf](http://www.pro.catholic.org.au/pdf/Pastoral%20Research%20Online%20Monthly%20Newsletter%20(September%202013).pdf) (accessed April 21, 2014).

⁸⁴ John Paul II, "Christifideles Laici ". Article 34.

2.1. Order of events within the Rite of Marriage

The RM contains three options; a “Rite for celebrating marriage during Mass” (the preferred option), a “Rite for celebrating marriage outside Mass”, and a “Rite for celebrating marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptised person”. The RM sets out the following order of events for celebrating marriage during Mass. The liturgy begins with an entrance rite followed by the liturgy of the word. The liturgy of the sacrament includes an introduction, the questions, and then the central moments of the rite, the exchange of consent and of rings, followed by the general intercessions. The liturgy of the Eucharist includes the Lord’s Prayer and the nuptial blessing. The rite concludes with a solemn blessing. The ritual structure of the second and third rites is similar to the first except that the liturgy of the Eucharist is not included. This material is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the Rite of Marriage showing elements to be stressed, key rubrics and options

Outline of the rite	Elements	Key rubrics
Introductory rites	Entrance rite*	The priest... goes with the ministers to the door of the church or, if more suitable to the altar (RM #19). If there is to be a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom... The customary bridal procession may be retained (RM #20).
Liturgy of the Word	Liturgy of the Word #*	The priest gives a homily drawn from the sacred text. He speaks about the mystery of Christian marriage, the dignity of wedded love, the grace of the sacrament and the responsibilities of married people (RM #22).
Liturgy of the sacrament	Introduction	All stand, including the bride and bridegroom, and the priest addresses them in these or similar words... (RM #23).
	Questions*	The priest then questions (the couple) about their freedom of choice, faithfulness to each other, and the acceptance and upbringing of children (RM #24).
	Consent *	The priest invites the couple to declare their consent. If, however, it seems preferable for pastoral reasons, the priest may obtain consent from the couple through questions (RM #25).
	Blessing and Exchange of Rings*	The bridegroom places his wife's ring on her ring finger. The bride places her husband's ring on his ring finger (RM #28).
	General Intercessions*	The general intercessions, (prayer of the faithful) (RM #29).
Liturgy of the Eucharist	Liturgy of the Eucharist *	During the preparation of the gifts, the bride and bridegroom may bring the bread and wine to the altar (RM #30). Three proper prefaces (for marriage) are contained in the Roman Missal (RM #31).
	The Lord's Prayer	After the Lord's Prayer, the prayer "Deliver us" is omitted (RM #33).
	Nuptial Blessing *	The priest faces the bride and bridegroom and, with hands joined, says... (RM #33).
Concluding rites	Solemn Blessing*	Before blessing the people at the end of Mass, the priest blesses the bride and bridegroom. (RM #37)

#Elements which the rite identifies should be stressed are shown in **bold**. The rite notes that the reception of Holy Communion by the groom and the bride and by others present is also to be emphasised.

*Indicates that the rite provides options for these elements and that the couple as ministers, in consultation with their priest, have decisions to make about how the rite is celebrated.

2.2 Description and Analysis of the Rite of Marriage

2.2.1 Ritual Symbols

Sacrosanctum Concilium emphasised the central role of sacred signs (symbols) in the liturgy noting that: the sanctification of women and men is “signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs” (SC #7). The central symbols in the marriage liturgy are the bride and groom themselves and the rings. Sandra Schneiders’ analysis of the body as a prime instance of a symbol is helpful in understanding the place of the bride and groom as embodied symbols in the marriage liturgy. Schneiders makes four points in relation to the human body as symbol:

1. Symbols are essentially perceptible realities that mediate what is otherwise imperceptible.
2. Symbols only mediate the imperceptible in interaction with an interpreter who encounters the reality being symbolised.
3. Unlike signs, symbols participate directly in the presence and power of what they symbolise; they mediate the symbolised to the interpreter.
4. Symbols embody and bring to expression an inexhaustible depth of reality; they invite the interpreter to ever new, deeper, and more adequate expressions of that reality.⁸⁵

Symbols are essentially perceptible realities that mediate what is otherwise imperceptible. Within marriage human beings come to know the God of love by being loved and by loving. In marriage humans come to know the God of forgiveness and

⁸⁵ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text : Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* 2nd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical 1999), 35-36.

fidelity through the experience of the forgiveness and fidelity of a partner and oneself.⁸⁶ In marriage the spouses reflect the love of God to each other and beyond each other to the world. In church teaching this understanding is elaborated most fully in *Gaudium et Spes*

By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God (GS #48).

Within RM bride and groom become symbol and interpreter for each other. Together they are powerful symbols for the assembly. This is why attention to the recommendations of the rite in terms of the actions of the bride and groom is of such significance. The rite consistently presents the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to each other. This is possible on account of their Baptism into Christ's Paschal Mystery which constitutes the broad sacramental context within which the sacrament of marriage takes place.⁸⁷ Beginning with the marriage liturgy the bride and groom become a lifelong source of sanctification for each other; they invite each other to ever new, deeper, and more adequate expressions of the reality of sacramental marriage. Positioning them together in the place of honour in the liturgical entrance procession emphasises both their role as ministers and their equality and, when celebrated well, RM invites the assembly as interpreters to a new, deeper and more comprehensive understanding of these realities of marriage.

⁸⁶ Nathan Mitchell reminds us that Aquinas held that sacramental symbols are given to human persons to move them from what is familiar to what is unknown and unfamiliar: "symbols invite *faith*". Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll: Orbis 2006), 67.

⁸⁷ This assumes marriage between two baptised persons. RM includes a Rite for celebrating marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptised person. Detailed treatment of the theological issues related to the marriage of baptised unbelievers is beyond the scope of this thesis.

2.2.2. Entrance Rite

In the order of events set out in RM the entrance rite is foundational, for it “sets the tone for a joyful and prayerful celebration”.⁸⁸ In the first listed option for the entrance rite, the priest goes with the ministers to the door of the church, where “he greets the bride and bridegroom in a friendly manner, showing that the Church shares their joy” (RM #19). This action gives powerful emphasis to marriage as a liminal rite, a rite associated with growth of the couple and a change of their status within the community, a rite of passage.⁸⁹ The bride and groom enter the door of the church as single baptised individuals; during the liturgy they will be transformed and they will leave through the same door as a sacramentally married couple. Dennis Smolarski notes that, “it is unfortunate when this prescription is ignored or overlooked, because the physical action of passing through the doorway of the church can be a powerfully symbolic, religious experience.”⁹⁰ This action also highlights the ecclesial aspect of this ceremony; this is an action in which the whole church welcomes the couple and shares their joy.

In the rite’s preferred option⁹¹ for the entrance procession to the altar “the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by, at least, their parents and two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung” (RM #20). In this option, the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament are accorded due prominence in the liturgical procession. Contrary to popular notions that a wedding ceremony is the bride’s special day, this option conveys clearly the

⁸⁸ German Martinez, *Worship: Wedding to Marriage* (Washington DC: Pastoral, 1993), 338.

⁸⁹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans., Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10-11.

⁹⁰ Dennis C. Smolarski, *Sacred Mysteries: Sacramental Principles and Liturgical Practice* (Mahwah: Paulist 1995), 25.

⁹¹ The Church’s preferred option is usually listed first in its ritual books.

meaning that the wedding ceremony is a special occasion for both bride and groom, that the sacrament of marriage is both men's and women's work.

The rite's preferred processional option provides an opportunity to ritualise the injunction of the Matthean Jesus, that "a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mt 19:5). The bride and groom enter the church with their parents and leave together, at the end of the rite, without them. These ritual actions not only signify the couple's becoming one but also that the couple has begun to address the first of the series of psychological tasks on which a good marriage is built; that is, "to separate emotionally from the family of one's childhood so as to invest fully in the marriage and, at the same time, to redefine the lines of connection with both families of origin."⁹²

The Church's preferred entrance rite also serves to eliminate some undesirable social stereotypes. In the customary bridal procession, which may be maintained in Australia as part of the rite (RM #20), the bride enters on the arm of her father, a vestige from the times when this aspect of the ceremony signified that the woman, as chattel, was being passed as the property of one male (her father), to become the property of another male, (her husband). Catherine Bell reminds us that "ritual practices and traditions have been critical to the establishment and naturalization of cultural hierarchies based on age and gender."⁹³ The customary bridal procession ritualises a gender hierarchy which may be deleterious to women. Some domestic violence towards women has been linked to the patriarchal sense of ownership of women by men.⁹⁴

⁹² Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 26-27.

⁹³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89.

⁹⁴ See Michael P Johnson, "Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two Forms of Violence against Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57, no. 2 (1995).

The customary procession may also detract from the ministerial role of the bride and the fundamental importance of her free consent in giving herself to her husband in marriage. The rite emphasises the free choice of both bride and groom, yet the bride, who as active subject has chosen her mate, seems more like an object than a subject if she is “given away”,⁹⁵ contradicting the central requirement of free consent.

In the customary procession the groom, his parents and the mother of the bride are absent, highlighting notions of inequality. Smolarski summarises the problems with the customary procession: “It is not ancient, nor widespread in the Church,⁹⁶ and certainly not at all liturgical... This style of entrance ignores the presiding minister, relegates the groom and his attendants to a secondary position, and has its origins in the days when women were the property of men.”⁹⁷

The singing of an appropriate entrance song by the whole assembly, rather than by a soloist, highlights the ecclesial aspect of the ceremony, that the whole Church shares the joy of the bride and groom. Corporate singing is also a means of expressing the full, conscious and active participation of the assembly (SC #14). These options are in closer accord with the intention of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that the marriage rite more clearly signifies the grace of the sacrament and teaches the duties of the spouses (SC #77) and that the faithful should easily understand the sacred signs (SC #59).

⁹⁵ Ronald L. Grimes, "Deeply into the Bone : Re-Inventing Rites of Passage," (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/docDetail.action?docID=10064754>.

⁹⁶ The customary procession is widespread in the Australian Catholic Church.

⁹⁷ Smolarski, 117.

2.2.3. Liturgy of the Word

The Introduction to RM notes that the Liturgy of the Word “is a highly effective means for the catechesis on the sacrament of marriage and its duties” (RM #11). The Rite offers nine first readings, responsorial psalms and second readings and a choice of ten gospel readings, with the advice that the readings, “should be chosen with care, having regard to the pastoral needs of the occasion.”⁹⁸ Pastors often encourage the couple to do the choosing, to select readings from the range available which speak to their beliefs about Christian marriage and their hopes for their future together.

Sacrosanctum Concilium emphasises the central importance of the Liturgy of the Word in the celebration of the liturgy:

Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung: the prayers, collects and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, *and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning* [emphasis added] (SC 24).

A major contradiction arises from many of the scripture readings listed in the RM. The patriarchal meanings that derive from many of the suggested readings included within the rite are inconsistent with the actions and signs of the rite, which emphasise the equality of bride and groom. The tone and language of one of the options for the second reading is both illustrative and typical: “Wives should be obedient to their husbands. . . husbands must always treat their wives with consideration in their life together, respecting a woman as one who, though she may be the weaker partner. . .” (1 Pt 3: 1-9). To many hearers of this reading today the dominant message is patriarchal, patronising and disparaging of women.

⁹⁸ *The Rite of Marriage : English Translation*, 49.

Even the definitive reading from Ephesians (5:2, 21-33), which has provided the biblical basis of the Catholic understanding that marriage is a sacrament, has been challenged on account of the hierarchical emphasis it gives to the relationship between spouses in requiring the submission of women to men. Alternative texts which proclaim a new inclusive community of all the baptized (Gal. 3) are available for use in RM.⁹⁹ Carolyn Osiek is highly critical of the Ephesians 5 text, concluding that it is contradictory for the church to affirm the full dignity and equality of women with men in the sacrament of marriage when the language, imagery and metaphors of Eph. 5: 22-33 continue to perpetuate inequality.¹⁰⁰

Francis Schussler Fiorenza is so critical of the negative consequences of the imagery and imperatives that have emanated from the Ephesians 5 text that he presents compelling arguments for a “fundamental shift in the underlying imagery of the relation between husband and wife in their relationship to God, Christ and the church.”¹⁰¹ Schussler Fiorenza draws upon recent developments in Roman Catholic systematic theology in the understanding of the church as sacrament. If preference is given to the understanding of the Church as the sacrament of the Spirit, marriage becomes a symbol of the formation of a new community, a community that images the formation of the first Christian communities under the power of the Spirit. This image emphasises the fundamental equality of husband and wife as disciples in the formation of a new Christian community.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Equality in Marriage: The Biblical Challenge," in *Marriage in the Catholic Tradition: Scripture, Tradition and Experience*, ed. Todd A. Salzman, Thomas M. Kelly, and John J. O'Keefe (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 69-73.

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Osiek, "The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): A Problematic Wedding," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32, no. 1 (2002): 38-39.

¹⁰¹ Fiorenza, 603-604.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 604-605.

In a tacit acknowledgement of problems with some of the New Testament texts, four new readings have been added to the 1990 Rite.¹⁰³ These readings are more inclusive of images which emphasise the fundamental equality of marriage and of men and women in marriage, and may help to resolve the tension which exists between the way in which some of the exclusive readings are heard and interpreted in today's first world western cultures, and the official meanings of the signs and actions within the current rite.

2.2.4. Liturgy of the Sacrament

RM's introduction to the "Liturgy of the Sacrament" demonstrates a balanced view of love. Critics of current Catholic theologies of marriage display diametrically opposed positions with respect to the place of romantic love in marriage. Brennan R. Hill identifies the crucial importance of finding an appropriate place for romantic love in any reformulation of the sacramental theology of marriage, writing: "unless we can incorporate Christian, conjugal, and indeed, romantic love into our discussion of the sacramentality of marriage, it will never be suitable to address contemporary Christians."¹⁰⁴ The opposing position is represented by Francis Schussler Fiorenza who is critical of the central position given to romantic love in some theological treatments of marriage and argues that more emphasis should be given to the social and communal aspects of marriage.¹⁰⁵ However, romantic love has a foundational role in bringing the couple together which Fiorenza acknowledges: "the friendship that may bring the two together as an individual couple has

¹⁰³ There has been no change to the Gospel readings; one Old Testament reading has been modified to make it less offensive to women. The added New Testament readings are Rom 15: 1b-3a, 5-7, 13; Eph 4:1-6; Phil 4:4-9; Heb 13:1-4a, 5-6b.

¹⁰⁴ Brennan R. Hill, "Reformulating the Sacramental Theology of Marriage," in *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville: Liturgical 1996), 13.

¹⁰⁵ Fiorenza, 607.

to grow and develop to include others, and has to broaden out to other tasks and other communities.”¹⁰⁶

In the introduction to the liturgy of the sacrament, the priest addresses the bride and the bridegroom with these or similar words:

My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity (RM #23).

The liturgy gives primacy to the couple's coming together in the church to have their love sealed and strengthened by the Lord. This love which has brought the couple to this point is acknowledged as good (Christ abundantly blesses this love). The Rite emphasises the strengthening of this love, and the bride and bridegroom themselves, so that they may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity, on the foundation of their Christian baptism. This expresses eloquently what couples ideally hope for in their marriage.

The official theology of the church, presented succinctly in the Introduction to RM, proclaims that marriage is established by the irrevocable covenantal consent that the spouses freely give to and receive from each other (RM #2). The Introduction to RM presents a balance between the interpersonal aspects – couples are to “strive to nourish and develop their marriage by undivided affection” (RM #3) – and social aspects – couples should be “steadfast and ready to cooperate with the love of the Creator and Saviour, who through them will constantly enrich and enlarge his own family” (RM #4).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

The theology expressed in the rite of marriage reconciles the opposing positions of Hill and Fiorenza in regard to the place of romantic love in marriage. It acknowledges the goodness of the love that brought the couple together and prays that that love may be sealed and strengthened; that is, as the love of the couple grows stronger and more powerful it overflows to a wider circle of persons and tasks. The rite affirms and incorporates Christian, conjugal, and indeed romantic love, within a liturgical theology which can speak clearly to contemporary Christians. Romantic love has brought the couple together and their rational, willed decision has brought them to this liturgy so that their love can be sealed and strengthened.

‘Sealed’ has a biblical connotation where a seal indicates authenticity, ratification or security.¹⁰⁷ Sealing also conveys the sense that the sacrament “consecrates the spouses in a Christian marriage for the duties and dignity of their state.”¹⁰⁸ In the liturgy, the couple comes before God and God’s people seeking to increase the strength of their love; to have God’s seal mark the authenticity of that love; to ratify that love; to secure that love; and to strengthen them for their marital mission.¹⁰⁹

RM achieves an appropriate balance between romantic love, which is fundamentally important to the couple at the beginning of their marriage, and the communal and social expression of love more broadly given, which develops from the foundation of that romantic love of the spouses as it grows and ripens (GS #50). The rite illuminates the communal and social meaning of marriage well in an age when there is an overemphasis on individualism and personal fulfilment.

¹⁰⁷ T. H. Weber, "Seal," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 850.

¹⁰⁸ "Code of Canon Law". Can.1134.

¹⁰⁹ A link with the seal of Confirmation is made later in this chapter.

Love of spouses for one another is not confined to romantic love but consists rather of the intermingling of many elements: it is indeed a “many-faceted love” (GS #48). As the prayers of RM reveal, it is all of these elements of love that Christ strengthens in the sacrament. The introductory greeting emphasises the setting where the couple seek to have their love sealed and strengthened: it is in “this church” in the presence of the “Church’s minister and this community”. The introductory greeting links the love of the couple with the social and ecclesial relevance of that love.

2.2.5. Questions of the Couple

With the exception of some of the problematic scriptural imagery, RM is faithful to the balanced theology of marriage presented in its introduction. This theology is implicit in the questions which the priest asks of the couple immediately after the Introduction to the Liturgy of the Sacrament.

“N. and N., have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?”

“Will you love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?”¹¹⁰

“Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” (RM #24).

The first two questions emphasise the love of the couple demonstrated by their preparedness to give each other the gift of themselves for the whole of their lives. The third question emphasises the social and communal aspects of marriage in the couple’s commitment to openness to life, specifically openness to children, and in its broader meaning, openness to bring life to the broader community, indeed to the world.

¹¹⁰ The language of the second question reveals jarring patriarchal echoes in its inconsistency; husband and wife, or man and woman, would more clearly emphasise the equality of the spouses. The draft English translation of the 1990 Rite removes this inconsistency at No 60.

Ronald Grimes notes the growing tendency in some places “to address ritual questions to family, friends, and church members about their willingness to support the couple.”¹¹¹ Such a question at this stage of the liturgy (though not officially a part of the Church’s rite) appropriately involves the assembly and reminds those present of their obligation to support this couple in their marriage.

2.2.6. Consent

The Consent is the central sacramental moment of the liturgy; its words and gestures are the ritual signs by which the spouses establish their marital covenant, and it is the point at which the couple are most obviously the ministers of the sacrament to each other. The priest invites the couple to declare their consent (RM #25) before the altar (a ritual place which speaks of sacrifice and offering) and the assembly (who witness the ritual expression of the sacramental bond). The couple hold each other’s right hands and proclaim in turn:

*“I, N., take you N., to be my husband/wife.
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.
I will love you and honour you all the days of my life”* (RM #25).

There is a great theological richness and depth to the words and actions of the exchange of consent. The Latin original uses *accipio*, - to take, receive, accept. “I take you”, which, as well as conveying a sense of rational choice, also conveys a sense of receiving, of gracious acceptance of the gift of the other. The words which follow denote the giving of the gift of the each individual subject’s lifelong fidelity to their chosen partner. This verbal exchange is consistent with Louis-Marie Chauvet’s notion of symbolic exchange: “There is no reception of anything *as a gift* which does not require some return-

¹¹¹ Grimes.

gift as a sign of gratitude . . . Which is to say that by the very structure of the exchange the gratuitousness of the gift *carries the obligation of the return-gift of a response.*"¹¹² For Chauvet this symbolic exchange of verbal communication between subjects is fundamental to the efficacy of the sacraments.¹¹³

Behind the spouse's gift of their whole life there is also a sense that each is God's gracious and gratuitous gift to the other: "by your love and providence you have brought them together" (RM #112). Spouses symbolise God's offer of salvation for each other. In the process that begins with the marriage liturgy and continues for life, "the gift of the other's love and care, the human communion, communicates freedom – freedom to become a better person, freedom to open up and share with others the love and care which has been given to us."¹¹⁴

In Chauvet's terms, the ineffable nature of this gift draws the recipient into a return gift which is expressed as ethical action: "agape between brothers and sisters."¹¹⁵ In the liturgy, and in the daily living of this sacrament, agape grows between the spouses and then spreads in an increasing circle beyond them. The church's preference that the rite be celebrated within a Mass, and the centrality of the Eucharist to the spirituality of marriage, relate to this point, for "the celebration of the Eucharist expands our capacity to be both receptive to gift in life and also capable of gifting . . . in our own actions."¹¹⁶ The

¹¹² Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans., Patrick Madigan and Madeline Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical 1995), 108. Italics in original.

¹¹³ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁴ Brian Gleeson, "Symbols and Sacraments: Their Human Foundations," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 2(2004).
http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/395674/AEJT_2.10_Gleeson_Symbols_and_Sacraments.pdf (accessed March 13, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Chauvet, 277. Italics omitted.

¹¹⁶ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 129.

Eucharist and sacramental marriage expand the capacity of spouses to be both receptive to gift and capable of gifting.

Holding each other's right hands ritually strengthens the verbal exchange. It recalls the presence of God, and the ideal that the couple will be Christ to one another:

For I, the lord your God,
hold your right hand:
it is I who say to you, "Do not fear
I will help you" (Is 41:13).

