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PhD Thesis

**Matrimony as creative union : A liturgical theology drawn from  
The Order of Celebrating Matrimony  
McGrath, David Patrick**

McGrath, D. P. (2022). Matrimony as creative union : A liturgical theology drawn from *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* [PhD Thesis]. Australian Catholic University. <https://doi.org/10.26199/acu.8y5x2>

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**Matrimony as Creative Union:**  
**A Liturgical Theology Drawn from *The Order of***  
***Celebrating Matrimony***

Submitted by

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BA, BEdSt, MEd Admin, MA (Theol), M.Th (Res)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Theology

Faculty of Theology and Philosophy

**Australian Catholic University**

June 2022



To

**Helen Kathleen McGrath**

Helen continues to teach me sacramental marriage.


## Declaration

*"This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have 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 acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.*

*All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required)."*

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## **Statement of Appreciation**

Prof Clare Johnson

Thesis supervisor

for her personal and professional commitment to liturgy, her thoroughly timely and diligent supervision of this project, her patience, her wisdom, and for her judgment in providing the optimal mix of support, encouragement, and challenge.

Rev Dr James McEvoy

Associate supervisor

for his meticulous attention to clarity of expression and to fine detail, his wise and helpful questions and suggestions, and for his encouragement.

Jennifer Mason

Centacare Brisbane

for encouraging this research.

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## Abbreviations

AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> , Francis, “The Joy of Love,” 2016
c.	canon
CC	<i>Casti Conubii</i> , Pius XI, “On Christian Marriage,” (1930)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CDWDS	Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments
DCE	<i>Deus Caritas Est</i> , Benedict XVI, “God is Love,” 2005
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> , Vatican II, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” 1965
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , John Paul II, “On the Family,” 1981
FR	<i>Fides et Ratio</i> , John Paul II, “On the Relationship between Faith and Reason,” 1998
GIRM	<i>The General Instruction of the Roman Missal</i> , (2012), incorporating adaptations approved for the dioceses of Australia.
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Vatican II, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” 1965
ICEL	International Commission on English in the Liturgy
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Vatican II, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 1964
LS	<i>Laudato Si’</i> , Francis, “On Care for Our Common Home,” 2015
OCM1990-Lat	<i>Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium, editio typica altera</i> , 1990
OCM2015-Aus	<i>The Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> , 2015, English language edition of OCM1990-Lat approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
OCM	<i>The Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i>
OCM2015-E+W	<i>The Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> , 2015, English language edition of OCM1990-Lat approved by the Bishops of England and Wales
OCM2016-USA	<i>The Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> , 2016, English language edition of OCM1990-Lat approved USCCB
RM1984-Aus	<i>The Rite of Marriage: English Translation</i> , 1984, second English language edition of the <i>Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium</i> , 1969, approved by the Australian Episcopal Liturgical Commission

- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” 1963
- STh *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas
- VD *Verbum Domini*, Benedict, “On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” 2010

## Abstract

In 1981 Pope John Paul II exhorted the Church to develop new and better programs of marriage preparation, including the use of the marriage liturgy as an effective educational and spiritual resource, to enable the bride and bridegroom to receive greater benefit from the celebration of this sacrament. Innovative programs of marriage preparation have been developed; however, the Australian statistics since 1981 indicate that many Catholics have turned away both from marriage as institution and marriage as sacrament.

Enabling couples to receive greater benefit from the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony implies the need to assist them to recover a sense of the power and relevance of sacraments in general. A fuller comprehension of the principle of sacramentality can provide a meaningful context for enriching understandings of the sacramental system in general and sacramental marriage in particular.

Elements of Kevin Irwin's liturgical-sacramental method are employed to develop a contemporary sacramental theology of matrimony derived from *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2015). In Irwin's method of liturgical theology, the Church's liturgy (*lex orandi*), influences what the faithful believe (*lex credendi*), and both of these influence the lived reality of a sacrament (*lex vivendi*). A contemporary theology derived from the rite, and particularly from its teaching that matrimony derives its force and strength from creation, discloses that matrimony, like the Eucharist, can motivate us to be stewards of all creation.

Since dialogue between theology and science has the potential to produce a fruitful synthesis, the theology derived from the rite is assessed in dialogue with key contemporary social scientific research. Findings from social psychology, which seek to identify why marriages succeed or fail, and from the burgeoning field of positive psychology, which seek

to identify the qualities that contribute to human flourishing, are presented in dialogue with the theology revealed in *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2015).