In the Consent, in a manner that is similar to entry to consecrated religious life, the couple publically vow their permanent commitment to accept God's offer of salvation through a real renunciation of goods: like religious life marriage is an ascetical vocation.¹¹⁷ The, "I take you", commits the couple to each other to the renunciation of all others. This commitment extends to bad times as well as good, and to lifelong permanence.

The Rite provides three options for the Consent of which this active form is the first. The second option also takes an active form. It contains most of the elements of the first option expressed in more traditional language:

I, N., take you, N., for my lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part (RM #25).

This option does not speak of love and honour and it lacks the declarative richness of the first option's words: "*I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.*"

To show clearly that the couple ministers the sacrament to each other "many presiders encourage the couple to memorise their promises and most couples comply."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Gaillardetz, 67-68.

¹¹⁸ Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," 5.

Learning the words by heart enables eye contact which may be a sign of trust, honesty and directness and which emphasises the ministry of the couple to each other and the mutual commitment that they are making.

The priest may leave the sanctuary and stand between the first rows of pews at this time to accentuate further the ministerial role of the couple. The third option (RM #25C) where the priest obtains consent from the couple through questions may diminish the emphasis upon the couple as ministers of the sacrament.

The Consent ritualises the establishment of the matrimonial covenant. The matrimonial covenant, which is based upon the free consent of the spouses, “is the most profound type of covenant, aside from that which exists between God and His people . . . [it] involves an interpersonal relationship which is total, that is involving their spiritual, emotional and physical joining.”¹¹⁹ RM rightly emphasises the exchange of Consent and preferences its first active form, as that option pre-eminently ritualises the giving of free consent to total interpersonal relationship.

2.2.7. Blessing and Exchange of Rings

The blessing and exchange of rings which follows the Consent reaffirms and strengthens symbolically the promise of lifelong love and honour. The rite provides three options for the blessing of the rings and one for situations where there is only one ring. The second option is reprinted below.

*Lord, bless these rings which we bless in your name.
Grant that those who wear them
may always have a deep faith in each other.
May they do your will*

¹¹⁹ Thomas P. Doyle, "Marriage," in *The Code of Canon Law : A Text and Commentary / Commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America*, ed. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel (London: G. Chapman, 1985), 740.

*and always live together
in peace, good will, and love (RM #110).*

This option continues to reveal the balance between the love of the couple (may they always have a deep faith in each other, and always live together in . . . love) and the social and communal aspects of marriage that grow out of that love (May they do your will).

The couple exchange the rings saying;

*“N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (RM #28).*

The invocation links this marriage into the mystery of the Trinity where, in terms of Augustine’s theology, the Holy Spirit is described as the love which passes between the Father and the Son.¹²⁰ There is an implicit reference here to the Holy Spirit as the love that binds the couple. Again learning the words by heart emphasises the ministry of the couple to each other and the mutual commitment of love and fidelity that they are making.

In the exchange of rings there is a moment of subtlety and depth which escapes many participants and some pastors.¹²¹ The ring that the bride receives is a sign, not only of her commitment to marriage, but of her partner’s covenant with her, of his love for, and fidelity to, her. The wedding ring that the groom receives reminds him of his bride’s

¹²⁰ Augustine, "The Trinity" <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130106.htm> (accessed April 21, 2014).VI,5(7).

¹²¹ Fr Stephen Wang writes, “I was at a beautiful wedding recently, and I had a small moment of revelation about the meaning of wearing a wedding ring. It’s not an exaggeration to say that my understanding was turned completely upside down . . . So the ring that is given is a sign of the love and fidelity *of the one who gives it*. The ring that you wear, that was placed on your finger by your spouse on your wedding day, does not represent your commitment to your marriage, your love for your spouse, your faithfulness to this relationship and to the vocation God has called you into, etc. It represents the commitment, love and faithfulness *of your spouse to you*.”. Stephen Wang, "The Meaning of the Wedding Ring" <http://bridgesandtangents.wordpress.com/2012/08/27/the-meaning-of-the-wedding-ring/> (accessed June 22, 2013).

lifelong covenant with him. RM gives preference to an *exchange* of rings which emphasises the equality and the mutual commitment of bride and groom, rather than the giving of a ring only to the bride which may emphasise notions of possession.

2.2.8. General Intercessions

The General Intercessions follow the Blessing and Exchange of Rings. The model provided in RM focusses appropriately upon marriage with the focus of the intercessions radiating outward from the bride and groom to all married people. In order, prayers are offered for the bride and groom, that their love may be fruitful (if appropriate), for both sets of parents, for those preparing for marriage, and for married people everywhere.

2.2.9. Liturgy of the Eucharist

If the rite is celebrated during Mass the liturgy of the Eucharist follows. The rubrics note that “during the preparation of the gifts, the bride and bridegroom may bring the bread and wine to the altar” (RM #30). Associating the bride and groom with the gifts may strengthen their own and the assembly’s understanding that they too are gift.

A choice of three prefaces of marriage is provided, the third of which includes the well-known, poetically powerful though gendered verse;

*Love is man’s origin,
love is his constant calling,
love is his fulfilment in heaven* (RM #117).

2.2.10. Nuptial Blessing

The conclusion of the rite of marriage is the nuptial blessing which, in the Rite for Celebrating Marriage during Mass, seems illogically separated from the marital covenant it

is designed to bless.¹²² The Nuptial Blessing has been part of the Christian celebration of marriage since its beginning with references to it from as early as fourth century Rome and the eastern Churches.¹²³ The blessing emphasises that salvation is God's gift and that bride and groom depend on God's grace in this challenging vocation.

The Introduction to RM refers to the "special nuptial blessing on the bride" (RM #6), a further example of the distortion of marriage as a joining of equals, a distortion that stems from the dominant influence of Ephesians 5 on traditional theologies of marriage. This is corrected in the 1990 Rite which refers to the blessing upon "the bride and bridegroom" (RM #35).

David N. Power reminds us that, at the core of each sacrament, there is a prayer of blessing related to persons and the things that they share; a prayer that relates God's action through Word and Spirit to creation, to covenant, and to redemption from sin and death.¹²⁴ Nuptial Blessing B (RM #120) illustrates some, although not all, of these elements. They are directly related to the bride and groom and to what they share and there is explicit reference to creation and to covenant.

Nuptial Blessing B also gives emphasis to the ethical dimension – the *lex vivendi* - of the liturgy with its references to "their mission in the world", "live this sacrament", and witnessing to the presence of God in their marriage. In its emphasis this nuptial blessing

¹²² Joncas presents historical research to show that this placement is an historical legacy from ancient Roman times when there was no rite of consent. Michael Joncas, "Solemnizing the Mystery of Wedded Love : Nuptial Blessings in the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium 1991," *Worship* 70, no. 3 (1996): 232.

¹²³ Martinez, 142.

¹²⁴ David N. Power, "Sacraments in General," in *Systematic Theology : Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress 2011), 493.

neatly completes the links between the rule of prayer (*lex orandi*), the rule of belief (*lex credendi*), and the rule of Christian living (*lex vivendi*).¹²⁵

Nuptial Blessing B displays a disparity in the blessings it invokes on the wife:

*Give your blessings to N., your daughter,
So that she may be a good wife (and mother), caring for the home,
faithful in love for her husband,
generous and kind.*

compared with those invoked on her husband:

*Give your blessings to N., your son,
so that he may be a faithful husband
(and a good father).*

Joncas criticises this text for, as it is heard in assemblies today, it “suggests that the husband has fewer responsibilities for maintaining the household than does the wife.”¹²⁶

2.2.11. Concluding Rites

The rite concludes with a further blessing of the bride and groom before the priest blesses the assembled people. Again a range of options is available. There may be some ritual redundancy in the solemn blessing of the bride and groom given the similarity to the proximate nuptial blessing.

¹²⁵ Irwin, 46.

¹²⁶ Joncas, "Solemnizing the Mystery of Wedded Love : Nuptial Blessings in the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium 1991," 223.

2.3 Marital Spirituality in the Rite of Marriage

The theology expressed in the rite of marriage acknowledges the goodness of the love that brought the couple together and prays that that love may be sealed and strengthened.¹²⁷ According to Christopher Kiesling, the central place given to the mutual love of the couple in the liturgy indicates that “the effort to learn to love as Jesus loves is at the heart of marital spirituality.”¹²⁸ Joann Heaney-Hunter also emphasises the learning involved in marriage: “sacramental marriage is a school where we learn what it means to be followers of Christ.”¹²⁹ There is a consistency between these two statements and recent research findings into couples in long-term relationships which emphasise that “simply wanting a relationship to continue is insufficient - active engagement in behaviours that support the relationship is needed in order to maintain its stability.”¹³⁰ Important questions arise when these views are considered:

- What is it that helps couples to make “the effort to learn to love as Jesus loves”?
- What helps couples to learn “what it means to be followers of Christ”?
- What is it that helps couples actively engage in “behaviours that support the relationship”?

¹²⁷ See Section 2.2.4 above

¹²⁸ Christopher G. Kiesling, "The Liturgy of Christian Marriage: Introduction to Marital Spirituality," *Spirituality Today* 34 (1982): 51.

¹²⁹ Joann Heaney-Hunter, "Eros and Agape: Expressions of Love in Sacramental Marriage," in *Understanding and Communicating the Sacrament of Marriage in our Contemporary Culture.* (The University of Notre Dame 2006), 1.

¹³⁰ Robyn Parker and Joanne Commerford, "Lasting Couple Relationships: Recent Research Findings," (2014). <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca22.pdf> (accessed June 24, 2014), 7.

These questions surely signal several foundational issues for marital spirituality, or how the married couple are to live out of the Gospel values central to and celebrated in the marriage liturgy.¹³¹

Living out the values celebrated in the marriage liturgy requires a growing awareness of the presence of God. A marital spirituality involves putting the marriage relationship first and giving priority to loving and honouring one's spouse all the days of one's life. Love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable and in marriage one's spouse is one's closest neighbour.

Marital spirituality may be understood as an "overarching, unifying dimension of the affective, cognitive and behavioral elements of marital relationships."¹³² There is research evidence that spirituality as a set of principles guiding one's approach to living a particular way of life, and influencing all aspects of the relationship, (including communication, conflict resolution, decision making and sexuality), "likely results in increased relationship satisfaction."¹³³ Giving priority to these aspects of the marital relationship demands work, "not so much physical work but a kind of redemptive effort to be present, to hear and understand and to respond faithfully with love to the other."¹³⁴

Lumen Gentium taught that "Married couples . . . should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives" (LG #41). Echoing *Gaudium et Spes* #48, Richard Gaillardetz writes that the proper path to holiness for married couples winds through the joys and the

¹³¹ This definition is drawn from Kevin Irwin. Kevin W. Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II* (Mahwah: Paulist 2013), 201.

¹³² Paul Giblin, "Marital Spirituality : A Quantitative Study," *Journal of Religion and Health* 36, no. 4 (1997): 322.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹³⁴ M. Kathleen Schaefer, "The Nurturing of Marital Life," *Liturgy* 4, no. 2 (1984): 73. Mindfulness as "redemptive effort to be present" is developed in Chapter 3.

challenges of everyday married life: “My ‘salvation’, the spiritual transformation that God wishes to effect in me, transpires within the crucible of my relationship with my wife and children.”¹³⁵ Julie McCarty employs a similar metaphor noting that conjugal love “will mature over the years, deepening and expanding as the Spirit purifies and sanctifies the couple like gold that is ‘tested by fire’ (1Pet 1:7).”¹³⁶ Both salvation and Spirit are gift; however, as the Catholic tradition teaches, humans have a free choice in terms of how they respond to God’s gift. They can choose to accept the heat of the crucible, and be aware of the presence, and open to the guidance, of the Spirit. The statements of both Gaillardetz and McCarty prompt the question: what is it that helps couples to be open to acceptance of the discomfort of this transforming heat?

This question becomes even more relevant in the context of modern Australian culture, which contains elements that can be corrosive of marriage. The whole liturgy of marriage, and particularly the Consent, ritually enacts a set of Christian values that powerfully counter Australian consumerist culture’s emphasis on excessive choice, consumption and disposability. These values and the counter-cultural characteristics of Christian marriage are shown in the table 2.

¹³⁵ Gaillardetz, 62.

¹³⁶ Julie McCarty, “Nuptial Pentecost: Theological Reflections on the Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in Christian Marriage,” in *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91.

Table 2. Contrast between characteristics of a consumerist society and characteristics of marriage

Characteristics of a consumerist culture	Characteristics of Christian marriage
Excessive choice	Choosing one <i>(I take you . . .)</i>
Consumption	Nurturing the relationship <i>(I will love you and honour you . . .)</i>
Disposability	Lifelong commitment <i>(all the days of my life.)</i>

The marital spirituality implicit in RM presents a way of life that supports these Christian values, it becomes critically important in enabling couples to be open to the grace that will support them in enacting the values of Christian marriage in the face of strong, countervailing cultural values.

Effective pre-marriage education programs which prepare couples for full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy of marriage can help them to reflect upon the meaning and values of Christian marriage as expressed in the rite, and upon spirituality as an awareness which can help to enact those values. A meaningful liturgy can become a “high point in the religious journey of the couple and serve as a wellspring for growth in their conjugal spiritual life.”¹³⁷ When the rite is effective its traces remain “in the heart, in the memory, in the mind . . .”¹³⁸ Under the influence of the Holy Spirit these traces can coalesce and grow into a robust marital spirituality, for in “the sacramental liturgy, through its words and symbols . . . the Holy Spirit puts us into communion with Christ” (CCC #688).

¹³⁷ Germán Martínez, *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacraments* (Mahwah: Paulist 2003), 289.

¹³⁸ Grimes.

The spirituality presented in the words and symbols of the marriage liturgy is a spirituality of hope: “Christ abundantly blesses [your] love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity” (RM #23).

The spirituality foresees challenges: “I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health” (RM #25), “Lord, may they both praise you when they are happy and turn to you in their sorrows” (RM #121); “May the only Son of God have mercy on you and help you in good times and in bad” (RM #126); “. . . may [they] be faithful as God is faithful, and led to holiness through success and failure” (RM #29,4).

RM engenders a spirituality of growth: “Lord, grant that as they begin to live this sacrament they may share with each other the gifts of your love and become one in heart and mind as witnesses to your presence in their marriage” (RM #120); “May the mystery of Christ’s unselfish love, which we celebrate in this eucharist, increase their love for you and for each other” (RM #114); “The love of man and woman is made holy in the sacrament of marriage, and becomes the mirror of your everlasting love” (RM #117).

Finally, the spirituality of RM expresses marriage’s mission: “Give them the strength which comes from the gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others” (RM #33).

Practices which support the growth of the spirituality of RM include reading, reflection, meditation, prayer, music and ritual including liturgy, particularly, in the Catholic tradition, Penance and Eucharist. Reflection is a key to developing the sacramentality of the joys and the challenges of everyday married life. Barbara Fleischer and Gerald Fagin express the connection between everyday experiences and sacramentality well: “on one level we fully experience our environment, relationships, human emotions, intuitions, actions, responses and imaginings in our daily life and

secondly, we connect our understandings of those experiences with the larger Christian story, rooted in the life and paschal mystery of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹³⁹ The spirituality presented in the rite resonates with this twofold connection.

2.4 Missed opportunities in the Rite of Marriage

RM does not express the church’s ultimate and complete understanding of marriage but offers the church’s best expression of the mystery of the sacrament at a particular point in history. RM (like all rites) continues to develop over time in order to meet the needs of worshipers. Margaret Mary Kelleher proposes that one of the tasks of liturgical theology is to “ask critical questions about the adequacy of what is or has been mediated in public corporate worship.”¹⁴⁰ A comparison of RM with other church rites reveals areas where the rite of marriage is in need of further development.

2.4.1 Pneumatological Omission or under Emphasis

A textual inadequacy is apparent in all current forms of the nuptial blessing. While God the Father and Christ are explicitly invoked, the Holy Spirit is not.¹⁴¹ The nuptial blessings move directly from anamnesis to intercession without an epiclesis.¹⁴² This is indicative of the general pneumatological poverty of RM compared with the other

¹³⁹ Barbara J. Fleischer and Gerald M. Fagin, "The Sacramentality of Friendship and Its Implications for Ministry " in *A Sacramental Life: A Festschrift Honoring Bernard Cooke*, ed. Micheal Barnes and William P. Roberts (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), 238.

¹⁴⁰ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 5.

¹⁴¹ The Holy Spirit is explicitly present in only one of the Solemn Blessing options at the end of the marriage liturgy: “May the Holy Spirit of God always fill your hearts with his love” (RM #126).

¹⁴² Mark Searle, "Marriage Rites as Documents of Faith: Notes for a Theology of Marriage," in *Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Anne Y. Koester and Barbara Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical 2004), 246.

sacramental rites; for example, ordination is not merely an induction into orders, “it is the conferral of the Spirit in the form of an epiclesis”.¹⁴³

Invocation of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to the efficacy of the sacrament of marriage as it is for baptism, ordination, Eucharist and the other sacraments. It is fundamental to Schussler Fiorenza’s envisioning of marriage as “the beginning of a new community, a community of equal disciples and partners under the impact and power of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁴ The sacraments are efficacious because “the Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, *in the epiclesis of each sacrament* [emphasis added], expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit (CCC #1127). According to Chauvet, “the sacraments are inconceivable without the Spirit’s action.”¹⁴⁵ Writing specifically of marriage, Herbert Vorgrimler claims that in order for the sacrament of married life that begins with the marriage liturgy to succeed, “the blessing of God in the Holy Spirit is necessary: therefore the marriage ceremony must be epicletic in form.”¹⁴⁶

Unlike the 1984 RM, the 1990 RM, in its introduction, draws on the teaching of Vatican II to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit: through this sacrament the Holy Spirit enables spouses to “strive to nurture and foster their union in equal dignity, mutual giving, and the undivided love that flows from the divine font of charity, so that, uniting divine and human realities, they persevere in good times and in bad, faithful in body and mind.” (RM, [1990] #9)

¹⁴³ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans., Linda M Maloney, Third ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical 1992), 266.

¹⁴⁴ Fiorenza, 605.

¹⁴⁵ Louis Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: Liturgical 1997), 167.

¹⁴⁶ Vorgrimler, 309.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* proclaims that “In the liturgy the Holy Spirit is teacher of the faith of the People of God and artisan of ‘God’s masterpieces,’ the sacraments of the New Covenant” (CCC #1091). In its section on the celebration of the marriage liturgy, the *Catechism* again emphasises the role of the Spirit: “The various [marriage] liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis . . . The Holy Spirit is the seal of [the bride and groom’s] covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity” (CCC #1624). The *Catechism* (published in 1994) refers to the 1990 RM wherein this inadequacy of the 1984 rite has been addressed by the inclusion of an explicit epiclesis in each of the nuptial blessings. Australians participating in the RM in 2014 are denied the pneumatological richness of the 1990 rite because an English translation of it is yet to be implemented.

Kevin Seasoltz emphasises the importance of God’s gift of the Spirit for all people. His thought holds particular relevance for the sacrament of marriage. Seasoltz explains that:

1. The Spirit is a gift that is given to all people . . . not only to bishops and other ordained ministers; [the gift] is given to all who open their minds and hearts to the presence and power of God’s Spirit.
2. The gift of the Spirit is a gift of unity . . . the Spirit brings unity and mutual comprehension, empowering people to reach consensus and to speak with one voice.
3. The gift of the Spirit is a gift of diversity . . . each person is called to realize the distinctive characteristics of his or her personality . . . the riches of God’s Spirit

are not revealed in the sameness of people but rather in their wonderful diversity.¹⁴⁷

Seasoltz's second and third points highlight the necessity for married persons to be open to the gift of the Spirit. The paradox of the Spirit as gift of unity and gift of diversity has direct relevance to Fiorenza's insistence that a theology of marriage must "steer the middle course between the romanticism of identity and the romanticism of difference."¹⁴⁸ A theological middle course envisions that a married couple, guided by the Spirit, would develop a spirituality that fosters both their growth as a couple and their growth as autonomous individuals. This growth would allow them "to build togetherness by creating the intimacy that supports it while carving out each partner's autonomy."¹⁴⁹

2.4.2 Paucity of Ritual Gestures

A second inadequacy in RM is the relative paucity of ritual gestures. The aphorism, "actions speak louder than words", has been verified by communications research which indicates that, in interpersonal communication, the majority of the affective meaning is carried by nonverbal rather than verbal channels: "depending on the study, the estimated amount of information communicated nonverbally ranges between 65% and 95% of the total messages conveyed."¹⁵⁰ The power of body language is central to liturgy. According to Mark Searle, "liturgy is uniquely a matter of the body: both the individual body and the

¹⁴⁷ R. Kevin Seasoltz, *God's Gift Giving : In Christ and through the Spirit* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 161-162.

¹⁴⁸ Fiorenza, 610.

¹⁴⁹ Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 27.

¹⁵⁰ David Ricky Matsumoto, Mark G Frank, and Hyi Sung Hwang, "Reading People: Introduction to the World of Nonverbal Behavior," in *Nonverbal Communication : Science and Applications*, ed. David Ricky Matsumoto, Mark G Frank, and Hyi Sung Hwang (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 12.

collective body,”¹⁵¹ while Nathan Mitchell terms the body “liturgy’s first and most obvious language.”¹⁵² David Torevell goes so far as to claim that “all religious and social anthropological writings on ritual emphasise its unique *bodily* qualities.”¹⁵³

In general the Vatican II liturgy does not emphasise the body as liturgy’s first language. Kevin Irwin notes that: “the Catholic sacramental imagination may have been diminished by the reformed liturgy itself, which is often cerebral, didactic and ponderous. This is especially true when the participants are not fully engaged in the gestures and symbolic actions that are of the nature of liturgy”.¹⁵⁴ While he rejects most critiques of the liturgical reform prompted by SC, John Baldovin acknowledges that “there has been a neglect of gesture in the past thirty years or so . . . [and] there is need for a new ‘choreography’ of the liturgy in the sense of conscious and intentional use of the body”.¹⁵⁵

Giving appropriate emphasis to bodily actions is of crucial importance for several reasons. Firstly, one of the primary ways in which ritual acts is through a focus on the body as Catherine Bell explains, “by virtue of movement and stillness, sound and silence, through which the body produces and reabsorbs these oppositional schemes, an orchestration is effected in which some schemes come to dominate and interpret others”.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Mark Searle, "Ritual," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold (London: SPCK, 1992), 56.

¹⁵² Mitchell, 152.

¹⁵³ David Torevell, *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 23.

¹⁵⁴ Kevin W. Irwin, "Liturgical Method: Issues for the Third Millennium," *Theology Digest* 44, no. 1 (1997): 51.

¹⁵⁵ John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2008), 104.

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 220-221.

In other words ritual fosters an instinctive knowledge of, and preference for, some forms of human action over others.¹⁵⁷

Within the liturgy the verbal and the nonverbal channels, text and bodily actions, carry the transformative experience of the mystery of the sacred: overemphasis of one channel may diminish the impact of another. According to Veronica Rosier, it is through active participation in the full range of liturgical symbolic behaviours that we express and deepen our relationship with God: “limiting any liturgical celebration to an emphasis on verbal communication weakens the Church’s sacramental transaction with the divine”.¹⁵⁸

Secondly, a diminution of the bodily nature of liturgy may weaken the link between liturgy and ethics, between the *lex orandi* and the *lex vivendi*. If liturgy becomes overly cognitive at the expense of gesture and symbolic action it may operate at the level of thinking rather than of bodily action. It is in bodily actions, in living the Christian life, that Christians, in Chauvet’s words, “verify” (make true) what they have celebrated and received in the sacraments.¹⁵⁹ In their everyday actions within their married life – the ongoing sacrament of marriage – the spouses verify the words of their covenant to love and honour each other all the days of their lives.

Thirdly, emphasis upon the verbal, rather than the bodily risks exemplifying the distorted view that “the body should be feared, mistrusted, despised, punished, discounted, or ignored”, which has shaped much of Christian history.¹⁶⁰ This distorted view contradicts the central mystery of Christianity, the incarnation, which affirms the inestimable value of the body: “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14). It is in the flesh that God

¹⁵⁷ The link between the bodily, performative nature of the liturgy and its catechetical power is developed further in Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁸ Rosier, "The Spirit and Power of the Liturgy: Understanding Liturgical Catechesis," 397.

¹⁵⁹ Chauvet, 41.

¹⁶⁰ Mitchell, 153.

is most fully revealed; it is in the flesh that the Son of God worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart (GS #22).

Modern Christian anthropology corrects this distorted view by presenting an understanding of the body that accords with the mystery of the incarnation and with the Hebrew Scriptures where the body is part of God's good creation and describes the whole person: "The body is the whole man [*sic*] in his relationship to God and his fellow man. It is man's place of meeting with God and his fellow man. The body is the possibility and the reality of communication".¹⁶¹

This holistic understanding of the human person underpins a theology of marriage as the couple's gift of their bodies to each other as the source of communication that builds communion. Part of that communication is marital sexual intercourse, the ultimate in body language, where, as John Paul II wrote, "the gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person" (FC #80). The body is the spouses' place of meeting with each other and with God.

In his critique of the liturgy of Vatican II, Michael Bayldon argues that there were some significant changes to the body language of Catholic liturgy with the reforms following the council but that these changes have been overlooked because they have not been understood: "The church's body-language is not something which can be understood by osmosis. It has to be imparted. We need to be instructed."¹⁶²

The need for instruction on the meaning of liturgical actions was recognised by Vatican II in SC which called for "the promotion of liturgical instruction and active

¹⁶¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns and Oates, 1976), 150.

¹⁶² Canon Michael Bayldon, "Body-Language: Post Vatican II Liturgy," *New Blackfriars* 86, no. 1004 (2005): 452.

participation” (SC #14-19). In Kevin Irwin’s judgment, neglect of the Council’s call to promote liturgical instruction has been “one of the most egregious deficiencies in implementing the Vatican II liturgical reform.”¹⁶³

The differing perspectives of Irwin (who argues that the revised liturgy is overly verbal and cerebral) on the one hand and Bayldon (who claims that revised liturgy significantly changed the body language of Catholicism) on the other, may be reconciled if it is accepted that while some of the gestures and symbolic actions of the revised liturgy have been significant,¹⁶⁴ they have often been overwhelmed by a cerebral, verbal emphasis and they have not been effectively explained and understood.

The neglect of RM’s preferred option for the entrance procession provides an example that illustrates the points made by both Bayldon and Irwin. The preferred entrance procession of RM (where the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses) represents a significant and positive change in the body-language of Catholic liturgy which has been poorly promoted, poorly understood, and consequently rarely utilised.

There is a need then both to promote understanding of the gestures and symbolic actions of the revised liturgy so that they may be utilised in all of their fruitfulness, and to enrich with appropriate gestures and symbolic actions those rites which overemphasise the cognitive at the expense of the bodily. The body is an essential bearer of memory. David Power notes that, while the Church’s sacraments leave no permanent visible traces on the bodies of agents, “they do have a psychosomatic effect, so that in this way members carry

¹⁶³ Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*, 198.

¹⁶⁴ Bayldon rightly emphasises the reorientation of the church’s body in its worship. Bayldon, “Body-Language: Post Vatican II Liturgy,” 450.

about in their bodies the marks of Christ and of his Spirit and the memory of Christian belief.”¹⁶⁵ These marks are the traces that can grow into a robust marital spirituality.

Nonverbal, ritual bodily actions are central to this most bodily of sacraments for “the sacramental order is built around bodily actions done in bread, wine, oil, and water, *actions performed in giving and receiving the body/self in marriage* [emphasis added].”¹⁶⁶ And yet the current RM underplays or overlooks them to the detriment of the ritual participants.

Many young couples are attracted to the problematic ritual sign of the nuptial or unity candle¹⁶⁷. This attraction may indicate a desire for greater gestural expression in the rite. While John Baldovin argues that “the perceived meaning of the wedding liturgy is far more affected by nonverbal elements like the unity candle . . . than by the verbal elements that tend to occupy our theological attention,”¹⁶⁸ the theological significance of the nonverbal elements is a critical issue. A more theologically significant and richer nonverbal element could be provided by addressing the absence of an epiclesis in RM. An epiclesis accompanied by the powerful ritual gesture of the laying on of hands would enrich the rite of marriage.

2.4.3 Marriage as Consecration

The final ritual deficiency emerges in the light of a recent theological emphasis given to marriage as consecration. The new Code of Canon Law acknowledges that matrimony consecrates: “From a valid marriage there arises between the spouses a bond

¹⁶⁵ David N. Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 126.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Covino presents a balanced critique of this practice. Covino, 117-118.

¹⁶⁸ John F. Baldovin, "The Varieties of Liturgical Experience: Presidential Address," *Studia Liturgica* 32, no. 1 (2002): 9.

which by its nature is perpetual and exclusive. Moreover, a special sacrament strengthens and, as it were, *consecrates* [emphasis added] the spouses in a Christian marriage for the duties and dignity of their state”.¹⁶⁹ The Catechism notes the parallel between Holy Orders and Matrimony: “Through these sacraments those already *consecrated* by Baptism and Confirmation for the common priesthood of all the faithful can receive particular *consecrations*” (CCC #1639).

The notion of marriage as consecration was emphasised in Pope Francis’ 2014 catechesis: “This means that Marriage responds to a specific vocation and must be considered as a consecration. It is a consecration: the man and the woman are consecrated in their love. By virtue of the Sacrament, the spouses are invested in fact in a true and proper mission”.¹⁷⁰ The Church’s understanding of marriage continues to evolve: Vatican II proclaimed that the sacrament conferred a “kind of consecration” (GS #48), in 2014, in Francis’ view, it confers an authentic consecration.

The act of anointing with oil is rich in meaning in the Church’s ritual matrix. Anointing bride and groom with chrism would give due ritual emphasis to marriage as consecration in the service of communion, conveying a sense of strengthening them for their mission. Anointing the married couple would link the marriage more powerfully to their Christian initiation; it would parallel ordination;¹⁷¹ and it would further enrich the enacted semiotics of the rite. Just as in Confirmation anointing marks the individual’s total belonging to Christ, in marriage anointing with the seal of the Holy Spirit would mark would mark the couple’s total belonging to Christ and to each other, their enrolment in his

¹⁶⁹ "Code of Canon Law". Canon 1134.

¹⁷⁰ Francis, "On the Sacrament of Marriage" <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/40003> (accessed 18 April 2014).

¹⁷¹ Joncas, "Solemnizing the Mystery of Wedded Love : Nuptial Blessings in the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium 1991," 237.

service forever, and would serve as a reminder of the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.¹⁷²

2.5. Conclusions

This chapter has argued that RM presents a balanced theology of marriage in accord with the teaching of Vatican II. The rite presents participants with a range of options which, if thoughtfully considered, selected, and enacted, have the capacity to transform individuals. However, there are some problems with some of the gendered language of the rite and the patriarchal meanings of some of the readings. There are also some ritual inadequacies in the sacramental expression of marriage when compared with other sacramental rites.

Grimes cautions that rites “can run shallow or become decadent”.¹⁷³ It is a great scandal that the 1990 version of RM which the Catholic Church proclaims and teaches in the document *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, its *Catechism*, and its papal documents¹⁷⁴, is not yet the rite offered to couples who present for marriage in the Catholic Church in Australia. There is a pressing need to update RM. As Julie McCarty notes urgent attention needs to be given by those with “the authority to provide us with the revised rite of marriage in English . . . to complete this task so that we may all benefit from the explicit *epiclesis* of the sacrament”.

¹⁷² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. #1296.

¹⁷³ Grimes.

¹⁷⁴ In his Letter to Families Pope John Paul II refers at least four times to the epiclesis of the Rite of Marriage. John Paul II, "Letter to Families" http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html (accessed April 21, 2014)

Chapter 3

A Model for Pre-Marriage Education Based on *The Rite of Marriage*

Pre-marriage education programs grew out of the work of religious marriage celebrants, including priests, who counselled marrying couples to support and strengthen those marriages. In the early 1950s the Catholic Church took a leadership role in the provision of pre-marriage courses to groups of engaged couples. By the mid-1950s secular organisations also began to provide pre-marriage courses. The intention of PME was to promote positive couple relationships as a counter to the problems faced by Western countries as a result of widespread marital distress and divorce.¹⁷⁵

One result of John Paul II's call for improved pre-marriage education in *Familiaris Consortio* was the 1996 promulgation of a document by the Pontifical Council for the Family: *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (PSM). In its opening section PSM identifies the problems that led to its development:

Today . . . in many cases we are witnessing an accentuated deterioration of the family and a certain corrosion of the values of marriage. In many nations, especially economically developed ones, the number of marriages has decreased. Marriage is usually contracted at a later age and the number of divorces and separations is increasing even during the first years of married life (PSM #1).

The contemporary experience of marriage in Australia reflects many of the points made by the authors of *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*. In Australia there is a great pastoral need for targeted and effective pre-marriage education. This chapter will present a pre-marriage education model which prepares engaged couples for full and active

¹⁷⁵ This brief history is drawn from Halford et al. W. Kim Halford et al., "Best Practice in Couple Relationship Education," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 29, no. 3 (2003).

participation in the Rite of Marriage and which presents the Catholic teaching on marriage inherent in the Rite.

3.1 Marriage in Australia

Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that over the last twenty years there has been a decline in the marriage rate in Australia (Figure 1), with the rate stabilizing at a low level from 2004 to 2012. The number of marriages decreased in 2013, while the estimated resident population increased. Consequently, as the graph shows, the crude marriage rate decreased from 5.4 in 2012 to 5.1 marriages per 1,000 estimated resident population in 2013.

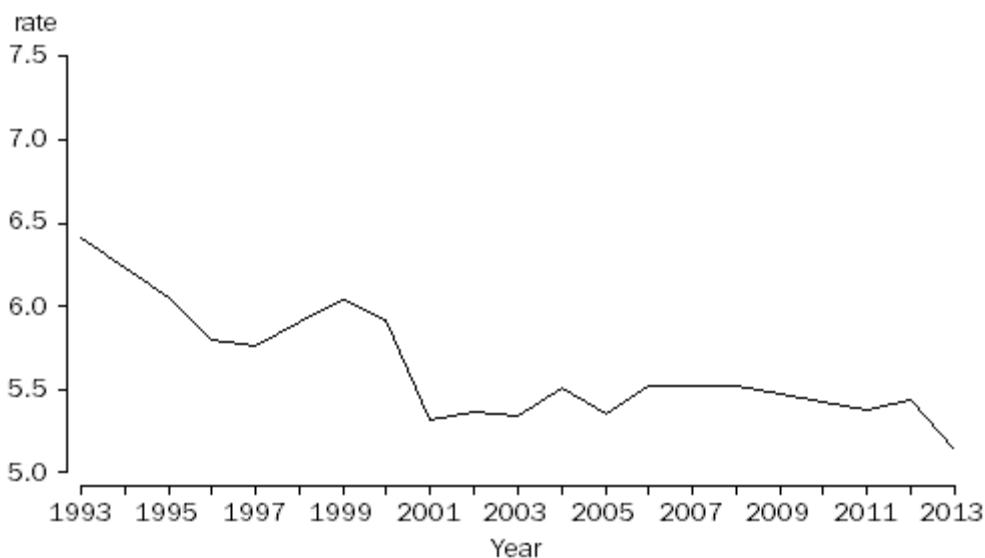


Figure 1. Crude marriage rates (marriages per 1000 resident population), Australia - 1993-2013¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2013 " <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3310.0Main%20Features122013?opendocument&abname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2013&num=&view=> (accessed December 12, 2014).

In Australia marriage is being contracted at a later age. ABS data (see Figure 2) reveal that the median age at which marriage is contracted has increased: the median age at first marriage in 2013 was 29.9 years for males and 28.3 years for females; in 1974 median ages at marriage were 23.3 and 21.4 years respectively.

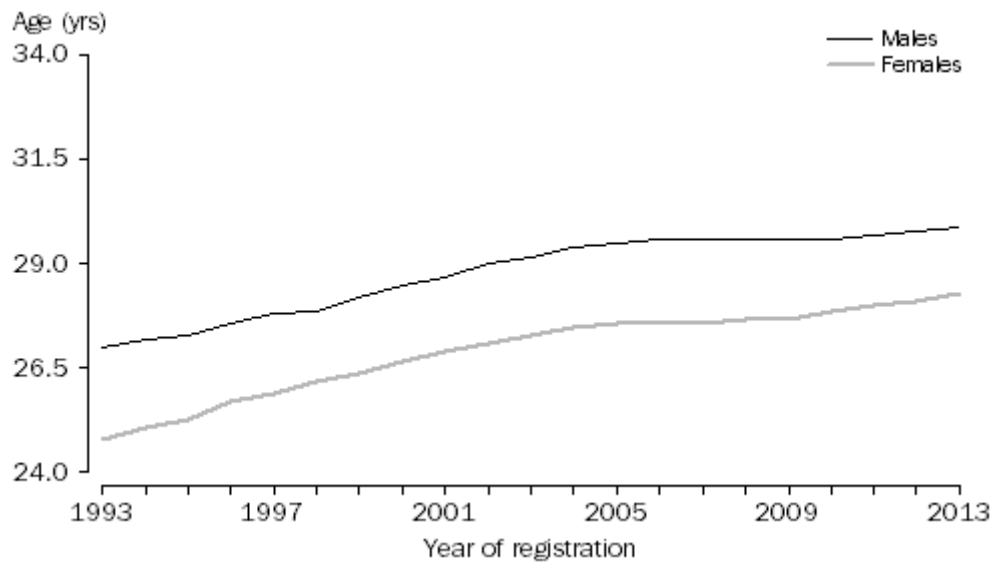


Figure 2. Median age at first marriage, Australia, 1993–2013¹⁷⁷

The proportion of couples divorcing in the early years of married life has declined in Australia: the proportion who received their divorce after fewer than 10 years of marriage was 49% in 1990, compared with 40% in 2005; in 2011, the proportion was 42%.¹⁷⁸ In general, however, the Australian data confirm the concerns expressed in PSM: the number of marriages has decreased and marriage is contracted at a later age.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ruth Weston and Lixia Qu, "Working out Relationships", Australian Institute of Family Studies <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factssheets/2013/familytrends/aft3/aft3.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2014).

3.1.1 Celebration of Marriage

Both the form and content of the marriage celebration provide stark evidence of the increasing secularisation of Australian society. Couples who choose a minister of religion, rather than a civil celebrant, to witness their marriage form a rapidly decreasing minority of those who marry. In 2013, 72.5% of all marriages were performed by civil celebrants. Of the 32,600 marriages performed by ministers of religion in 2013, the most common rites used were Catholic (32.3%) followed by Anglican (15.7%). Figure 3 demonstrates that if the decline in church marriages continues in a linear way it will approach zero by about 2030.

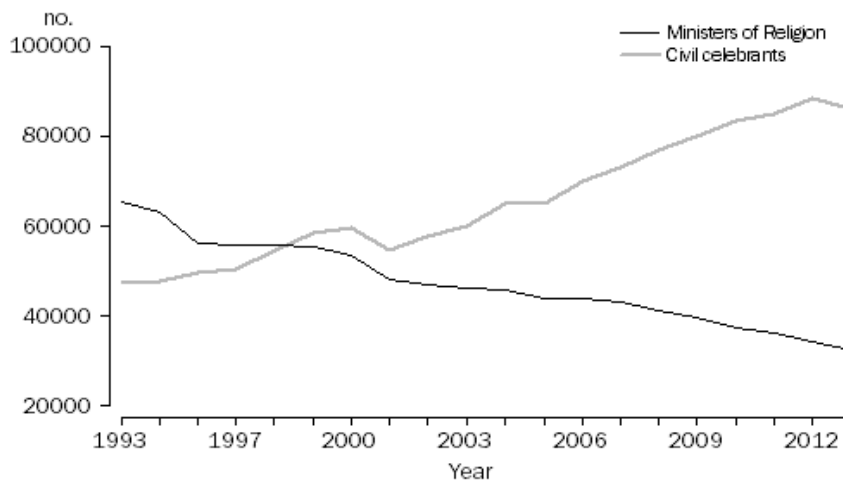


Figure 3. Type of celebrant, Australia, Selected years, 1993–2013¹⁷⁹

PSM raised the question: “are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for it?” (PSM #1). When addressing this question in an article cautioning against any relaxation of Church teaching on divorce and remarriage, ethicist Robert Spaemann offered a decisive ‘no’. Noting that Catholics are divorcing almost as frequently as their secular counterparts, he attributes much of the blame to poor marriage preparation,

¹⁷⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics.

particularly with respect to the teaching of Jesus on indissolubility,¹⁸⁰ noting: “Christian marriage preparation very often fails to give engaged couples a clear picture of the implications of a Catholic wedding.”¹⁸¹

The fact that the divorce rate among Catholics matches that of the population at large also prompted liturgist Kathleen Hughes to question the effectiveness of marriage preparation. Hughes highlights the minimal nature of such programs compared with those which prepare persons for ordained ministry or religious life and asks the apposite question, “How can we treat couples preparing to take similar solemn vows before God and the community with the same seriousness?”¹⁸²

In the context of these social problems PSM asserts that “the problem of preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and the life that follows emerges as a great pastoral need, first for the sake of the spouses, for the whole Christian community and for society”(PSM #1).

3.1.2 The Costs of the Breakdown of Marriage

The personal and social costs of the breakdown of marriage and family life are high. Divorce is a traumatic life event, second only to the death of a spouse in terms of stress caused, with consequent potential severe impacts upon the quality of life, including the mental and physical health, of the divorcing couple.¹⁸³ In 2014 it was estimated that the total cost of divorce to the Australian national economy was \$14 billion per year, an

¹⁸⁰ Jesus condemns divorce as contrary to the intention of the Creator: Mk 10: 9.

¹⁸¹ Robert Spaemann, "Divorce and Remarriage"
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/08/divorce-and-remarriage> (accessed July 30, 2014).

¹⁸² Hughes, 110.

¹⁸³ S. Stack, "Divorce," in *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, ed. V Ramachandran (Waltham, MA: Academic Press, 2012), 716.

amount that had increased by 17% in the previous two years.¹⁸⁴ The impacts of the breakdown of marriage and family life are widespread. Judith Wallerstein concluded from her research into divorce that changes in the family due to an increased rate of divorce result in profound changes for the whole of society with the greatest impacts being felt by children “who bear the psychological, economic and moral brunt of divorce.”¹⁸⁵

In Australia, as in the USA and the UK, a significant majority of couples cohabit before marriage: 76.6% of couples registering their marriage in Australia in 2013 cohabited prior marriage.¹⁸⁶ The reasons for cohabitation are many: some, scarred by the divorce of their parents, are “seeking to ensure a good future marriage and believe that a ‘trial marriage’ will accomplish this.”¹⁸⁷ Paul Amato’s summary of the research into the impacts of divorce reveals that the problems are inter-generational: “adults with divorced parents tend to obtain less education, have lower levels of psychological well-being, report more problems in their own marriages, feel less close to their parents (especially fathers), and are at greater risk of seeing their own marriages end in divorce.”¹⁸⁸ Effective PME then can contribute not only to fortifying the marriages of participants, but also to supporting the marriages of their children.