## Introduction

In his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI, drew upon *Gaudium et Spes* to present a numinous description of marriage:

Married love particularly reveals its true nature and nobility when we realize that it takes its origin from God, who "is love," the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.<sup>1</sup>

This statement underlines the link between marriage and creation. However, in the period since it was written, it has become clearer that God's loving plan for humans is inseparable from God's loving plan for the whole of creation. Procreation and watching over creation are complementary components of God's plan. It is a central argument of this thesis that *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2015)<sup>2</sup> allows the development of a broad and rich theology of matrimony which includes both endorsement and clarification of God's loving plan for women and men to watch over creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae: On the Regulation of Birth* (1968), [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html), article 8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2015), (hereafter OCM2015-Aus). This is the Australian version of the ICEL translation of the second typical edition of the *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium* approved in 1990. This translation is used with slight variations in the world's other English speaking Catholic contexts.



## **Aim and Research Questions**

The thesis responds to the call of Pope Francis for fresh, faithful, honest, realistic, and creative thinking about marriage.<sup>3</sup> OCM-2015Aus provides a rich source for theological thinking to assist both married couples who aspire to live the matrimonial ideal and those preparing for matrimony.

The aim of the thesis is to develop a liturgical theology of matrimony from OCM-2015Aus.

Four interrelated, applied research questions are addressed to achieve this aim:

1. What factors have contributed to a decline in faith in sacramental marriage?
2. What changes have been made in the Church's latest iteration of its marriage *Ordo*, and to what extent does the theology explicit and implicit in the revised edition of the *Ordo* provide the potential for fresh thinking about sacramental marriage?
3. What does dialogue between the liturgical-sacramental theology of OCM-2015Aus and the social science research on marriage contribute to the development of a fruitful synthesis of thought/theology on matrimony for today's world?
4. What are the implications of the answers to these questions for the Church, for married couples, and for those preparing for matrimony?

## **Method**

The thesis develops a novel liturgical theology of matrimony by the application of elements of Kevin Irwin's method of liturgical theology to the primary source for the thesis:

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family* (2016), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf), (hereafter AL), article 2.

OCM-2015Aus. The liturgical theology developed includes both theology *of* liturgy (evaluation of the church's decisions on additions, omissions, or changes to its *Ordo*), and theology *from* liturgy (what theology can be developed from the church's revised *Ordo*). Data has been gathered from a close reading of the ritual text. Attention has been paid to the words of the ritual text: the scripture readings, prayers of blessing, other prayers of the liturgy; but also, to the non-verbal aspects of the *ordo*: the sacramental signs, gestures, and postures. From these data, interpretations have been made which have allowed identification of commendable changes, missed opportunities, suggestions for further enrichment, and the development of a theology of matrimony drawn from the revised *Ordo*. Comparison with *The Rite of Marriage*, (1984)<sup>4</sup> has clarified the evolution of the revised *Ordo*.

## **Chapter Synopses**

Chapter One reviews the literature relevant to the thesis topic and outlines the methodology of the thesis. The chapter identifies implicit gaps and explicit suggestions for further research in the magisterial and theological literature. Key sources and methods employed in the study within the fields of theology of liturgy, and theology from liturgy, are identified and validated.

Chapter Two examines the contemporary cultural and socio-political context within which OCM-2015Aus is celebrated and experienced. A significant aspect of that context is a decline in the marriage rate and particularly a decline in the rate of sacramental marriage. Theories which have been advanced to explain that decline are evaluated.

The focus then shifts more directly to OCM-2015Aus. Chapter Three is the first part of a two-part evaluation of the changes made in the second edition of the *Ordo* (theology *of* liturgy). The first edition of the *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium* (1969) represents the

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<sup>4</sup> Catholic Church, *The Rite of Marriage: English Translation*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1984).

Catholic Church's first attempt to revise and enrich the marriage rite in accord with the reform agenda of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.<sup>5</sup> The second typical edition of the same *Ordo* continues that reform and enrichment process. Critical evaluation of the decisions made in the revision and enrichment process is one of the ways in which liturgical theology can contribute to the sacramental life of the church. The criteria employed in this evaluation are described and justified.