¹⁸⁴ Lauren Wilson and Lisa Cornish, "Divorce Is Costing the Australian Economy \$14 Billion a Year," *Herald Sun*, 6 July 2014.

¹⁸⁵ Judith S. Wallerstein, "Children after Divorce: Wounds That Don't Heal," in *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 397.

¹⁸⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics.

¹⁸⁷ NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, "Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples: Information Report," in *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.

¹⁸⁸ Paul R. Amato, "Research on Divorce: Continuing Trends and New Developments," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 72, no. 3 (2010): 653.

3.2 Recognised Benefits of Pre-marriage Education

In the context of a high divorce rate with its concomitant large social and economic impacts it is encouraging that the secular literature on marriage education is generally positive in regard to the benefits this education has on the community and the individuals involved.¹⁸⁹ In the last 30 years there has been a large body of high quality research into why marriages succeed or fail and further research into developing the skills required to sustain loving and lasting relationships.¹⁹⁰ Pre-marriage courses can assist participants to develop the skills and strategies to grow through the inevitable changes and crises of marriage.

3.3 The Role of Liturgy in Sacramental Catechesis

Providing skills and information to build lifelong marriages, (marriages which, in the Catholic understanding, are total, free, faithful and fruitful), requires effective pre-marriage education. Yet education in the Christian message in general, and the Christian message on marriage in particular, has been justly criticised as bland, feeble and ineffectual because it does not give a central place to the formative potential of the liturgy: “What we *do*, how we *act*, in the liturgical assembly shapes us in particular and powerful ways and is both formative of identity and catechetical in the most basic sense.”¹⁹¹ In other words, in relation to the marriage liturgy, the actions of bride and groom, before altar and assembly, can have a formative impact on their identity as a married couple, can open

¹⁸⁹ W. Kim Halford, *Australian Couples in Millenium Three: A Research and Development Agenda for Marriage and Relationship Education* (Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services, 2000), 83.

¹⁹⁰ J. M. Gottman and C. I. Notarius, "Marital Research in the 20th Century and a Research Agenda for the 21st Century," *Family Process* 41, no. 2 (2002).

¹⁹¹ Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," 324-325.

them to the Word of God in relation to marriage, and can educate them for the journey to become the couple and the persons that God has called them to be.

Since what we do and how we act in the liturgical assembly shapes us so powerfully, education in the words and actions of the marriage liturgy should form an essential part of Catholic pre-marriage education. In Catholic teaching, if not in Catholic practice, this has long been held to be so. Emphasising that catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, Pope John Paul II wrote that: “sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice” (CT #23). In spite of this powerful papal teaching, the *General Directory for Catechesis* notes that the practice of catechetics testifies “to a weak and fragmentary link with the liturgy: limited attention to liturgical symbols and rites, scant use of the liturgical fonts . . . the marginalization of liturgical celebrations in catechetical programs” (GDC #30).

Mere information about what will take place in the marriage liturgy is insufficient, for, as Kathleen Hughes notes, catechetical methods which provide mere information about the liturgy can leave participants uninspired and disengaged.¹⁹² More than mere information is necessary to engage and inspire couples and to help them to prepare to experience their marriage liturgy fully. The *experience* of the liturgy is the vital issue, as Nathan Mitchell explains: “one discovers what a sacrament ‘is’ by *celebrating* it, not by analyzing its structure in terms of matter, form and causality”.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Hughes, 8.

¹⁹³ Nathan Mitchell, "Sacrament: More Than Meets the Eye," *Worship* 83, no. 4 (2009): 357.

3.3.1 Sacramental Transformation

Celebrating a sacrament well and with understanding opens one to the possibility of transformation. The verb ‘to transform’ (meaning to change, alter, convert) occurs frequently in relation to liturgy in general and to the marriage liturgy in particular. The definition of sacrament employed in this thesis emphasises transformation: “Sacraments are human experiences that *transform* [emphasis added] our perspectives, meaning and action as we experience God.”¹⁹⁴ Joseph Martos writes of the marriage liturgy: “*The bride and groom are being transformed*, and the marriage liturgy is a door through which they enter into that sacred *transformation*” [emphasis added].¹⁹⁵

The notion of transformation is implicit in Brian Gleeson’s description of how the daily, lived experience of sacramental marriage ideally forms better persons: “The sacrament of daily life occurs when we enter into deep dialogue and communion with one another. The gift of the other’s love and care, the human communion, communicates freedom – freedom to become a better person, freedom to open up and share with others the love and care which has been given to us.”¹⁹⁶

There are scriptural bases for this emphasis upon transformation. It is during the wedding at Cana (one of RM’s suggested Gospel readings) that Jesus transforms water into wine. This short passage (Jn 2: 1-11) is dense with Johannine symbolism yet one of its fundamental themes is “the importance of the acceptance of the ‘word’ of Jesus”.¹⁹⁷ The

¹⁹⁴ Fleischer and Fagin, 231.

¹⁹⁵ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, Revised and Updated ed. (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001), 395.

¹⁹⁶ Gleeson.

¹⁹⁷ Francis J. Moloney and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, [Rev. ed.]. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005), 68.

transformation of the water into wine is entirely the work of Jesus, yet the transformation depends on the willingness of the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do (Jn 2:5).

Another scriptural source on the notion of transformation is found in 2 Corinthians where Paul writes: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminds us that “Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations” (SC #7). Acute awareness of Christ’s presence is always transformative, as Robert Taft writes: the divine presence is dynamic “producing an effect or change in whom or what God is present to.”¹⁹⁸ Taft also notes the critical importance of individual faith to awareness of Christ’s transformative presence in the liturgy: “only faith draws back the veil.”¹⁹⁹ It is for this reason that RM stresses the importance of nurturing and fortifying the faith of the couple to be married: “priests should first of all strengthen and nourish the faith of those about to be married, for the sacrament of marriage presupposes and demands faith” (RM #7). Married, Catholic pre-marriage educators, by their witness, should support priests in this fundamental task.

The transformation which can occur in the liturgy is God’s work, through the Spirit, yet it requires our faith and our free, full, conscious and active participation: as Kathleen Hughes writes: “we must respond, be receptive, unveil our minds and hearts – our faces - before God. Then *transformation* [emphasis added] happens. It is inevitable. The celebration of the liturgy with attention will change us.”²⁰⁰ Tom Elich also emphasises

¹⁹⁸ Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, Second ed. (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2001), 249.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁰⁰ Hughes, 28.

the link between active participation and transformation: “By our liturgical participation, we are transformed, saved, reconciled by God.”²⁰¹ If the marriage liturgy is well planned and celebrated well, if it has been possible to gain the active participation of the whole assembly, then the whole assembly, as well as bride and groom, can be opened to the possibility of transformation.

3.3.2 Pre-Liturgical Catechesis

Pre-liturgical catechesis prepares participants for full, conscious and active celebration of the liturgy *with understanding*. Pre-liturgical catechesis can help those preparing for participation in the marriage liturgy to be open to acceptance of the ‘word’ of Jesus; to be responsive, receptive and open to the possibility of transformation.

Murphy explains how liturgy provides a Christian pedagogy²⁰² in which learning changes the learner: “to learn, to know, is to be transformed – it is to implicate our selves, our very bodies in the actions and practices of coming to know.”²⁰³ Real learning results in transformed learners. The actions of bride and groom during the marriage liturgy will ideally open them to transformational learning: “The ‘knowledge’ imparted in worship is not simply cognitive – not the grasping of data by the intellect – but is material and corporeal; it is a knowledge that can be known only in the doing of it. It is, at heart, bodily and performative.”²⁰⁴ For this reason Clare Johnson cautions that a narrow focus on the verbal components of liturgy “risks overlooking the potential sources of liturgical

²⁰¹ Tom Elich, "Full, Conscious and Active Participation," in *Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy*, ed. Carmel Pilcher, David Orr, and Elizabeth Harrington (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013), 41.

²⁰² Pedagogy as it is used here refers to the capacity of liturgy to disclose a unique way of knowing that can transform persons. In terms of the maxim - *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* - the way we pray schools us in personal knowledge of what we believe and forms us to act as members of the Body of Christ.

²⁰³ Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," 323.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 325.

intelligibility located in the visual, kinetic, gustatory and olfactory realms . . .”²⁰⁵ The catechetical power of liturgy derives, in part, from its bodily and performative nature which allows liturgy to catechise in ways that formal discourse (mere information) about the theology of marriage cannot.

To participate fully in the marriage liturgy is to open oneself to the possibility of transformation by the (verbal and bodily) language of taking and accepting; of promising to be true in good times and bad, in sickness and health; of avowing to love and honour one’s spouse all the days of one’s life. It is to be shaped by the language of strengthening, blessing and indissolubility in the prayer of the Church: “May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide” (RM #26). The language of the central moment of the marriage liturgy establishes the possibility of embracing and living out a set of values and actions that are counter to the prevailing culture.²⁰⁶ In Murphy’s words, the language of liturgy “signifies differently, creating a new set of possibilities for human existence; it puts the world under judgment – not condemnation, but judgment.”²⁰⁷ In other words to participate in the Catholic marriage liturgy is to make a powerful countercultural statement for marriage as total, free, faithful and fruitful in a culture which increasingly views marriage as conditional, temporary and individualistic. The marriage liturgy points the newly married couple to a journey on the way of the Lord, not the way of the world.

Preparation for participation in the liturgy should be centred on RM and particularly on the ways in which the rite calls Catholics to be different from prevailing

²⁰⁵ Clare V. Johnson, "Sacrosanctum Concillium's Principle of Liturgical Intelligibility," in *Vatican II: Reforming Liturgy* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2013), 53.

²⁰⁶ See Table 2.2 above.

²⁰⁷ Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," 330.

social norms regarding marriage. The criticisms of Spaering and Hughes that the divorce rate among Catholics is approaching that of the wider community underscores Murphy's more wide-ranging critique of the church in the modern west as inept in asserting those differences that mark authentic worship and witness.²⁰⁸ Serious and effective preparation for, participation in, and reflection upon, the Catholic marriage liturgy has the potential to form couples whose lives proclaim marriage as total, free, faithful and fruitful; couples who as they grow into their Christian calling to be the light of the world, can let that light shine, to encourage others to give glory to God (Mt 5:14-16).

3.4 Stages of Liturgical Catechesis

Liturgical catechesis may be conceptualised as comprising three interrelated phases:

1. Pre-liturgical catechesis (preparation for full, conscious and active participation in liturgy).
2. Liturgical catechesis (the transformation that results from full, conscious and active participation in liturgy).
3. Post-liturgical catechesis (reflection upon living out the experience of full, conscious and active participation in liturgy: that is, mystagogy).

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* emphasises that, if the liturgy is to produce its full effects, pastors should ensure that “the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (SC #11). The particular focus of this thesis is pre-liturgical catechesis: it seeks to address the question of how participants in Catholic pre-marriage education courses may be supported to become

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 331.

fully aware of what they are doing in the rite as preparation for full, conscious and active participation in the marriage liturgy.

Familiaris Consortio stresses the need for pre-liturgical catechesis. The immediate stage of marriage preparation includes “preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy” (FC #66). PSM emphasises and expands the requirement that the couple be introduced to the rite of marriage, linking it with a guiding principle of SC:²⁰⁹

The immediate preparation for the sacrament of marriage must find suitable occasions to introduce the engaged couple to the rite of marriage. As well as deepening the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family with particular attention to moral duties, in this preparation the engaged should be guided to take an informed and active part in the marriage celebration, and understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and texts (PSM #52).

Inherent in this statement is an indication of the rationale for placing the Rite of Marriage at the heart of the immediate phase of pre-marriage education. Doing so facilitates the achievement of two goals: it guides the engaged to take an informed and active part in the marriage liturgy and it deepens engaged couples’ understanding of the Christian teaching on marriage and the family. Education in this area should be directed toward facilitating the active participation of the couple in their marriage liturgy and developing their understanding of the actions and texts of that liturgy. This form of liturgical catechesis “prepares for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy. This explains the contents of the prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation and silence. It must be regarded as an ‘eminent kind of catechesis’” (GDC #216).

²⁰⁹ SC #11.

Explanation of the prayers and the meaning of the signs and gestures not only educates the couple toward active participation in the marriage liturgy, but also potentially deepens their Christian understanding of marriage and the family in a way that is highly relevant to the couple and opens them to the experiencing in practice the content of that teaching. As was shown in Chapter 2, *The Rite of Marriage* presents the Catholic theology of marriage in a succinct yet complete manner which outlines clear implications for living the sacrament. The Rite exemplifies Aidan Kavanagh's contention that the official worship of the Church is *the* fundamental source of Christian theology: "a liturgical act *is* a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral and foundational kind."²¹⁰ The Rite (*lex orandi*), integrates both the Catholic theology of marriage (*lex credendi*), and a pathway for living the sacrament (what Kevin Irwin has termed the *lex vivendi*).²¹¹

In early Christian usage mystagogy generally referred to reflection after experience of the sacraments. There were however some exceptions, wherein explicit teaching about what would happen in the celebration of the rite occurred as preparation for the sacraments.²¹² Preparation for the experience of the sacraments complements post-sacramental reflection; as Simon Chan writes: "in today's church perhaps it is less critical *when* [emphasis added] mystagogical instructions are given; what is vital is that understanding of the liturgy must form a necessary part of the education of those who are seeking to enter the church or are already in it."²¹³ In both cases the goal of the catechesis is the same: to assist individuals to be open to the transformative effect of the liturgy by helping them to "enter the world of the liturgy, walk around inside it, explore their

²¹⁰ Kavanagh, 89.

²¹¹ Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology*, 46.

²¹² Hughes, 9. For example, preparation for the sacraments of initiation.

²¹³ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology : The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 123.

experience of its sights and sounds and smells, savor its memory, ponder the memory of what was said and done, and live out its vision.”²¹⁴

The pre-sacramental catechetical approach proposed here shares these goals: to allow couples a preview walk around of the world of the marriage liturgy, to ponder the words and actions of their forthcoming liturgy, and to be open to transformation by it to live out its values of love and fidelity.

3.5 Full Conscious and Active Participation in the Liturgy of Marriage

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* gave primacy to the “full, conscious, and active participation by all the people” in liturgical celebrations (SC #14). Active participation entails attending carefully to what is happening in the liturgy. Protestant theologian Don Saliers fleshes out the meaning of full, conscious and active participation as “singing, listening, attending to one another and bringing our lives to the symbols and actions.”²¹⁵ While full, conscious and active participation has interlinked external and internal aspects (in Elich’s words, “the external is integral to achieving the internal”),²¹⁶ Kathleen Hughes notes that active participation is primarily internal; it has to do with a “kind of *mindful engagement* [emphasis added] in the rites, an attending to the words and gestures, the symbols, the choreography, the space . . .”²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Hughes.

²¹⁵ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 47.

²¹⁶ Elich, 34.

²¹⁷ Hughes, 18.

3.5.1 Mindfulness

The positive benefits of mindful engagement, commonly termed mindfulness, have become a fruitful area of exploration within the field of psychology since the concept was introduced into clinical practice in the late 1970s. Mindfulness has been defined as the “awareness that arises out of intentionally attending in an open and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment.”²¹⁸ This definition captures two essential elements of mindfulness: it is both an outcome (awareness) and a process that produces that outcome (intentionally attending to the present moment in an open and discerning way). Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer emphasizes the process of actively drawing novel distinctions as fundamental to attending to the present moment in an open and discerning way.²¹⁹ It is this aspect of mindfulness which is emphasized by relationship researcher, James V. Cordova, in his program which has been designed to strengthen marital relationships: “[Love] means seeing your partner with fresh eyes, everyday, and not letting your view of your partner become obscured or jaded by old assumptions”.²²⁰ Developing greater mindfulness increases our capacity to see the people we love with fresh eyes and to listen to them more attentively.²²¹

The extensive research literature on the connection between mindfulness and positive relationships provides a sound empirical basis for Cordova’s emphasis upon mindfulness. It is appropriate merely to sample that literature here. Langer reports research which indicates “that there is a strong relationship between mindfulness and marital

²¹⁸ Shauna L. Shapiro, "The Integration of Mindfulness and Psychology," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 65, no. 6 (2009): 555.

²¹⁹ Ellen J. Langer and Mihnea Moldoveanu, "The Construct of Mindfulness," *Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 1 (2000): 1.

²²⁰ James V. Cordova, *The Marriage Checkup: A Scientific Program for Sustaining and Strengthening Marital Health* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2009), 42.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

satisfaction.”²²² Cordova reports a study which suggests that “couples who appear to be more mindful appear to be more likely to enjoy greater relationship health and stability, and within that, increases in satisfaction and affectionate behavior, as well as greater inter-partner harmony on a range of life issues.”²²³ Mindfulness can be developed as part of relationship enhancement programs: in this context it has been found to be “efficacious in enriching current relationship functioning and improving individual psychological well-being across a wide range of measures.”²²⁴

Researchers in the field of mindfulness acknowledge the origin of the concept in a range of religious and spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism, but also the Christian contemplative tradition. Not surprisingly, the principles of mindfulness have been shown to be “not only compatible with Christianity but also can enhance the Christian spiritual journey and increase value based behavior.”²²⁵

The significance of the concept, if not the term, has been noted in various theologies of marriage. Thus Kathleen Schaefer writes: “Everything about Christian marriage demands work, not so much physical work but a kind of redemptive effort *to be present* [emphasis added], to hear and understand and to respond faithfully with love to the other.”²²⁶ Theologian Wioleta Polinska makes a direct connection between mindfulness and marriage. Drawing upon Buddhist notions of impermanence and being fully present to

²²² Ellen Langer and Leslie C. Burpee, "Mindfulness and Marital Satisfaction," (2005), 49.

²²³ Karen Wachs and James V. Cordova, "Mindful Relating: Exploring Mindfulness and Emotion Repertoires in Intimate Relationships," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 33, no. 4 (2007): 478.

²²⁴ James W. Carson et al., "Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement," *Behavior Therapy* 35, no. 3 (2004): 488.

²²⁵ Scott H. Symington and Melissa F. Symington, "A Christian Model of Mindfulness: Using Mindfulness Principles to Support Psychological Well-Being, Value-Based Behavior, and the Christian Spiritual Journey," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 1 (2012): 71.

²²⁶ Schaefer, "The Nurturing of Marital Life," 73.

now, Polinska contends that the Christian theology of marriage overemphasizes indissolubility to protect the stability of marriage. She accepts this noble purpose but contends that the emphasis is perhaps misplaced: “Christian theology might become more successful at preserving the stability of marriage by becoming less focused on the finality of the couples’ bonds, and instead attending to the present reality of the couples’ relationship”²²⁷ Polinska sets up a false dichotomy here: the theology of RM with its stress upon “I will love you and honour you all the days of my life”, correctly emphasizes that indissolubility and present reality are interrelated. However, Polinska is helpful in noting the many studies that support the efficacy of mindfulness for strengthening couples’ relationships and outlining the positive contributions that mindfulness can make to marriage: “*Mutual participation and active engagement in all activities that a couple shares* [emphasis added] are profound ways of reenergizing closeness among partners.”²²⁸

Pre-marriage education courses that assist individuals to prepare for active engagement in their marriage liturgy may also help them to prepare for a lifetime of active engagement, of being present, to their spouse. Current, skills-based, pre-marriage courses typically emphasise mindfulness in relation to listening within the communication component of the course. Listening effectively to one’s partner affirms them and strengthens the relationship because it demonstrates that one is prepared to make the challenging effort involved in being fully present to them. Writing on “The Art of Listening”, Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay, asks what motivates an individual to listen with her full attention: the answer is “love, care or duty: we either do it because of

²²⁷ Wioleta Polinska, ““Till Death Do Us Part”?: Buddhist Insights on Christian Marriage,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010): 29.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

our affection for or commitment to the person.”²²⁹ In marriage, love and duty, affection and commitment, unite: both provide the motivation for listening with full attention to one’s spouse, and more comprehensively, for being mindful to the totality of the marital relationship. This is encompassed in one of the nuptial blessings of RM:

*Lord, grant that as they begin to live this sacrament
they may share with each other the gifts of your love
and become one in heart and mind
as witnesses to your presence in their marriage.* (RM 120)

Learning to become fully present to one’s spouse is part of becoming ‘one in heart and mind’.

Like the liturgy, the daily living out of marriage requires one’s full, conscious and active participation in building the relationship with one’s spouse. Drawing attention to the connection between mindful engagement in the rite of marriage and mindful engagement in the daily living of sacramental marriage is beneficial to those preparing for marriage. Full, conscious and active participation in the rite is foundational to lifelong sacramental marriage. Full, conscious and active participation in the marriage itself makes the sacrament an ongoing liturgy, God’s gift to the couple and through them to the world. It is the daily mindful experience of marriage that is transformative. Kevin Irwin does not use the term ‘mindfulness’, however, the concept is implicit in his writing on the primacy of experiencing liturgy: “*understanding* what occurs is always secondary to *experiencing in ever-new ways* [emphasis added] what occurs uniquely in and through the liturgy.”²³⁰

John Baldovin shows that the etymology of the word “liturgy” is more accurately “a work done for the people”, rather than the more common “the work of the people”.

²²⁹ Hugh Mackay, *Why Don't People Listen?* (Chippendale, N.S.W: Pan Australia, 1994), 149.

²³⁰ Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*, 61-62.

Marriage is the sacrament of everyday life and a sacrament is always liturgy.²³¹ Daily full, conscious, and active participation in the marriage itself makes the sacrament an ongoing liturgy: God's work done for the people. In this way marriage as ongoing sacrament and liturgy reflects God's love to the world. To adapt the words of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: "[spouses] should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all" (SC #48). The fruits of daily ministering to each other, of living fully the lifetime Christian vocation of marriage, can become visible and can influence others. Thus philosopher and Judaic scholar, Jonathan Sacks can write: "In marriage at its best you see humanity at its best, and in a loving home you can almost touch the divine presence."²³²

Kevin Irwin makes the same point equally eloquently:

Active participation in the sacred liturgy is the *means* to serve unimaginable and indescribable goals. Letting the liturgy be the liturgy is a first step in all its complexity and beauty toward the real goals of the liturgy – assimilation into God in the communion of the church for the sake of our witnessing in the world to what we celebrate.²³³

Active participation in the liturgy is the bedrock of (new) evangelisation. Tom Elich makes the same point as Irwin and identifies the sequence: in the liturgy "we are led by our full, conscious and active participation to a mystery beyond all telling: as we participate in the *rite*, we participate in the *priestly work of Christ*, and are led to participate in the *divine life of the Trinity*."²³⁴ This is the sequence which the *Catechism* proclaims: "Liturgical

²³¹ Vorgrimler, 78.

²³² Jonathan Sacks, "Marriage Is a Metaphor for Our Relationship with God" <http://www.rabbisacks.org/marriage-is-a-metaphor-for-our-relationship-with-god/> (accessed December 10, 2014).

²³³ Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*, 63.

²³⁴ Elich, 35.

catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ . . . by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC #1075).

3.6 A Model for Pre-Marriage Education on Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant

The model for pre-marriage education on marriage as sacrament and covenant presented below is based on the principles articulated above and restated in summary form here:

- If the liturgy is to produce its full effects, pastors should ensure that “the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (SC #11).
- Catechesis for marriage should assist couples to prepare for full, conscious and active participation in the rite and for their ministerial role in the liturgy.
- Catechesis for marriage should guide the engaged to “understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and texts” (PSM #52).
- Catechesis for marriage should proceed “from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC #1075).
- The Rite of Marriage is a door to a lifelong sacrament/liturgy/vocation which offers spouses a path to “advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God”. (GS #48)

The PME model presented in this thesis was developed, trialled and refined with pre-marriage groups during 2014. It comprises a PowerPoint presentation, accompanying

background notes for presenters, and a reflection workbook for participants.²³⁵ It is designed as a component of a comprehensive course which employs an adult learning model involving input, personal reflection guided by workbook exercises, sharing with one's partner, and private couple discussion. This component of the course is allocated a maximum time of one hour and the model presented below should be evaluated in the light of that time constraint.

The content of this model was developed in light of Elich's analysis of levels of fruitful participation in the liturgy, drawn from Mark Searle's work with the three scholastic dimensions of the sacramental sign. This elaboration (specifically in relation to marriage) is shown in table 3.

²³⁵ The reflection workbook is included as an appendix.

Table 3. Dimensions of the sacramental sign of marriage, level of participation and emphasis in pre-marriage education²³⁶

Three dimensions of the sacramental sign	Level of participation	Aspect of sacramental marriage	Emphasis in pre-marriage education
1. The <i>sacramentum tantum</i> : the signifier taken on its own.	External	Consent, Nuptial Blessing	Components of the Rite of Marriage: The entrance rite The Liturgy of the Word The questions The consent (exchange of vows) The blessing and exchange of rings The nuptial blessing
2. The <i>res et sacramentum</i> : what is immediately signified by the rite, but which, in turn, signifies something more than itself.	Sacramental	The man and the woman become husband and wife; the newly married couple signify God's love for God's people and Christ's love for Christ's Church.	The sacramental mystery of marriage: Marriage as: Vocation Sacrament Covenant Communion Partnership
3. The <i>res tantum</i> : what the sacrament ultimately means.	Internal	Graced by the Spirit, the authentic married love of the couple is caught up into divine love (GS #48).	Marital spirituality: growing in authentic married love.

In accord with the principle of proceeding “from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” and Elich’s levels of fruitful participation, the model begins with the components of the Rite of Marriage (the

²³⁶ This table, relating specifically to marriage, is developed from Elich's general analysis. Elich, 34-35.

sign), proceeds to the sacramental mystery of marriage (the thing signified), which leads to marital spirituality (openness to the mysteries or what the sacrament ultimately means).

The components of the Rite of Marriage are presented to PME participants to provide a preview of the world of the marriage liturgy for them as they prepare for the sacrament, and to deepen their understanding of the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family. The key messages related to each component are summarised in table 4.

Table 4. Overview of the Rite of Marriage showing elements to be stressed, key messages and options

Outline of the rite	Elements	Key messages
Introductory rites	Entrance Rite*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church welcomes, and rejoices with, the bride and groom • The bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament • The equality of the bride and groom • Acknowledgement of the formative role of both sets of parents
Liturgy of the Word	Liturgy of the Word#*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bride and groom have selected readings which speak to their highest values and beliefs about Catholic sacramental marriage • The bride and groom are persons who seek to hear and live the word of the Lord
Liturgy of the sacrament	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church prays that the love of the couple may be sealed and strengthened
	Questions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic marriage is free, faithful and open to life
	Consent*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The couple minister the sacrament to each other now and for the rest of their lives
	Blessing and Exchange of Rings*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rings symbolise the gift of lifelong love and fidelity • The exchange of rings symbolises the equality of bride and groom
	General Intercessions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wife and husband demonstrate their dependence on God for the success of their own marriage and the well-being of their families, friends and the wider community
Liturgy of the Eucharist	Liturgy of the Eucharist*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Eucharist is the great symbol of unity: in sharing the bread and wine wife and husband become one in sharing the life of Christ.
	The Lord's Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wife and husband proclaim that they are servants of the kingdom
	Nuptial Blessing*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wife and husband demonstrate their dependence on God for blessing all that they hope for in their marriage
Concluding rites	Solemn Blessing*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assembly acknowledge their dependence on God

#Elements which the rite identifies should be stressed are shown in **bold**. The rite notes that the reception of Holy Communion by the groom and the bride and by others present is also to be emphasised.

*Indicates that the rite provides options for these elements and that the couple as ministers, in consultation with their priest, have decisions to make about how the rite is celebrated.

3.6.1 Pre-Marital Catechesis: Introductory Rites

The PME catechesis entailed in this model begins by congratulating couples on their profound counter-cultural choice of a church wedding: in Australia in 2013 more than seven of every ten marriages were performed by civil celebrants. The participants in these courses are part of the fewer than three in ten who will celebrate their marriage with some kind of religious rite.²³⁷

The importance of ritual in relation to significant life events like love and commitment is acknowledged by noting the popularity of the secular ritual of ‘lovelocks’ where a couple buy a padlock, inscribe it with their names, lock it to a bridge and then throw the key into the river below.²³⁸ They are seeking to signify the locking or sealing of their love. The liturgy too speaks of sealing the love of the couple:

*My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may **seal and strengthen** [emphasis added] your love in the presence of the Church’s minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity (RM #23).*

The introduction to the ‘Liturgy of the Sacrament’ indicates that the marriage liturgy will encompass, but greatly surpass, what occurs in any secular marriage ritual. In the Catholic marriage liturgy, the Lord seals and strengthens the couple’s love in a public and ecclesial sacramental marriage, which is founded on the baptisms of bride and groom and reminds them of how their baptism in Christ will enrich and strengthen them for the duties of marriage, with an emphasis on mutuality and fidelity.

²³⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics.

²³⁸ Part of the parapet of the world famous Pont Des Arts Bridge in Paris has collapsed under the weight of the growing number of locks that had been attached. Wendy Urquhart, "Lovelocks' Collapse Paris Bridge Rail" <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27758940> (accessed January 2, 2015).

Participants in the PME course are invited to compare and contrast video excerpts of two marriage liturgies, the 2011 marriage of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in the traditional rite of the Church of England²³⁹ and a section from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) 2013 video, "Saying I Do: What Happens at a Catholic Wedding". This contrast highlights the emphasis in the Catholic rite upon bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament: the liturgy marks the beginning of their daily life-long ministry of this sacrament to each other. In the Catholic marriage rite the priest is present as the official witness of the Church, to bestow the blessing of the Church and, in Australia, as an agent of the Commonwealth to marry the couple legally. The Catholic emphasis upon bride and groom as ministers shapes the ritual in a particular way; it affords them the place of honour in the ecclesial entrance procession and it preferences the declarative forms of the consent and the exchange of rings.

3.6.2 Liturgy of the Word

The Introduction to RM emphasises that the liturgy of the word “is a highly effective means for the catechesis on the sacrament of marriage and its duties” (RM #11), accordingly pre-marital catechesis should have an appropriate focus upon the Word. It is common practice for pastors to encourage the couple to select scripture readings from the range available, which speak to the couple’s values and beliefs about Christian marriage and their hopes for their future.

The particular challenge here arises from contradiction between the life situations of many of the couples who present for PME (“usually they have lost contact with regular

²³⁹ Wherein the Archbishop of Canterbury is obviously the minister who controls the rite.

Church practice”)²⁴⁰ and the presumption of the liturgy that those celebrating the Rite of marriage are

- people of the Word
- people hungry for the Word, and in need of the Word
- people who find in the Word the very voice and presence of the Lord
- and people ready, or being readied, to preach and live the Word.²⁴¹

This PME model presents three typical scripture readings (Ruth 1: 16-17, 1 John 4: 7-12 and John 2: 1-11) which speak respectively of commitment, of love, and of listening to the Word of Jesus. The objective is to allow participants to hear inspiring, non-patriarchal readings which do express most engaged couples’ highest values and beliefs about Christian marriage, to assist them with selecting readings for their own marriage liturgy and, in Fleming’s words, “to evangelize, to bring the word of God to bear upon their lives, and to help them to understand the sacrament of marriage in terms of the scriptures.”²⁴²

3.6.3 Questions

The ritual questions asked of bride and groom –

“N. and N., have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?”

“Will you love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?”

“Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”(RM #24).

²⁴⁰ Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," 4.

²⁴¹ Fleming, 59.

²⁴² Ibid., 60.

- encapsulate the duties of Christian marriage and prepare couples for the immensity of the commitment they will make in the Consent. The first two questions emphasise the love of the couple demonstrated by their preparedness to give each other the gift of themselves for the whole of their lives. The third question emphasises the social and communal aspects of marriage in the couple's commitment to openness to life, specifically openness to children, and in its broader meaning, openness to bring life to the broader community, indeed to the world. In the PME catechesis couples are challenged to reflect on these questions and the alignment between the official meanings of the questions and their personal understanding of them.

3.6.4 Consent

Within RM, the Consent is the central sacramental moment of the liturgy; its words and gestures are the ritual signs by which the spouses establish their marital covenant, and it is the point at which the couple are most obviously the ministers of the sacrament to each other. Participants are encouraged to reflect upon the solemnity and the significance of this ritual moment as their door to the experience of the sacred in everyday life. It is the moment where mindful engagement in the rite, and attention to the words and gestures, is most essential. Cordova advises married couples seeking to sustain and strengthen their relationship that, “perhaps the most important gift that you can give to your partner and to your marriage is the gift of your undiluted presence. Being truly present and attentive may be the most effective thing you can do for your marital health.”²⁴³

Participants in the PME course are reminded that full, conscious, active participation in the rite involves “listening, attending to one another and bringing our lives

²⁴³ Cordova, 74.

to the symbols and actions.”²⁴⁴ Vatican II taught that genuine scientific research never truly conflicts with faith (GS #36). Here good science (the emphasis in the psychological literature upon mindfulness) and good theology (SC’s emphasis upon full, conscious, active participation) align. At this key moment in the liturgy the bride and groom need to employ their mindfulness to listen, to attend to one another, and particularly to bring their lives to the symbols and actions. In the words of the Consent, “I will love you and honour you all the days of my life” (RM #25) bride and groom give and receive the gift of themselves for the whole of their lives. The immensity of the gift and the giving are enhanced by both partners being completely in the moment.

3.6.5 Blessing and Exchange of Rings

Bride and groom are likewise encouraged to bring their lives to the symbols and actions of the exchange of rings. The exchange of rings strengthens and confirms the Consent. In saying, and in hearing, the words of the exchange of rings, “N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (RM #27). The *exchange* of rings is emphasised. The ring that the groom wears is a sign, not only of his commitment to marriage, but, more significantly, of his partner’s commitment to him, of their love for, and fidelity to, him (and vice versa for the bride). In saying and in hearing the words, in giving and receiving the rings, bride and groom are giving and receiving the gift of faithful, encircling love forever. For most individuals no person has ever said, nor will ever say, words of such significance to them. Commonly couples in pre-marriage courses readily accept the need to be mindful during this significant exchange.

²⁴⁴ Saliers, 47.

Consideration of the exchange of rings with its emphasis upon love and fidelity provides PME participants with an opportunity to consider their own understanding of marital fidelity. This understanding can be advanced through consideration of material drawn from an interview with marriage researcher John Gottman:

I can go to the deli and see a beautiful woman there, and I can just get on with ordering my sandwich. Someone else might think she was beautiful and then wonder what would happen if they told her that. They give themselves permission to cross a boundary, even though they're in a committed relationship. They think what harm will it do? But the biochemistry of love can take over. In every close conversation you have you secrete oxytocin, you create a bond.²⁴⁵

Gottman's statement on fidelity, which comes from 40 years of research into marriage and relationships, is consistent with the teaching of Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28). Sharing their responses to this material with their partner challenges couples to clarify their individual responsibility for, and their personal understanding of, marital fidelity and its boundaries.

3.6.6 Liturgy of the Eucharist

RM stresses that the celebration of marriage should normally be within Mass (RM #6). The Eucharist is the great symbol of unity: in sharing the bread and wine wife and husband become one in sharing the life of Christ. As part of the PME model couples are reminded that whether to celebrate marriage within a Eucharistic context or not is another decision for them to make in consultation with their pastor. Again Fleming offers sage advice for pastors: couples should be met where they are and encouraged to "whatever

²⁴⁵ John Gottman, "Will You Still Be Sending Me a Valentine?," *New Scientist*, April 29, 2006, 39.

level of spiritual formation they can appropriate, remembering that they have a lifetime of marriage ahead of them in which to draw closer to the life and prayer of the church.”²⁴⁶

3.6.7 Nuptial blessing

RM identifies the Nuptial Blessing as a particularly significant component to be emphasized in the Rite, for in the nuptial blessing, “the priest implores God’s blessing on the marriage covenant” (RM #6). In kneeling to accept this blessing wife and husband demonstrate their dependence on God to bless all that they hope for in their marriage. The PME course reminds couples that there is a choice of nuptial blessings available to them in RM and that their pastor will generally encourage them to choose a blessing which expresses their beliefs and hopes for their marriage. An excerpt from Nuptial Blessing B provides an exemplar:

*Lord, grant that as they begin to live this sacrament
they may share with each other the gifts of your love
and become one in heart and mind
as witnesses to your presence in their marriage (RM #120).*

This excerpt expresses simply and eloquently some fundamental tenets of Christian marriage: the couple’s dependence upon God; the marriage liturgy as the beginning of a life of sacramental marriage; sharing the gifts of God’s love grows the communion of the couple; and that marriage reveals God to the world. In Sacks’ words, “in a loving home you can almost touch the divine presence.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Fleming, 64.

²⁴⁷ Sacks.

3.7 From the Sign to the Thing Signified

In accordance with the principle that catechesis for marriage should proceed “from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC #1075), the PME model progresses from the sign to the thing signified. Consistent with the centrality of human experience: “Sacraments are human experiences that transform our perspectives, meaning and action as we experience God”,²⁴⁸ the model develops the argument of German Martinez that “a theological perspective of marriage must integrate the full complexity of its core values into multi-faceted, *real-life experience*.”²⁴⁹ To express the rich complexity of the lived experience of marriage, Martinez identifies five complementary core values which interact to actualize the sacramental mystery of marriage as summarised in figure 4.

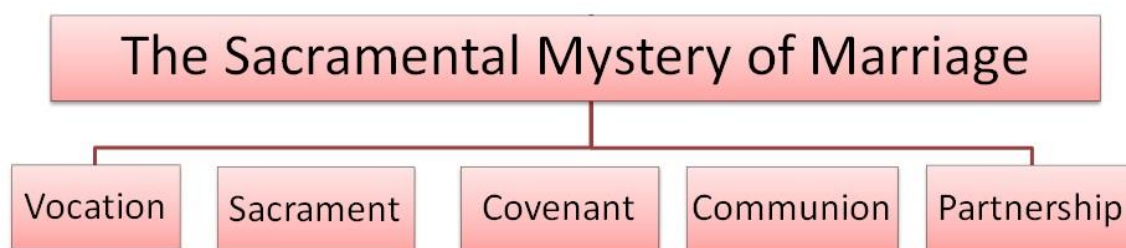


Figure 4. The Sacramental Mystery of Marriage²⁵⁰

The PME model explores each aspect of the sacramental mystery of marriage with participating couples, highlighting that the signs of the rite signify marriage as vocation, sacrament, covenant, communion and as partnership.

²⁴⁸ Fleischer and Fagin, 231.

²⁴⁹ Martínez, 274.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 277. The order of the elements has been changed for pedagogical reasons.

3.7.1 Vocation

The PME course encourages participants to see marriage as vocation or the free response to a call or invitation given by God which is just as valid and momentous as the call to the priesthood or to religious life. To say, as Martinez does, that “marriage is just as valid a path to holiness as is a call to the priesthood”,²⁵¹ is not to disparage vocations to the priesthood but to elevate marriage to its correct position as valid vocation. The rite emphasises the free consent of the partners in response to this call: “have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourself to each other in marriage?” (RM #24), and God’s role in that call: “Lord, by your love and providence you have brought them together” (RM #112).

3.7.2 Sacrament

PME participants are asked to reflect upon marriage as a sacrament; that is, as a human and divine action and experience with the potential to transform the couple’s perspectives, meaning and acts as they experience God.²⁵² Couples are challenged to consider that within marriage the meaning of sexual intercourse is transformed: sexual intercourse becomes a sign of giving oneself and accepting the gift of the other “to both signify and create interpersonal communion.”²⁵³

The everyday experience of marriage is potentially transformational since through it, one can come to know the God of love by being loved and by loving. Within marriage one comes to know the God of forgiveness and fidelity through the forgiveness and fidelity of one’s partner and oneself. The Australian Catholic Bishops emphasise the importance of

²⁵¹ Ibid., 278.

²⁵² Fleischer and Fagin, 231.

²⁵³ Michael G. Lawler, *What Is and What Ought to Be: The Dialectic of Experience, Theology and Church* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 159.

this everyday experience: “Marriage is an opportunity to experience the beauty of human love, a love that mirrors the love of God.”²⁵⁴

In the PME course, the words of Jonathan Sacks are presented to encourage couples to reflect upon the goal of their own marital journey: “marriage can transform us into something larger, more spacious, more generous and tender than we could ever be on our own. In marriage at its best you see humanity at its best, and in a loving home you can almost touch the divine presence.”²⁵⁵

3.7.3 Covenant

In exploring marriage as covenant, the PME course encourages couples to recognise that at the central moment of the liturgy the spouses freely establish their marital covenant with the words of the rite: “I take you . . . I will love you and honour you all the days of my life (RM #25). With these words and gestures each spouse makes a personal, total and solemn commitment to their partner, the commitment to give the gift of themselves to their partner for the whole of their life. The immensity of this sacred promise is emphasised by linking the marital covenant with the covenant Jesus established with his followers: “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20), and by asking participants to reflect on the fact that in Canon Law “the most profound type of covenant, aside from that which exists between God and God’s people, is the covenant between spouses.”²⁵⁶ To strengthen this learning individual participants are challenged to reflect upon the value they place upon promise-keeping, how well they have kept promises in the past, and on the immensity of this promise in relation to all previous promises. Promises are central to the

²⁵⁴ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1.

²⁵⁵ Sacks.

²⁵⁶ Doyle, 740.

marriage liturgy and keeping those promises is central to the lived liturgy of marriage, for keeping those promises is “the way by which the old self is changed into something light and generous and good for the other;”²⁵⁷ it is the way in which spouses become penetrated with the spirit of Christ (GS #48); it is the way in which the sacrament can lead spouses into the mystery of participation in the life of God.

3.7.4 Communion

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God is a communion of persons and God therefore “is discovered wherever we give ourselves over to the life of communion.”²⁵⁸ Giving oneself over to the life of communion within marriage is explored in the PME course as a way for couples to conceptualise having in common: common sharing, common possession, common responsibility and common nurturance of love.²⁵⁹ This material is linked to previous learning by reminding participants of the importance of communication in building strong, positive relationships, for communication means having understanding in common, yet most individuals find this aspect of communion difficult: communication requires “patient, deliberate, and loving work to hear each other clearly and understand each other well.”²⁶⁰ Likewise participants are reminded of the importance of differentiation rather than fusion in healthy relationships: “authentic marital communion in intimacy is neither the merger of two selves nor the absorption of one self

²⁵⁷ Hughes, 107.

²⁵⁸ Gaillardetz, 23.

²⁵⁹ Michael G. Lawler, "Marriage: Covenant and Sacrament," in *A Sacramental Life: A Festschrift Honoring Bernard Cooke*, ed. Michael Barnes and William P. Roberts (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), 139.