Since sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy, the revised edition of the *Ordo* appropriately stipulates that at least one scripture reading that explicitly speaks of marriage must always be chosen for the liturgical celebration. Chapter Four of the thesis, constituting the second part of an evaluation of changes made in OCM2015-Aus, focusses upon the five new scripture texts that were added to the second edition: one from the Old Testament (designated as explicitly speaking of marriage) and four from the letters of Paul. The same evaluation criteria employed in Chapter Three are used here.

Chapters Three and Four are evaluative, working within the paradigm “theology of liturgy,” Chapter Five presents a synthesis, operating within the paradigm, “theology from liturgy,” looking at, for example, what theology can be developed from the foundational statement in OCM-2015Aus that “the matrimonial covenant ... derives its force and strength from creation?” Chapter Six returns to the evaluative “theology of liturgy:” if creation is foundational to the sacrament of marriage, then how adequately is that notion expressed in the revised *Ordo*?

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<sup>5</sup>“*Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” 1963, accessed June 2, 2022, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html), (hereafter SC).

Since dialogue between theology and science has the potential to produce fruitful insights for future theological and practical advances, Chapter Seven assesses the theology derived from OCM-2015Aus in dialogue with key contemporary social scientific research into marriage. Findings from social psychology, which seek to identify why marriages succeed or fail, and from the burgeoning field of positive psychology, which seek to identify the qualities that contribute to human flourishing, are presented in dialogue with the theology revealed in OCM-2015Aus.

Finally, Chapter Eight integrates the original analyses and syntheses of the previous chapters to present a set of recommendations for action.

### **Inclusive language**

The thesis attempts to use inclusive language, that is, language which is respectful of, and promotes the acceptance and value of all people. Many of the older works cited reflect language-usage practices that, in the English-speaking world, have privileged men and often rendered women invisible. The authors cited, were they writing today, would use inclusive language; their works are a product of their time. Consequently, in the interests of accuracy and fluency, citations are presented verbatim.

### **Final Introductory Remarks**

All research is value laden, and it is appropriate for researchers to position themselves, identifying their conscious values and biases. Consequently, the location of this researcher as a Roman Catholic, married, white, middle-class, Australian male, who is committed to marriage for the benefit of both individuals and their community, is acknowledged. Accordingly, the thesis has a focus upon Roman Catholic ritual, magisterium, and theology. Hopefully, however, the thesis has the potential to be helpful to other Christians, to people of other religions, and to people of no religion.

## Chapter One

### Marriage: A Subject of Universal Concern

The 2016 Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, acknowledges a contradiction between the riches of Christian teaching on marriage and the vibrant desire of many young people to marry on the one hand, and the “many signs of crisis in the institution of marriage” on the other (AL 1). Pope Francis acknowledges the complex spectrum of doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and pastoral issues that confront marriage and calls upon pastors and theologians to present honest, realistic, creative, and faithful new thinking to help to achieve greater clarity in response to those issues (AL 2).

This thesis responds to the call of Pope Francis by using OCM-2015Aus as a source for fresh theological thinking about marriage. This approach unambiguously locates the thesis within the field of liturgical theology. Using liturgy as a source for theology responds to the mandate of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that the liturgy should be studied under its “theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral and juridical aspects” (SC 16). While the focus of this thesis is predominantly theological, the material below touches upon each aspect of SC 16’s list.

This first part of this chapter identifies the key literature which informs the thesis and the second part of the chapter outlines and justifies the methods used in the thesis.

#### 1.1 Identifying Deficits and Points of Departure in the Existing Literature

For the purposes of this analysis the relevant literature considered may be classified into three distinct groups: literature which responds directly to the publication of the revised OCM, literature which identifies deficits in current theologies of matrimony, and literature

which involves dialogue between Church teaching on matrimony and the sociological and social-psychological research into successful marriages.

### 1.1.1 Literature Relating Directly to the revised OCM

The publication of the revised edition of the OCM has prompted the production of a range of books and articles. These may be divided into two groups. There have been many publications designed to inform the faithful, and particularly pastors, of the changes to the *Ordo*, and a smaller number of lengthier, more scholarly, publications which provide closer analysis of the OCM. Liturgist Paul Turner has written extensively on the revised OCM. The core purpose of his shorter pieces is to “present an overview of some of the significant differences between the first and second editions of the OCM.”<sup>6</sup> Turner succeeds in outlining the changes to the current *Ordo* and provides helpful commentary designed to guide pastors to provide good pastoral care for couples and to help them to celebrate joyfully and fruitfully.<sup>7</sup>

Critique is not a dominant theme in Turner’s articles. However, he is critical of the revised edition’s English translation of the entrance procession: “in place of recommending the liturgical procession in which the bride and groom enter after the priest, it simply declares that the procession takes place ‘in the customary manner’ (OCM 46), without defining what that manner may be. It therefore allows the greatest laxity. It is as though the English-language rubrics for the procession turn up their hands and say, ‘Whatever.’”<sup>8</sup> He also critiques the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Turner, "The Revised Marriage Rite: An Overview of Changes to the Liturgy," *Pastoral Liturgy* 47, no. 6 (2016): 5.