²⁶⁰ Cordova, 45.

into the other; it is the abiding together of two persons whose identities are both affirmed and transformed as they offer themselves as gift to the other.”²⁶¹

3.7.5 Partnership

The PME course highlights that the actions and gestures of the rite, particularly the preference for an inclusive entrance rite and an exchange of rings, speak strongly of the equal partnership of bride and groom. Participants are reminded that partnership is inherent in the definition of marriage: “marriage is an intimate *partnership* [emphasis added] of life and love” (GS #48). A marriage partnership is a daily journey, an ongoing process of loving, honouring, growing and becoming. It is in this process, in the love and struggles of marriage, that a couple attains to the holiness of their vocation. In their personal reflection and sharing couples are challenged to reflect upon their personal understanding of holiness and to move, if necessary, from a popular misconception of holiness as a misty-eyed otherworldliness to an understanding of holiness as a daily realistic engagement with the joys, wonders and challenges of married life. Kathleen Hughes provides an inspirational definition of holiness which resonates with this latter view: “Holiness includes delighting in this world rather than fleeing it, recognizing that God, the creator and sustainer of all things is revealed at the very heart of the world and of *human experience* [emphasis added].”²⁶²

3.8 From the Sacrament to the Mysteries

In the PME course the core values of marriage – vocation, sacrament, covenant, communion and partnership – are emphasised as offering spouses a path to holiness:

²⁶¹Gaillardetz, 54.

²⁶²Hughes, 103.

“becoming the person whom God calls us to be in the midst of the world, *allowing* [emphasis added] the action of God and the life of God to pervade and transform our lives.”²⁶³ It is “as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation [that] they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ” (GS #48). There are however factors which can hinder progress on that path to holiness, which can obstruct the fulfilment of conjugal and family obligations, which can impede spouses’ allowing the action of God and the life of God to pervade and transform their lives. Participants are challenged to consider how the culture of the society in which they live, and the influence of the social network of which they are part, may impact upon their marriage.

3.8.1 Marriage in a Consumer Society

Elements of contemporary western culture – excessive choice, consumption and disposability can be corrosive of marriage.²⁶⁴ In the PME course these elements are illustrated using images from popular advertisements and magazines. Christian marital spirituality is presented as a way to be counter-cultural, to work to protect what is most important to married couples: their marriage relationship. Marital spirituality is defined as what helps us to live out the values central to and celebrated in the marriage liturgy and these are shown to be counter-cultural by comparison with some cultural values as illustrated in table 2.²⁶⁵

Couples are invited to consider that while Christian marriage shares with the secular culture an emphasis upon romantic love, Christian marriage is counter-cultural in

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* points to the serious disturbances caused to families by the social and psychological influences of modern economic conditions (GS #47).

²⁶⁵ See Chapter 2 above.

that it also emphasises self-sacrificing love: “I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health” (RM #25).

3.8.2 Social Networks

Information, attitudes and behaviours can spread through the social network to which one belongs. In the PME course, couples are presented with research findings which show that study participants were 75% more likely to become divorced if a friend was divorced and that this effect extended to two degrees of separation: if the friend of a friend was divorced participants were 33% more likely to become divorced.²⁶⁶ The researchers suggest that “attending to the health of one’s friend’s marriages might serve to support and enhance the durability of one’s own relationship.”²⁶⁷ In their reflection and sharing within the PME course couples are challenged to consider practical ways in which they might support the health of their friends’ marriages. The educational rationale here is that this exercise provides couples with the opportunity to review the work of their pre-marriage course – which is focussed upon developing a healthy marriage – and the opportunity to develop an action plan to support the health of their friends’ marriages. The catechetical rationale is that this exercise develops practical strategies to support spouses’ service to God and neighbour, as part of their lifelong marriage liturgy, for in the New Testament, “the word ‘liturgy’ refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity” (CCC #1070). In their active charity to support the health of their friends’ marriages spouses can contribute greatly to the new evangelization and to the good of society.

²⁶⁶ Rose McDermott, James H. Fowler, and Nicholas A. Christakis, "Breaking up Is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else Is Doing It Too: Social Network Effects on Divorce in a Longitudinal Sample," *Social Forces* 92, no. 2 (2013): 504.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 516.

Participants are reminded of the Australian research which concludes that “simply wanting a relationship to continue is insufficient - active engagement in behaviours that support the relationship is needed in order to maintain its stability.”²⁶⁸ Active behaviours that support one’s own marriage, as well as active behaviours that support the health of one’s friends’ marriages, are likely to have positive effects for the marriages of one’s friends and oneself.

3.8.3 Marital Spirituality

Research reveals that the level of interest in spirituality is generally low among Australian young people with only about 17% of Generation Y (those born from 1981 - 1995) actively engaging with Christian spirituality.²⁶⁹ In the PME course, marital spirituality is presented as openness to God, supported by a set of practices which support the efforts of spouses to enact the values celebrated in RM. A marital spirituality is pragmatic and pertinent: it helps couples to work every day to become the best couple that they can be, to reveal God’s love in their love for each other, in loving and honouring each other every day of their lives.

Spirituality influences all aspects of the marital relationship and (to the degree that it is an integral part of the relationship, influencing communication, conflict-resolution, decision making, and sexuality), likely results in increased relationship-satisfaction.²⁷⁰ In the PME course, couples are encouraged to reflect upon practices which will help them to live out the values central to and celebrated in the marriage liturgy. A list of suggestions including reading, reflection, mindfulness, meditation, prayer (e.g., Forgive us our

²⁶⁸ Parker and Commerford, 7.

²⁶⁹ Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton, and Ruth Webber, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia* (Mulgrave, VIC: John Garratt 2007), 70.

²⁷⁰ See Giblin, "Marital Spirituality : A Quantitative Study."9

trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us), music and ritual, including liturgy (particularly Reconciliation and Eucharist in the Catholic tradition), is provided to support their reflection and sharing.

3.8.4 Conclusion

The PME model presented here concludes with a summary of Catholic marriage as total, free, faithful and fruitful.²⁷¹ Pope Francis, in his catechesis on marriage, provides a practical summary of the entire PME course: “there are three words that always need to be said . . . may I, thank you, and sorry.”²⁷² With the (be)attitude of ‘may I’ one respects the personal autonomy and otherness of one’s spouse; with ‘thank you’ one expresses gratitude for the gift of the other; with ‘sorry’ one acknowledges one’s humanity and the constant need to seek (and grant) forgiveness. Finally the PME course model recalls Pope Francis’ exhortation to tell young people that marriage is beautiful: “There are problems in marriage – different points of view, jealousies, arguments, but tell young people to never let the day end without making peace. The sacrament of matrimony is renewed in this act of peace. This path is not easy, but it is so beautiful. Marriage is beautiful. Tell them that.”²⁷³ The PME model – from presentation to participant reflection exercises – proclaims the message of Francis and of the *Rite of Marriage*, that marriage is beautiful.

This chapter has presented a model that seeks to assist couples to prepare for full, conscious and active celebration of their marriage liturgy. Yet liturgy is primarily performative: transformation occurs within the performance of the liturgy. The next

²⁷¹ Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae" http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html (accessed March 24, 2015). #9.

²⁷² Francis, "General Audience 02 April 2014" http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140402_udienza-generale.html (accessed February 4, 2015).

²⁷³ Cindy Wooden, "Marriage Isn't Easy, but It's Beautiful, Pope Says" <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1304506.htm> (accessed January 14, 2015).

chapter examines what participant observation of the marriage liturgies of a small sample of couples who have participated in the PME course has contributed to the development of the model presented above.

Chapter 4

Gathering Data from Liturgical Performance

What actually happens in the celebration of the liturgy? Addressing this complex question, Robert Taft writes: “In 1513, Michelangelo Buonarroti completed the frescoes that still grace the Sistine Chapel . . . In the magnificent creation scene, the life-giving finger of God stretches out and almost – but not quite – touches the outstretched finger of the reclining Adam. Liturgy fills the gap between those two fingers.”²⁷⁴ The image to which Taft points illuminates the wonder and mystery of the liturgy, yet even such a beautiful image is but a pale reflection of the privileged encounter with God that can be experienced through full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. The student of liturgical theology can comprehend something of that encounter through reading liturgical texts; but access to a deeper and richer experience of that encounter is available only through participation in the liturgy itself. This chapter will focus on liturgical experience of the sacrament of marriage in a contemporary Australian context.

The previous chapter presented a PME model that seeks to assist couples to prepare for full, conscious and active celebration of their marriage liturgy. This model was developed in dialogue with a review of the relevant literature, particularly *The Rite of Marriage*, but also in light of observation of the marriage liturgies, and subsequent interviews, of a small sample of couples who participated in the PME course in which this model was employed.

Observation of marriage liturgies falls within the ambit of ritual studies, a relatively new field of inquiry. Ronald Grimes recalls that getting the first edition of his book,

²⁷⁴ Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 240.

Beginnings in Ritual Studies published in 1982 was difficult because, “no one knew what ritual studies was.”²⁷⁵ Writing in the revised edition of that work, Grimes argued that ritual studies needed to develop methods of data collection to complement the study of ritual texts: “We need to understand how ritual as prescribed in texts is related to ritual as performed.”²⁷⁶ Paul Bradshaw makes a similar point in the conclusion of his critique of traditional methods in liturgical theology, arguing that liturgical theology needs to borrow from anthropology, psychology and sociology “in order to explore more deeply the essentially multivalent character of worship itself and the multiple meanings attached to the activity that co-exist within any group of people celebrating ritual together.”²⁷⁷

Ritual studies, which encompasses liturgical studies, has subsequently developed as a multi-disciplinary field of inquiry, utilising pragmatically, methods drawn from anthropology, social psychology, semiotics, kinesics, communications theory, interview strategies, participant observation and other fields of study as required for the particular problem under investigation.²⁷⁸ Participant observation was employed in this study in order to seek to understand how ritual, as prescribed in *The Rite of Marriage*, is related to ritual as performed in marriage liturgies, and the multiple meanings that co-exist when a group of people celebrate ritual together.

Participant observation in marriage liturgies and subsequent interviews of the ritual participants provided data informing both theological and methodological approaches to refining the PME model. Theologically, liturgy is primarily performative: transformation occurs within the performance of liturgy. Mark Searle explains: “Liturgy is something that

²⁷⁵ Ronald L Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Revised ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), xi.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²⁷⁷ Paul Bradshaw, "Difficulties in Doing Liturgical Theology," *Pacifica* 11, (1998): 194.

²⁷⁸ Johnson provides a more comprehensive list. Johnson, "Researching Ritual Practice," 205.

is *done*. It does not exist in books, but comes to be at particular places and times as people get together to enact it. Liturgy's meaning is only realized in the doing.²⁷⁹ A theologian studying the texts of *The Rite of Marriage* can attempt to analyse the range of meanings that may be communicated when a couple actually marries. But the text on the page is not a prayer; it becomes a prayer when hearts and voices enunciate it Godward. The rite of marriage can be discussed and analysed in a workshop setting, but sacramental marriage only happens when, in a moment of ultimate seriousness, one person makes a covenant with another in the context of a community's tradition and its understanding of the consequences of doing so.²⁸⁰

Part of the range of meanings communicated when a couple actually marries depends upon the personal meanings held by, or gained by, the ritual participants, particularly the bride and groom and the presider in the 'doing' of the ritual. Addressing the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems lies at the heart of qualitative research.²⁸¹ A focus on the meanings held by participants, rather than the meanings that researchers bring to the problem, is a central characteristic of the qualitative research process, a focus that makes the methods of qualitative research appropriate when the researcher seeks to explore a problem related to individual or group meaning and to develop a complex and detailed understanding of it.²⁸²

Since liturgy is something that is done, since liturgy's meaning is only realised in the doing, and since the preconceived personal meanings of participants (as well as those

²⁷⁹ Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 22.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. Searle's example of baptism has been rewritten here to apply to marriage.

²⁸¹ John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, Third ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 44.

²⁸² Ibid., 47-48.

which emerge from the ritual) are so significant, the qualitative research techniques of participant observation and interview are appropriate here. These techniques, together with analysis of other data, have contributed to the development of the PME model presented above. The data analysis spiral which provides rigour to qualitative research has been utilised: “to analyse qualitative data, the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text or images . . . and exits with an account or a narrative [or a model]. In between the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles round and round.”²⁸³

Development of the PME model presented in Chapter 3 involved circling ‘round and round’ as the materials and process were expanded and refined. A spiralling, iterative process was employed that included:

- Analysis of *the Rite of Marriage*,
- Development of educational materials based upon the *Rite*,
- Presentation of those educational materials to participants in the PME course,
- Reflection upon participants’ (and colleagues’) responses to those educational materials,
- Participant observation of the marriage liturgies and interview of a small sample of participants,
- And revision of the educational materials.

²⁸³ Ibid., 182.

4.1 Reflexivity

Qualitative research assumes that all research is value laden, that objectivity in research is neither possible nor desirable, and that it is incumbent upon inquirers to position themselves in a study identifying their research presuppositions; that is, to “report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field.”²⁸⁴ Consequently the history and social location of this inquirer as a Roman Catholic, married, white, middle-class, Australian male are acknowledged. The inquirer’s interest in this topic derives from his role as a facilitator of a Catholic pre-marriage education group course and his dissatisfaction with the material currently presented in the “Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant” component of that course. The inquirer hopes to contribute to a reinvigoration of this component of that course and similar courses. The inquirer places a high value upon the richness and the wisdom of the Catholic *Rite of Marriage*.

4.2 A Method for Liturgical Theology

Margaret Mary Kelleher’s liturgical theology method brings together an emphasis upon the performance of liturgy and the qualitative research technique, participant observation, because as she writes: “the symbolic mediation of meaning actually occurs only within the performance of ritual,”²⁸⁵ Her method employs an adaptation of participant observation which emphasises gathering of data from participation in, and careful observation of, Roman Catholic liturgical performance. Kelleher’s method focuses on the task of “objectifying and judging the horizons that are made public in the church’s liturgical praxis.”²⁸⁶ She acknowledges the significance of private understandings in

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁸⁵ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 12.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

mediating ritual meaning, writing: “the decisions and actions of persons involved in the ritual play an important role in the assignment of meaning.”²⁸⁷

In the marriage liturgy the bride and groom are ministers of the sacrament to each other. The Rite allows them (in consultation with their pastor), significant choice in the words and actions of the ritual. The decisions that they make derive partly from their private horizons, and these decisions play an important role in the potential for generating public meaning. Learning how the bride and groom find meaning in the words and actions of the rite, meanings which inform the decisions they make, has particular salience for this thesis.

Kelleher’s method, with appropriate modification, is employed in this study. Kelleher acknowledges that a particular method may be described as a series of questions designed to transform an unknown into a known, and notes that, while her method provides a series of general questions, these have to be made specific in relation to particular unknowns.²⁸⁸ Similarly, the method has to be made specific in relation to the particular unknown. In this thesis interviews have been added to participant observation in order to gain access to the private meanings that bride and groom bring to, and gain from, the marriage liturgy.

One objective of the PME course described in the previous chapter is to increase course participants’ understanding of the official meanings (theology) of the Rite of Marriage and its celebration: it aims to be consciousness-expanding or horizon-expanding. Kelleher provides an appropriate method to contribute to evaluation and development of the PME course since her method is specifically designed to allow the investigator to move towards objectifying a public horizon: “a world of meaning which provides a context for

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

the assembly's worship."²⁸⁹ In the observation of liturgical performance the investigator can become aware of new meanings which become available for a community's appropriation (perhaps through the outcomes of PME courses) as well as meanings which are in the process of being criticised, rejected or transformed.²⁹⁰ This study attempts to identify the private and the public limits (horizon) of the world of meaning implicit in five Catholic marriage liturgies celebrated in 2014, with particular emphasis upon new, rejected and transformed meanings.

Kelleher stresses the need for the investigator to study a number of liturgical celebrations over a period of time in the one place to identify the regular pattern of a particular assembly.²⁹¹ For the investigator of marriage liturgies this is not possible, since for marriage liturgies the assembly is usually a unique combination of the friends and relatives of the bride and groom, and sacramental marriage is a 'one-off' ritual celebration. In the marriage liturgy there is also a greater focus upon the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to each other (bride and groom are the primary subjects and agents of the symbolic mediation of meaning) and the assembly has a less significant ritual role to play than in the Eucharistic celebration.²⁹² Consequently the investigator participated in and observed five unique marriage liturgies in different places during 2014.

Kelleher proposes a four-stage process for the task of identifying and evaluating the various worlds of meaning (horizons) that are evident in the church's liturgy: gathering

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

²⁹² Focus upon the ministerial role of the bride and groom does not deny the important ministerial role of the presider nor that of the assembly. However, the unique nature of the assembly for marriage liturgies can make the ministerial role of the assembly problematic. The solution to those problems is beyond the scope of this thesis.

data from liturgical performance, interpretation, objectification and judgment. With some minor modifications those four stages are employed here.

4.3 Research Approach

Volunteers were sought from participants in the PME course to be part of a research project designed to improve the “Marriage as Covenant and Sacrament” section of the course. Potential volunteers were informed that if they consented to participate in the research they would be asked to allow their celebration of the Rite of Marriage to be video-recorded and subsequently to participate in an audio-recorded interview related to their celebration of the Rite. Ten couples returned completed consent forms. Of these ten, five couples (here designated couples V, W, X, Y, and Z) celebrated their marriage liturgies at times and venues that made data collection practicable. After they had celebrated their marriage liturgies, interviews were conducted with couples V, W and Y.²⁹³ One interview (average duration 30 minutes) was conducted with each couple. The interview questions were designed to elicit personal meaning. In accord with the qualitative research practice of moving in analytic circles, the interview questions were revised after each interview.²⁹⁴ Prior approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University.

4.4 Gathering Data from Liturgical Performance

To focus the gathering of data from liturgical performance Kelleher presents a number of questions, grouped under three categories – ritual subject, symbols, and process

²⁹³ Couple X moved interstate soon after their marriage and attempts to contact couple Z were unsuccessful.

²⁹⁴ The interview protocol remained substantially the same with minor adaptations in response to unexpected material gathered in previous interviews.

– to guide observation. Restrictions of space require that this study focusses upon ritual symbols in particular, because, as Kelleher suggests, “what ritual participants do with or in relation to ritual symbols rather than . . . what is said about the symbols,”²⁹⁵ is key to accessing the meaning generated by the ritual. This focus upon ritual symbols is justified by the importance of the bride and groom as embodied symbols in the marriage liturgy where the bride and groom become symbol and interpreter for each other and, together, they are a powerful symbol for the assembly.²⁹⁶ The great wisdom of the Catholic rite is that it consistently presents the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to each other: beginning with the marriage liturgy ideally they become a lifelong source of sanctification for each other; they invite each other to ever new, deeper, and more adequate expressions of sacramental marriage. In light of this overall theology of Catholic marriage, the description offered here will focus on the emphasis given to bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to each other.

Of the five marriage liturgies observed, four utilised the Catholic Rite of Marriage. One of these four utilised the Rite for celebrating marriage during Mass and the remaining three the Rite for celebrating marriage outside Mass. The fifth couple celebrated their marriage using a non-Catholic Christian rite which has been included here for purposes of comparison.²⁹⁷ Table 5 presents a summary of this and other data gathered from observation of the five marriage liturgies.

²⁹⁵ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 14.

²⁹⁶ See Chapter 2 above.

²⁹⁷ The PME course does not discriminate by religion and couple X volunteered to be part of this study.

Table 5. Key elements of five marriage liturgies²⁹⁸

Marriage liturgy	V	W	X	Y	Z
Venue	City church	City church	Wedding chapel, resort location	Wedding chapel, resort location	City church
Rite	Rite outside Mass	Rite during Mass	Non-Catholic Christian rite.	Rite outside Mass	Rite outside Mass
Presider	Priest V	Priest W	Christian minister X	Priest Y	Priest Z
Entrance rite	Customary bridal procession	Customary bridal procession	Customary bridal procession	Customary bridal procession	Customary bridal procession
Entrance music	<i>Canon in D Major:</i> Pachelbel	<i>Canon in D Major:</i> Pachelbel	<i>Wedding March:</i> Mendelssohn	Song: <i>You and Me:</i> Wade and Cole	<i>Canon in D Major:</i> Pachelbel
Liturgy of the Word	Rom 12:1-2, 9-18 Jn 15:9-12	Rom 12:1-2, 9-13 Mt 5:1-12	No scripture readings	Ru 1:16-17 1Jn 4:7-12 Mt 5:1-12	Sg 7:10, 8:6-7 Rom 12: 9-18 Jn 2: 1-11
Homily	Related to the bride and groom's understandings of marriage.	Related to the bride and groom's understandings of marriage. and linked to readings chosen by them.	No homily	On love in marriage and God's love for us: not directly linked to the scripture readings.	On love one another as I have loved you, with some links to the Gospel reading.
Exchange of consent, rings	Form A (RM #25). Whispered by priest V, repeated by bride and groom into microphone.	Form A (RM #25). Learnt by heart: priest W moved away from sanctuary.	Interrogative form; bride and groom responded, "I do," to questions from presider and repeated his words in the exchange of rings.	Form A (RM #25). Whispered by priest Y, repeated by bride and groom.	Form B (RM #25). Learnt by heart. Priest Z emphasised "join your right hands" (RM #25).
Nuptial blessing	C (RM #33)	<i>OCM</i> , 1990 #243	No blessing	A (RM #33)	A (RM #33)

²⁹⁸ Copies of video recordings of the marriage liturgies will be held in secure storage at ACU Brisbane for a period of five years after submission of the thesis.

4.5 Interpretation

In Kelleher's method the process of interpretation "engages one in an attempt to understand the liturgical performances one has experienced and in efforts to express that understanding".²⁹⁹ The primary sources one consults in the attempt to understand liturgical performance are persons associated with ritual and the assembly [here the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament] and the official text of the rite.³⁰⁰ Consultation with the ritual participants proceeded by way of semi-structured interviews.³⁰¹ The final version of the semi-structured interview questions is shown in table 6.

²⁹⁹ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 15.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁰¹ Analysis of the Rite is presented in Chapter 2 above.

Table 6. Semi-structured interview questions³⁰²

Element	Question/comment
	Why was it important for you that you celebrated your marriage in the Catholic Church?
	Which aspects of your liturgy will you remember the most? Why?
Music	How did you choose the music for your liturgy? What did it mean to you?
Entrance	What did you consider in choosing your entrance procession? What did it mean to you?
Liturgy of the Word	Do you remember your readings? How did you choose your readings? Did (do) they speak to you?
Homily	What do you remember from the homily?
Consent	What did (and does) this mean to you?
Exchange of rings	What did (and does) this mean to you?
Prayers of the faithful	How did you select these prayers?
Nuptial blessing	How did you choose this blessing? What did (and does) it mean to you?
	Other comments
	In this element of the PME course we focus upon the Rite of Marriage. Is that focus appropriate?
	Is there anything else we could do to make that section more helpful for couples?

³⁰² Interviews were conducted on 15/07/14, 29/07/14 and 08/11/14. Copies of audio recordings of the interviews will be held in secure storage at ACU Brisbane for a period of five years after submission of the thesis.

Noteworthy observations in terms of the emphasis given to bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to each other that require some interpretation include:

1. The predominance of the customary bridal procession.
2. Priests V and W had asked the brides and grooms individually before the liturgy to reflect upon what marriage meant to them. These written reflections formed the basis of the priests' homilies.
3. Couples W and Z had learnt the words of the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings by heart.
4. Priest W moved away from the sanctuary to stand between the first row of pews during the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings.

4.5.1 The Importance of 'Tradition'

In the process of interpretation Kelleher suggests that questions be formulated "for the purpose of discovering why certain choices were made in the ritual celebration."³⁰³ Accordingly, since couples had a choice of different entrance processions, they were asked: "What did you consider in choosing your entrance procession? What did it mean to you?" All three couples nominated the importance of tradition. Groom V explained that tradition was an important consideration in planning their marriage liturgy: "We approached it wanting a traditional type of wedding. We kept that in mind with a lot of the decisions we made. Just because that's the sort of background we had come from. We didn't want anything to be too out there, we wanted the conservative approach that comes with being traditional." Specifically, in relation to the entrance procession, he added: "When we did our PME course, that was the first time we had heard that the bride and groom walk down the aisle together, and all the weddings we had been to had the

³⁰³ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 17.

traditional procession.” For Bride V the traditional entrance had been internalised: “I always wanted my dad to walk me down the aisle because I saw it as me leaving one family and joining another. That’s how I had always seen walking down the aisle.”

Bride W had considered three options: “together [with my groom], on my own, or with my mother, and then I decided a bit of tradition was nice. It was really lovely to have someone [my mother] to walk down with; it was nice to have someone to hold your hand.”

Bride Y also nominated tradition: the customary bridal procession is “a little bit traditional in that sense. It [entering on my father’s arm was] quite emotional, overwhelming.” Groom Y found the customary procession significant for a different reason: “The handing over from Y’s father to myself, that’s certainly an important moment of the ceremony.”

4.5.2 The Shifting Role of ‘Tradition’ in Relation to the Choice of Readings

All couples emphasised the importance of tradition. They were, however, prepared to break with tradition in some aspects of their liturgies. Speaking of the readings they chose for the Liturgy of the Word, Groom V said, “The 1 Corinthians reading (1 Cor 13: 1-13) has become sort of clichéd these days.” Bride V agreed, “We didn’t want anything that was overdone and everyone could almost rattle off.” Explaining their choice of readings Bride W said, “[We wanted readings that were] not old fashioned or the woman being subservient to the man. [We wanted a theme] of being a team, partnership, justice, appreciative of friends and family, and the world we live in; and hopeful, forward-looking readings.”³⁰⁴ The recommended readings were also problematic for couple Y. Bride Y explained, “A lot of the readings I didn’t relate to: A lot of them [emphasised] ‘you will honour and obey your husband.’”

³⁰⁴ For couple W, none of the Nuptial Blessings met these requirements so they asked priest W to find an alternative.

In response to the question, “Do your readings still speak to you?” Bride Y’s response was typical of that from all interviewees: “I haven’t had a chance to reflect on them since.” At the conclusion of their interview Groom Y made the more general, albeit related point, “This is probably not something that most people get to do; to sit down and reflect on the ceremony itself. I think we probably will actually go back and reflect on it now.”³⁰⁵

4.5.3 The Significance of the Homily

Presiders have choices to make with respect to the homily given within the marriage liturgy, choices with the potential to make a significant impact upon the bride and the groom (and the assembly). In response to the questions, “Which aspects of your liturgy will you remember the most? Why?” Groom V replied: “The first thing that came into my head was the homily. Father V asked us to write down the answers to several questions and that became the homily. The significance of the wedding is to declare what you think love is and what you think marriage is in front of all your family and friends, so that pretty much takes it straight to the core and this explains how I feel about the other person.” Bride V concurred: “I was going to say that. I liked that part.” The response of Bride W was similar: “The homily was really lovely, a nice little surprise.” Groom W elaborated: “Fr W asked us to reflect independently on what marriage meant to each of us. I suspected he was going to use it in his homily.”

Couple Y made no reference to the homily as a memorable element of their liturgy. When prompted, Bride Y replied, “I don’t remember anything that Fr Y spoke about.” Groom Y agreed, “No, [neither do I],” he said.

³⁰⁵ This point will be discussed further in Section 4.6.

4.5.4 The Consent and Exchange of Rings

In the marriage liturgy choices are also available for the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings. Couple W had learnt the words of the consent and the exchange of rings by heart, and Presider W moved away from the sanctuary to stand between the first row of pews during the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings. Groom W explained: “We had learnt the words by heart. It feels more sincere if you know it by heart and that way the perception is that you are saying it yourself, rather than reading off someone else’s text.” Bride W again mentioned tradition: “I definitely like an element of tradition with the whole wedding and I thought those words [of the exchange of consent and rings], though short and simple, captured all you needed to say.”

The exchange of rings was a key moment for Bride W: “I think it was nice having a physical reminder of what we said [during the exchange of consent] putting those rings on each other’s fingers. The rings are a constant reminder of what we have committed to and what we will do for each other throughout our lives.”

Bride Y reported: “Both of us had been practising [the words of the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings].” They accepted the decision that Presider Y made for them: “At rehearsal the day before Father Y said, ‘at this point I am going to whisper the words and you are going to repeat them.’”. However, Bride Y acknowledged that the choice was theirs: “I’m sure if we had said that we had learnt the words that would have happened.”

The exchange of rings was important for Bride Y: “I think the exchange of rings was about sealing of the ceremony.” For Groom Y: “At that moment we were married. I don’t remember the words but holding Y’s hand and placing the ring on her finger.”

Presider V also whispered the words and had Bride and Groom V repeat them. Bride V said: “He explained to us the passive form and he said to us, ‘I want you to be

saying it to each other because you are marrying each other.”” The consent and the exchange of rings were particularly memorable for Bride V: “A lot of things were a blur on the day, but I remember saying those words very clearly. The ring is a symbol but I took those words very literally, ‘take this ring as a symbol of my love.’ It’s like rounding off the promise that you made to each other. It’s like here is the symbol of those vows.” Groom V agreed: “[The exchange of rings is] just a very big symbol that I am prepared to give my life completely to somebody.”

4.5.5 Nuptial Blessing

According to the *Rite of Marriage*, the nuptial blessing is one of the elements to be stressed during the celebration of marriage (RM #6). Couple W had difficulty with the language of the nuptial blessings, as they did with the language of some of the recommended scripture readings. Groom W said, “We looked through those in the booklet and asked the priest if there were there any [nuptial blessings] with less emphasis on the subservience of the woman.”³⁰⁶

Presiders V and W asked the assembly to raise their hands over the couple during the nuptial blessing. This gesture had a powerful impact upon the recipients of the blessing. Bride V did not remember the words of the blessing yet she said of this gesture, “I felt quite joyous about it and quite comforted by it that all of our family and friends were praying for God to bless us. It was the first time I had seen that happen in a wedding”. Groom V observed, “It takes them [family and friends] a step further from just being observers too being participants.” Bride W echoed this same sentiment: “Raising

³⁰⁶ Couple W and presider W utilized one of the nuptial blessings from the as yet unofficial translation of the 1990 Rite.

hands got everyone to participate. It felt more tangible when everyone put their hand out.”³⁰⁷

4.6 Objectification and Judgment

The third and fourth stages of Kelleher’s method (objectification and judgment) are interlinked. Judging the adequacy or authenticity of the horizon made public in an assembly’s liturgical praxis is a “further dimension” of the task of objectifying or describing that horizon.³⁰⁸ In the third (objectification) stage, data from the official text (the *Rite of Marriage*) can be compared with data gathered from participant observation in marriage liturgies and interviews with the ritual subjects in order to allow detection of “conflicts, variations and new meanings that are appearing in liturgical praxis.”³⁰⁹ In the fourth (judgment) stage conflicts, variations and new meanings detected in liturgical praxis are evaluated using criteria developed to distinguish between elements “which contribute to the richness of the Christian tradition and those which impoverish or distort it.”³¹⁰

The evaluative criteria employed in this thesis are drawn from the work of M. Francis Mannion on the catholicity of the liturgy. Mannion utilises the work of Avery Dulles and Henri de Lubac to present a view of the Church which locates its catholicity not primarily in the Church’s geographic universality, but more fundamentally in its universality as experienced in “the spiritual depth, sacramental richness, religious exuberance and creativity of ecclesial institutions.”³¹¹ Celebrated well, the Rite of

³⁰⁷ These observations will be discussed further in Section 4.6.

³⁰⁸ Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 20.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹¹ M. Francis Mannion, "The Catholicity of the Liturgy," in *Beyond the Prosaic: Renewing the Liturgical Movement*, ed. Stratford Caldecott (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 24.

Marriage expresses this catholic spiritual depth, sacramental richness, religious exuberance and creativity.

Effective celebration includes much more than getting the words of the text exactly correct, an emphasis that Bruce Morrill terms “the pernicious problem of textual positivism.”³¹² Mannion expounds upon many of the elements involved in effective celebration: “when celebrated with attentiveness to ritual and text, with spiritual profundity, nobility and solemnity, with well-formed ministerial leadership, and with rich musical, artistic and architectural elaboration, the present liturgy is pastorally most edifying and deeply expressive of Catholic fullness.”³¹³ Celebration with attention to ritual and text, and celebration with well-formed ministerial leadership, are criteria particularly germane to the potential fruitfulness of the marriage liturgy in terms of meaning and transformation. The adequacy of the observed marriage liturgies have been evaluated against these criteria.

4.6.1 The Entrance Procession

Within the marriage liturgies observed for this study, conflicts, variations and new meanings occurred early on. All couples chose the customary entrance procession rather than that preferred in the Rite where, “the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung” (RM #20).³¹⁴ Couples interviewed appealed to tradition to justify not taking up the Rite’s preferred

³¹² Morrill, "Sacramental-Liturgical Theology since Vatican II: The Dialectic of Meaning and Performance," 5.

³¹³ Mannion, 36.

³¹⁴ In none of the observed liturgies was an entrance song sung. This represents a missed opportunity since a key purpose of the entrance song is to unite the assembly.

suggestion. Tradition is an important element of ritual; it forms part of the scholarly definition; ritual is: “traditional (not being done for the first time, claiming an ancient history or authorized by myth)”.³¹⁵ Tradition heightens the ritual nature of the marriage liturgy, “primarily by stressing a view of the bride and groom that appears to transcend current history and evoke eternal values”.³¹⁶

The strong emotional attachment to the customary bridal procession, even though it no longer represents what Catholics believe about marriage, represents for Paul Covino, not ‘tradition’ (the living faith of the dead), but ‘traditionalism’ (the dead faith of the living).³¹⁷ Morrill is critical of Covino’s essay, reading it as exemplifying the ideological-theoretical blinders the ritual theorist can unknowingly wear. Covino’s “insistence on a totalizing concept for the entire marriage rite fails to recognize that a given bride’s notions of *her* Catholic Church ceremony most likely include the ideal of the ‘fairytale wedding’”.³¹⁸

Pre-marriage educators need to be aware of the cultural forces which impact upon the bride and groom’s imagining of their ideal wedding, forces which are implicit in Bride V’s statement: “I always wanted my dad to walk me down the aisle because I saw it as me leaving one family and joining another. That’s how I had always seen walking down the aisle.” This view omits (or remains ignorant of) any acknowledgment in this “tradition” of the bride as chattel being passed from ownership of her father to ownership of her husband. It also neglects the emerging post-Vatican II Catholic tradition, exemplified in

³¹⁵ Grimes, 60-61.

³¹⁶ Bell, 147.

³¹⁷ Covino, 113.

³¹⁸ Morrill, 102.

the Rite's preferred entrance procession, and the ways in which that emerging tradition can enrich the marriage liturgy.

In presenting the preferences of the Rite and the rationale for them,³¹⁹ the pre-marriage educator aims to broaden meaning horizons and to increase the agency of PME course participants, by providing a wider range of options for them to consider. As Groom V said, "When we did our PME course, that was the first time we had heard that the bride and groom walk down the aisle together."³²⁰

The Rite's preferred entrance procession offers a potentially richer ritual experience for bride, groom and assembly. Liturgical processions are powerfully symbolic, as liturgist Thomas Scirghi notes: "processions are symbolic in that they say something about us and what we are doing together."³²¹ The Rite's preferred entrance procession in its inclusivity honours both of the bride's parents (and the groom's), and it ritualises both bride and groom leaving existing families to form a new family together. Even more significantly, the preferred procession gives emphasis, at the very beginning of the liturgy, to the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament to one another. In presenting the ritual richness of the preferred entrance procession, pre-marriage educators are supporting presiders "to fulfil their duty to make use of the possibilities which the ritual itself offers . . . to highlight the role of the ministers of the sacrament who, for Christians of the Latin Rite, are the spouses themselves" (PSM #63). The inclusive entrance procession pays

³¹⁹ The preferences of the Rite and the rationale for them are presented in detail in Chapter 2 above.

³²⁰ If couples participate in the PME Course quite close to their marriage liturgy it may be too late, too overwhelming, or too challenging for them to undergo a sufficiently deep consideration of what those 'traditional' actions such as the entrance procession actually mean or convey to make any changes to their 'ideal', imagined marriage ritual.

³²¹ Thomas J. Scirghi, "Encouraging the Assembly to Full Participation," *Pastoral Liturgy* November/December, (2013): 7.

attention to ritual and to text and highlights the ministerial leadership and symbolic value of bride and groom.

4.6.2 The Liturgy of the Word

The liturgy of the word is one of the elements to be stressed within the marriage liturgy for it is “a highly effective means for the catechesis on the sacrament of marriage and its duties” (RM #11), yet a major contradiction arises from many of the scripture readings listed in RM. The patriarchal meanings that derive from many of the suggested readings included within the rite are inconsistent with the actions and signs of the rite, which emphasise the equality of bride and groom.³²²

Interviews revealed that the couples had given careful consideration to their choice of readings, rejecting readings with a patriarchal emphasis: as Bride W said, “[We wanted readings that were] not old fashioned or the woman being subservient to the man.” Couples found it easier to evaluate (and reject) texts as patriarchal and old fashioned than they did aesthetic aspects of the liturgy like the customary bridal procession which may also communicate strongly patriarchal meanings.

Comments from those interviewed reveal a striking divergence of responses on the significance of the homily as an element of the liturgy of the word: comments which support Irwin’s contention that “preaching influences how liturgy is experienced.”³²³ For Couples V and W the homily was amongst the most memorable elements of their liturgies; for Couple Y it was not memorable at all. Presiders V and W had asked the respective couples to reflect independently on what marriage meant to them and had used those reflections in their homilies. Presider W linked those reflections to the scripture readings

³²² These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 above.

³²³ Irwin, "Liturgical Method: Issues for the Third Millenium," 46.

selected by the couple, a linkage which affirmed their reflections upon marriage and which fulfilled the requirements of the rubrics that “the priest gives a homily drawn from the sacred text” (RM #22).

In the evaluation of the act of preaching during sacramental liturgies, Irwin argues that one needs to ask “how well homilies relate the scripture readings to the enactment to follow in sacrament”.³²⁴ Irwin’s question is particularly pertinent to the marriage liturgy in which the bride and groom are the ministers of the sacrament to each other. In using Couple W’s reflections upon marriage and linking those reflections to their chosen scripture readings, presider W modelled an approach which effectively related the Liturgy of the Word to the enactment to follow in sacrament. Through incorporation of Bride W’s and Groom W’s personal visions of marriage he made effective use of the possibilities which the ritual offers to highlight the role of the spouses as ministers of the sacrament to each other.

4.6.3 The Consent and Exchange of Rings

The consent is the central moment of the marriage liturgy and the moment when the couple may most obviously be ministers of the sacrament to each other. Again Presider W effectively utilised the possibilities which the Rite offers to highlight the role of bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament. Couple W had learnt the words of the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings by heart, and Presider W moved away from the sanctuary to stand between the first row of pews during the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings. These elements of Couple W’s liturgy modelled attention to ritual and text, and highlighted the well-formed ministerial leadership of the couple.

³²⁴ Kevin W. Irwin, "Liturgical Theology," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 731.

Presider V wanted to emphasise the ministerial role of the couple: “I want you to be saying it [the words of the exchange of consent] to each other because you are marrying each other.” However, whispering the words and having Bride and Groom V repeat them emphasised his ministerial role and deemphasised theirs.³²⁵ A preferable approach might be to provide a card bearing the words of the exchange of consent and the exchange of rings to encourage the couple to learn those words by heart and to use should nervousness intrude during the liturgy.

Groom Y’s thoughts on the exchange of rings are apposite: “At that moment we were married. I don’t remember the words but holding Y’s hand and placing the ring on her finger.” So too are those of Groom V: “[The exchange of rings is] just a very big symbol that I am prepared to give my life completely to somebody.” These comments support the argument of this thesis³²⁶ that nonverbal, ritual bodily actions are central to this most bodily of sacraments for “the sacramental order is built around bodily actions done in bread, wine, oil, and water, actions performed in *giving and receiving the body/self in marriage*” [emphasis added].³²⁷ And yet the current RM underplays or overlooks nonverbal, ritual, bodily actions to the detriment of the ritual participants.

One of the few ritual bodily actions of the Rite seems to be taking on new meanings. According to the Rite, the priest invites the couple to join their right hands to declare their consent: “Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your *right hands* [emphasis added]...” (RM #25). Only Presider V emphasised, and insisted, that the couple join right hands. All other presiders accepted the preference of the couple to hold

³²⁵ At its worst this practice can convey a sense that the bride and groom are akin to ventriloquist’s dummies.

³²⁶ This argument is presented in Section 2.4.2 above.

³²⁷ Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving*, 121.

both hands. The exchange of consent ritualises the establishment of the matrimonial covenant. Specifying the right hand emphasises the link between the matrimonial covenant and God's covenant with God's people: "For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand" (Is 41:13).

Holding both hands emphasises the totality of the commitment being made: the matrimonial covenant "involves an interpersonal relationship which is *total* [emphasis added], that is involving their spiritual, emotional and physical joining."³²⁸ Holding both hands ritualises the totality of the covenantal, interpersonal relationship. Ritual adaptations like this can help to maintain ritual relevance within a changing community. The fundamental issue here is, does this adaptation "harmonize with the [marriage liturgy's] true and authentic spirit?" (SC #37). In Church teaching the consent consists in "that human act whereby the spouses mutually bestow and accept each other" (GS #48). Holding both hands harmonises well with the true and authentic spirit of mutual bestowal and acceptance and should be considered seriously for inclusion in any revision of the Rite.

Actions can speak louder than words but the words of the consent and the exchange of rings are of great consequence: they encapsulate the meaning of sacramental marriage. If presiders and pre-marriage educators can successfully encourage brides and grooms to learn by heart the words of their sacred promises: "I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad . . . Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. . .", then ready and frequent recall of those words may support them in their everyday living of sacramental marriage.

³²⁸ Doyle, 740.

4.6.4 Nuptial Blessing

The bride and groom minister sacramental marriage to each other yet the presider and the assembly have important ministerial roles which are illustrated in the nuptial blessing. The presider asks God to bless the couple. He calls upon the assembly to pray for the couple: “Let us pray to the Lord for N. and N. who come to God’s altar at the beginning of their married life. . .” (RM #120), and he invites the assembly to assent to the prayer of blessing with their “Amen”.

Presiders V and W strengthened the assembly’s ministerial role by asking them to raise their hands over the couple during the nuptial blessing. This gesture had a powerful impact upon the recipients of the blessing. Bride V did not remember the words of the blessing yet she said of this gesture, “I felt quite joyous about it and quite comforted by it that all of our family and friends were praying for God to bless us. It was the first time I had seen that happen in a wedding.” Groom V observed, “It takes them [family and friends] a step further from just being observers too being participants. Bride W echoed this sentiment: “Raising hands got everyone to participate. It felt more tangible when everyone put their hand out.”

In planning marriage liturgies couples and presiders should seek to utilise every opportunity for the assembly to exercise and experience its ministerial role, to move from observation to participation. Active affirmation of the assembly’s support for the couple during the liturgy may contribute to continued support for the couple after their marriage. As Canadian theologian James Schmeiser argues, “The experience of isolation by many of our married couples may be symptomatic of a community that no longer experiences itself

as a ministering community.”³²⁹ The manner in which a community worships influences what it believes and how it acts: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

4.6.5 Post-Liturgical Reflection

In response to the question, “Do your readings still speak to you?” Bride Y answered, “I haven’t had a chance to reflect on them since,” a response representative of that from all interviewees. Groom Y’s more general, albeit related point is noteworthy: “This is probably not something that most people get to do; to sit down and reflect on the ceremony itself. I think we probably will actually go back and reflect on it now.” These comments reflect firstly low levels of post-liturgical reflection; secondly, and more significantly, an indication that once experienced, couples realise the value of that reflection.

In summary these comments reveal that pastors and pre-marriage educators need to be more effective in promoting post-liturgical catechesis (reflection upon the full, conscious and active participation in the marriage liturgy and what it means for living out the sacrament: that is, mystagogy). Daily full, conscious and active participation in the marriage itself makes the sacrament an ongoing liturgy: God’s work done for the people.³³⁰ The Rite of Marriage is a door to lifelong sacrament/liturgy/vocation. The light which shines through that door illuminates a daily path for spouses to “advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God” (GS #48).

Reflection upon the experience of the Rite can help to guide spouses’ journey along that path. As Veronica Rosier stresses, “If liturgy conveys its meaning through well-

³²⁹ James A. Schmeiser, "Marriage, Ministers Of," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 803.

³³⁰ This understanding is developed in Chapter 3 above.

celebrated rites, reflection on personal experience of the rites, not explaining or talking about them, leads to a more intense appropriation of the living experience of Christ".³³¹ To support couples after marriage the Pontifical Council on the Family points to the desirability, especially in the first five years of married life, "to follow up the young couples through post-marriage courses" (PSM #73). Post-liturgical reflection, reflection on the personal experience of the marriage liturgy, should be an essential element of such courses.

4.7 Conclusion

This section of the thesis has proposed celebration with attention to ritual and text, and celebration with well-formed ministerial leadership, as criteria particularly germane to the potential fruitfulness of the marriage liturgy in terms of meaning and transformation. These criteria have guided critical reflection on contemporary liturgical praxis in the celebration of the Rite of Marriage. Significant ritual elements of the celebration of marriage have been evaluated to distinguish between those components which "contribute to the richness of the Christian tradition and those which impoverish or distort it."³³² This evaluation has informed the development of the PME model presented in Chapter 3, particularly the model's emphasis upon the ministerial role of the couple exemplified in the Rite's preferred entrance procession and the active options for the consent and the exchange of rings.

The next and final section of the thesis weaves together the various threads which contributed to the development of the model presented in Chapter 3 and makes recommendations for its further development.

³³¹ Rosier, "The Spirit and Power of the Liturgy: Understanding Liturgical Catechesis," 404.

³³² Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 22.

Chapter 5

Receiving the Liturgy of Marriage as God's Gift

More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life . . . The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages (FC #66).

This thesis responds to John Paul II's call for 'better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation' by presenting a pre-marriage education model based upon *The Rite of Marriage*. The *Rite* offers a balanced theology of marriage in accord with the teaching of Vatican II. The theology explicit and implicit in the rite can provide the foundation for effective pre-marriage education: "[the] documents of the marriage liturgy show more than the writings of the theologians . . . a balanced and forward-looking vision of how the mystery of marriage can be understood and lived."³³³

In the PME model³³⁴ presented here *The Rite of Marriage* is placed front and centre to assist couples to deepen their understanding of the Christian doctrine on marriage and to prepare for full, conscious, active participation in their marriage liturgy. The rite presents participants with a range of options which, if thoughtfully considered, selected and enacted, have the capacity to transform individuals. *The Rite of Marriage* has informed a model which presents a Catholic theology of marriage in a succinct yet complete manner and which outlines clear implications for living the sacrament.³³⁵ The model exemplifies Aidan Kavanagh's claim that the official worship of the Church is *the* fundamental source

³³³ Searle, "Marriage Rites as Documents of Faith: Notes for a Theology of Marriage," 244.

³³⁴ The model is presented as a word, not the final word, on education for sacramental marriage. The model continues to be refined through the processes of presentation, feedback, and reflection.

³³⁵ See Chapter 2 above.

of Christian theology: “a liturgical act *is* a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral and foundational kind.”³³⁶

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage emphasises that: “Real preparation is directed toward a conscious and free celebration of the sacrament of marriage” (PSM #16). In terms of conscious and free celebration of the sacrament of marriage, the link between the increasingly important psychological concept of mindfulness and SC’s emphasis upon full, conscious, active participation in the marriage liturgy, developed in Chapter 3, opens a fertile field which merits further exploration.

5.1 Addressing Missed Opportunities in the Rite

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage also notes that the marriage liturgy “is the source and expression of more binding and permanent implications” (PSM #16). The rite would become an even more fruitful source and expression of the binding and permanent implications of sacramental marriage if some of the problems identified by ritual participants interviewed for this study, such as the gendered language of the rite and the patriarchal flavour of some of the readings, were addressed.

There are also some ritual inadequacies in the sacramental expression of marriage when compared with other sacramental rites. Interviewees highlighted the significance of signs and actions, rather than words, during their marriage liturgies. There is a need both to promote understanding of the gestures and symbolic actions which are currently part of the rite, so that they may be utilised in all of their fruitfulness, and to enrich the rite further with more gestures and symbolic actions to achieve a more appropriate balance between

³³⁶ Kavanagh, 89.

the emphasis upon the cognitive elements and the bodily elements of the rite.³³⁷ The research conducted for this thesis has confirmed the notion that symbolising activity is more powerful than discursive speech in generating breadth and depth of meaning, and has affirmed that: “any attempt to promote the worshipping assembly’s awareness of Christ in their midst can succeed more readily by attending with careful thought to how symbols are celebrated.”³³⁸

The second typical edition of the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, prepared in 1990 and published in Latin in 1991, provides an enrichment to the introduction, rites and prayers; a wider selection of recommended scripture readings; and an explicit epiclesis of the sacrament. After twenty-five years of delay there is a crucial need to give higher priority to the provision of the revised *Rite of Marriage* in English.³³⁹ SC called for the rite of marriage to be “revised and enriched in such a way that the grace of the sacrament is more clearly signified and the duties of the spouses are taught” (SC #59). The 1990 Rite provides a fuller response to that call.

5.2 Ministers of the Sacrament

The emphasis in the Roman rite upon the couple themselves as the ministers of the sacrament derives from the juridical notion of free choice as the fundamental condition for marriage. The rite, while giving the central place to the ministerial role of the spouses, also envisions rich ministerial roles for the ordained minister and for the assembly. The liturgy is always performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the head and His

³³⁷ For example, consideration might be given to anointing the spouses with chrism to strengthen them for their vocation. Anointing with chrism is already part of the Church’s sacramental practice unlike the popular but problematic unity candle.

³³⁸ Kubicki, "Recognizing the Presence of Christ in the Liturgical Assembly," 837.

³³⁹ In June 2015 in Australia there are indications that the *recognitio* for the revised *Rite of Marriage* will be forthcoming shortly.

members: Christ is present in the marriage liturgy in the person of the ordained minister and in the assembly (SC #7), as well as in the couple. These complementary ministerial roles require further theological and liturgical development.³⁴⁰

Chapter 4 outlined the challenge to liturgists presented by the unique assembly that gathers for marriage liturgies. John Gallen highlights the significant role of the assembly in mediating the presence of Christ in the liturgy:

Liturgical action . . . is defined as what the members of the assembly do . . . By their mutual presence to each other, the grace of Christ's real presence is sacramentalized and delivered by and in the community members in a variety of specific liturgical events each of which is shaped in a particular symbolic expression ranging from eucharist *and the other sacraments* [emphasis added] to the liturgy of the hours and the sacramentals.³⁴¹

Compelling theologies of the Eucharistic assembly have been developed:³⁴²

comparable theologies of the assembly for the marriage liturgy are required.

There is a pressing need to find effective ways³⁴³ to unite for prayer the disparate group that gathers for the rite of marriage, and to ensure that they participate fully aware of what they are doing, that they are actively engaged in the rite, and that they are enriched by its effects.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Adoption of the 1990 Rite will hasten this process: As PSM notes (in the context of the revised rite): it will be necessary to explain "the gesture of imposing hands on the 'subject ministers' of the sacrament' (PSM # 66).

³⁴¹ John Gallen, "Assembly," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990), 73.

³⁴² See Judith M. Kubicki, *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Paul J. Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005).

³⁴³ RM #9 reminds presiders of their responsibility to "show special consideration for those who take part in liturgical celebrations or hear the Gospel only on the occasion of a wedding." Music ministers have a key role in ensuring corporate singing. The wedding booklet might well explain and acknowledge the important role of the assembly.

³⁴⁴ SC #11.

5.3 Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage

PSM envisages the immediate stage of preparation for the sacrament of marriage (the focus of this thesis) as the final stage of a three stage process involving remote, proximate and immediate preparation. Remote preparation, which takes place during infancy, childhood and adolescence, is predominantly a responsibility of families and schools. Married couples need well-researched, practical support so that they can understand how their example of married life might become a real model for those who will marry in the future (PSM #26). Catechists and pastors in their work with young single people also need to “stress and highlight the points that contribute to a preparation directed toward possible marriage” (PSM #30).

Proximate preparation ideally takes place in the parish during the period of engagement with a fundamental emphasis upon “a catechesis sustained by listening to the Word of God, interpreted with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, in view of an even greater understanding of the faith and giving witness to it in concrete life” (PSM #34). For many of the couples who present for Catholic pre-marriage education (which is the *immediate* stage of preparation for the sacrament of marriage), *proximate* preparation has not occurred. Mellor’s description of the reality of those who present for sacramental marriage bears repeating: “typically at least one partner has attended Catholic schools. Usually they have lost contact with regular church practice.”³⁴⁵ While typically at least one partner has experienced the catechetical program of Catholic schools, the post-secondary school drift from regular Church practice impedes most opportunities for proximate preparation for the sacrament of marriage. Consequently the short period of immediate preparation for marriage provides both a challenge in terms of the need to fill gaps in

³⁴⁵ Mellor, "Here Comes the Bride - but What Next?," 4.

formation that continued participation in the Christian community would have provided, and an opportunity to invite reconnection with the faith community.

The model presented in this thesis aims to prepare couples for full, conscious, active participation in their marriage liturgy and presents Church teaching on the joys, wonders and challenges of sacramental marriage in a way that connects faith and married life and gently invites reconnection with the faith community. This special form of catechesis for marriage complements, but does not replace, “the ongoing, systematic, catechetical courses which every ecclesial community must provide for all adults” (GDC #176). The connection between faith and married life needs to be strengthened through the provision of effective post-marriage courses, particularly in the first five years of married life. Post-liturgical reflection, reflection upon the personal experience of the marriage liturgy, should be an essential element of such courses.

The Church teaches that all “who exercise influence over communities and social groups should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family” (GS #52). Married couples exercise influence within their social groups. Strategies need to be developed and training provided to help married couples to support other married couples in their vocation. The counsel of John Paul II that “young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples” (FC #69) is further strengthened by the recommendation from social network research that “attending to the health of one’s friends’ marriages might serve to support and enhance the durability of one’s own relationship.”³⁴⁶ Further research is required to develop effective and practical strategies to assist individuals to attend to the health of their friends’ marriages.

³⁴⁶ McDermott et al., "Breaking up Is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else Is Doing It Too: Social Network Effects on Divorce in a Longitudinal Sample," 516.

5.4 Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage: an Element of a Larger Problem

Focussing closely on problems associated with preparation for sacramental marriage highlights a broader problem. Difficulties related to preparation for the sacrament of marriage are symptomatic of a general malaise among many Catholics with respect to the sacraments. In Australia the decline in participation in the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist is probably even greater than the decline in participation in sacramental marriage.³⁴⁷ Sacramental marriage is intimately related to Penance and particularly to Eucharist, for the Eucharist above all else, “is the source of love and lifts us up into communion with our Lord and with one another” (RM #6). A wider theological, liturgical and pastoral reinvigoration of sacramental practice is needed in order to present a compelling, new vision of our sacramental world,³⁴⁸ of which the sacrament of marriage is a key part.

5.5 Conclusion

According to John Baldovin:

It is of the utmost importance that we concentrate on the liturgy as God’s gift to us and that we find more and better ways to cooperate in receiving this gift. After all, in the liturgy we receive nothing less than divine life, a life meant to be shared with the world. What better gift can there be than that? And what better reason is there to put our energies into receiving that

³⁴⁷ John Paul II declared in 1984 that “the sacrament of penance is in crisis.” John Paul II, “Reconciliation and Penance ” http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html (accessed April 5 2015). #28. In 2011 about 12.55 of Australian Catholics attended Mass on a typical weekend: see Chapter 2 above.

³⁴⁸Ouellet acknowledges that while Chauvet and others have made significant contributions, “we do not yet possess a unified, common theological vision [of sacramental celebration] which would give impetus and coherence to pastoral action.” Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Towards a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans., Philip Milligan and Linda M. Cicone (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 210.

gift well and responding to it in our daily lives, so that we might become reflections of the world's true light, Jesus Christ.³⁴⁹

In the marriage liturgy God offers a twin gift: the gift of divine life enclosed within the gift of a loving spouse. Receiving both gifts well is, as Baldovin notes, of crucial importance if sacramental marriage is to reflect the light of Christ. In the words and actions of the marriage liturgy the spouses make the personal, total, and solemn commitment to give the gift of themselves to their partner for the whole of their lives. As spouses give the gift of themselves, and accept the gift of their partner, they receive the gift of divine life, they are “penetrated with the spirit of Christ” (GS #48).

This thesis has contributed to the task of finding, in Baldovin's words, ‘more and better ways’ to assist couples to prepare to experience sacramental marriage as God's gift, and to respond to that gift, including the gift of each other, in their daily lives. In doing so they will “express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (SC #2).

³⁴⁹ Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics*, 157.

Appendix

Reflection Workbook for Participants

The Rite of Marriage in the Catholic Church

The Rite of Marriage sets out beautifully the Catholic ideals of marriage.

Marriage

Marriage is an opportunity to experience the beauty of human love, a love that mirrors the love of God.¹



Vocation

- A vocation is a call or invitation given by God.
- We have a free choice in how we respond to God's invitation.²

¹ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* (Canberra: 2007), 1.

² The diagram and sections which follow are drawn from Martinez. Germán Martínez, *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacraments* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003).

Sacrament

- Sacraments in the broad sense are human experiences that transform our
 - perspectives,
 - meaning and
 - action as we experience God.³

In the narrow sense sacraments are the seven official actions or liturgies of the Catholic Church; Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. . .

Marriage is a sacrament in both senses of the term. The official minister of the sacraments of the Church, except for one sacrament, is a priest.

Covenant

- A covenant is a sacred promise.
 - “I am with you always”. Mt 28:2
 - The covenant you make is a personal, total and solemn commitment to your partner; the commitment to give the gift of yourself to your partner for the whole of your life.

Communion

- Communion is about having in common or sharing. Communion includes effective positive communication, shared possessions and shared responsibility for building the marriage relationship.

Partnership

- Marriage is an intimate partnership of life and love (*Gaudium et Spes* #48).
- A marriage partnership is a journey, an ongoing process of growing and becoming.
- It is in this process, in the love and struggles of marriage that a couple attains to the holiness of their vocation.

Holiness

The Church understands marriage as a path to holiness. It is in the love and struggles of marriage that a couple attains to the holiness of their vocation.

What is holiness for you?

- (a) A misty-eyed otherworldliness.
- (b) A daily realistic engagement with the joys, wonders and challenges of married life.
- (c) Delighting in this world rather than fleeing it, recognizing that God, the creator and sustainer of all things is revealed at the very heart of the world and of *human experience* [Kathleen Hughes].

³ Barbara J. Fleischer and Gerald M. Fagin, "The Sacramentality of Friendship and Its Implications for Ministry" in *A Sacramental Life: A Festschrift Honoring Bernard Cooke* ed. Micheal Barnes and William P. Roberts (Milwaukee Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2003), 231.

The Rite of Marriage

The table below shows some of the key beliefs and values of the Catholic Church which are expressed in the Rite of Marriage. Rank these from most important (1) to least important (9). Then share your ranking with your partner and agree on a couple ranking.

Beliefs and values	My rank	Our rank
Free consent		
The couple as ministers of the sacrament on the wedding day and every day		
Equality		
Giving and receiving the gift of each other fully for the whole of life (covenant)		
Communion		
Fidelity		
Openness to life		
Love and honour		
Vocation		

How well do your personal beliefs and values match those of the Catholic Rite of Marriage?

.....

.....

Why have you chosen to celebrate your marriage using the Catholic Rite of Marriage?

.....

.....

The way you enter the Church and the way you make your covenantal promises to each other provide opportunities to make clear your role as ministers of the sacrament, and other beliefs such as the equality of bride and groom.

Who will be part of the entrance procession for your wedding liturgy?

.....

.....

.....

The **Consent** is the most important moment of the marriage liturgy. This is when you make your covenantal commitment to each other.

At this moment you can be most clearly the ministers of the sacrament to each other.

Practise saying the words of the exchange of consent now so that you will begin to learn them by heart and will be able to say them mindfully and that your partner and all those present will hear them clearly during your marriage liturgy.

“I, N., take you N., to be my husband/wife.

I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.

I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.”

Promise keeping

Promise keeping is the way in which “marriage can transform us into something larger, more spacious, more generous and tender than we could ever be on our own” [Jonathan Sacks].

“I promise to be true to you...”

What value do you place upon keeping promises?

.....
.....

How well have you kept promises in the past?

.....
.....

Have you ever made a promise as solemn and momentous as this?

.....

Wedding rings as central symbols.

The wedding rings are one of the central symbols of the marriage ceremony.



What does a wedding ring symbolise for you?

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.....

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.....

What does it mean to you that the ring that you wear is a sign of your partner's love for, and fidelity to, you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Mindfulness

“Perhaps the most important gift that you can give to your partner and to your marriage is the gift of your undiluted presence. Being truly present and attentive may be the most effective thing you can do for your marital health.”⁴

How will you be mindful (stay in the moment) during the Consent and the exchange of rings?

.....

.....

.....

Fidelity

The rings are exchanged as a sign of love and *fidelity*. John Gottman reminds us of our responsibilities for fidelity and our need to set and respect boundaries:

People have a lot of responsibility for love and for emotional and sexual fidelity in a relationship.

For example, I can go to the deli and see a beautiful woman there, and I can just get on with ordering my sandwich. Somebody else might think she was beautiful and then wonder what would happen if they told her that. They give themselves permission to cross a boundary, even though they're in a committed relationship. They think, what harm will it do? But the biochemistry of love can take over. In every close conversation you have you secrete oxytocin, you create a bond. [John Gottman, 2006.]

Gottman’s statement, which comes from forty years of research into marriage and relationships, aligns with the teaching of Jesus: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (MT 5: 27-28).

⁴ James V. Cordova, *The Marriage Checkup: A Scientific Program for Sustaining and Strengthening Marital Health* (Lanham, Maryland: Jason Aronson, 2009), 74.

Share with your partner the boundaries that are important to you and listen mindfully to the boundaries that are important to them.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Sometimes we can fail to live up to our promise of fidelity. Fidelity includes not just the critically important area of sexual fidelity but also not betraying love by selfishness, thoughtlessness, dishonesty, jealousy.

Which shortcomings or forms of infidelity would you find it difficult to forgive?

.....
.....

Our marital commitment is to be true in “good times and in bad” and “to love and honour” all the days of our lives.

Sometimes our love for our spouse requires us to say ‘yes’: “Yes, I will care for you through illness, injury, loss of a job, depression, grieving...”

Sometimes our love for our spouse requires us to make the even harder decision to say no: “I love you too much to allow you to keep hurting yourself by continuing your addiction to alcohol, gambling, drugs, pornography...”

What would love require you to say “no” to?

.....
.....
.....

Marital spirituality

“Simply wanting a relationship to continue is insufficient - active engagement in behaviours that support the relationship is needed in order to maintain its stability”.⁵

Marital spirituality refers to practices that help one to engage every day in practices that support the relationship, practices that demonstrate in word and action that “I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

“Marital spirituality refers to what helps us to live out the values central to and celebrated in the marriage liturgy”.⁶

What practices help you to put the relationship first?

Circle the responses you agree with and add any other thoughts in the space provided.

Being a good person

Music and ritual

Reflection

Liturgy (Reconciliation and Eucharist)

Meditation

Appreciating the beauty of creation

Prayer

Caring for the environment

Forgiveness

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Mindfulness (being in the moment)

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Social responsibility

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⁵ Robyn Parker and Joanne Commerford, "Lasting Couple Relationships: Recent Research Findings," (2014). <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a147082/cfca22.pdf> (accessed June 24,2014).

⁶ Kevin W. Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 201.

We can affect our social network

“We suggest that attending to the health of one’s friends’ marriages might serve to support and enhance the durability of one’s own relationship”.⁷

What can we do to support the health of our friends’ marriages?

Circle the responses you agree with and add any other thoughts in the space provided

Compliment them when they listen mindfully to each other

Share with them strategies that have helped to strengthen your relationship

Remind them of the stages of marriage

Encourage them to seek counselling for difficulties early

Offer to look after their children while they have a night out

⁷ Rose McDermott, James H. Fowler, and Nicholas A. Christakis, "Breaking up Is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else Is Doing It Too: Social Network Effects on Divorce in a Longitudinal Sample," *Social Forces* 92, no. 2 (2013): 516.

*“There are problems in marriage – different points of view,
jealousies, arguments, but tell young people
to never let the day end without making peace.
This path is not easy, but it is so beautiful.
Marriage is beautiful. Tell them that.”*

Pope Francis, October 2013

There are three words that always need to be said:

*may I,
thank you,
and
sorry.*

Pope Francis, April 2014

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