<sup>7</sup> For example: “Readers should also be instructed how to find the readings in the lectionary and to proclaim them from that book, not from a photocopy ... The liturgical book has power and it is one of the symbols that give the liturgy its power.” Paul Turner, *One Love: A Pastoral Guide to The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2016), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Turner, "Rebooting the Catholic Wedding: Pastoral Considerations," *Liturgy* 34, no. 3 (2019): 15.

absence of a rubric pertaining to where the presider stands during the Consent: “where the priest stands can make a difference. Traditionally he stands between the couple and the altar in space that he typically occupies. However, at this point the couple are the ministers, and the priest is the church’s witness. He may alternatively take a position closer to the people, facing the same way that they do, so that the couple naturally turns toward the whole assembly. However, the OCM is silent on this point.”<sup>9</sup> Both examples are motivated by his desire to contribute to sound liturgical practice.

Other authors adopt a similar approach. Critique is generally absent since their goal is to inform of changes to the OCM. Daniel Merz provides a helpful chart comparing the first and second editions of the OCM and highlighting six areas of change.<sup>10</sup> The booklet by Richard Hilgartner and Merz provides more comprehensive background on the theological and liturgical development of the Catholic marriage rite. However, its primary goal is to outline the changes so as to support parishes to provide effective preparation for marriage and sound liturgical practices. For example, the authors caution against the inclusion of extraneous symbolism like the unity candle ceremony: “there really is no need to add superfluous symbolism or other elements to the liturgy.”<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, John Chalmers’ article emphasises the changes in the new edition of the OCM. Chalmers highlights, as significant additions, the rites for blessing an engaged couple and a married couple on significant anniversaries of their wedding, which have been incorporated into the revised edition of the OCM from the *Book of Blessings*. Chalmers provides some limited criticism of the “arcane” language of the new edition: “the 2015

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<sup>9</sup> Turner, "Rebooting the Catholic Wedding," 18.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Merz, "The Order of Celebrating Matrimony: What's New?," *Pastoral Music* 40, no. 2 (2016): 17.

<sup>11</sup> Richard B. Hilgartner and Daniel J. Merz, *Guide for Celebrating Matrimony* (Chicago: LTP, 2016), 68.

introduction seems at times to assume that the language of daily life is not sufficiently holy for God,” and asking, “Where is the strong, simple language of Vatican II?”<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising that critique is largely absent from these publications since their purpose is to inform of changes, to assist with pastoral support, and to encourage sound liturgical celebrations. However, more extensive commentaries also lack critique.

The commentary edited by Edward Foley seeks to provide “a comprehensive yet accessible guide to this sacrament.”<sup>13</sup> It is comprehensive, providing historical and theological background to the revised *Ordo*, principles for preaching and music, explorations of marital spirituality, international comparisons, guidance in using the revised *Ordo* to prepare for marriage as well as to prepare the wedding liturgy, and Canonical reflections.

As part of her chapter in this commentary, Kimberly Belcher presents a liturgical theology of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. This is a liturgical theology; it is drawn from the rites of the revised *Ordo*. It is succinct and explicatory, stressing the relationship between matrimony, baptism, and, ideally, the Eucharist: “the action of the couple giving their free and full consent is the most significant act of the rite. Two baptized people enter into the act of giving consent strengthened by the word of God proclaimed and receive the blessing of God through the mediation of the Church within the Liturgy of the Eucharist.”<sup>14</sup>

Belcher describes the rites and makes helpful suggestions about choice from options, emphasising the needs of the couple and the assembly. For example, in accord with SC 24, she states that, guided by the scripture readings the couple have played an active role in selecting,

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<sup>12</sup> John Chalmers, "Engaging the 2015 Order of Celebrating Matrimony," *Liturgy News* 49, no. 4 (2019): 6.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Foley, "Preface," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. Edward Foley (Chicago: LTP, 2019), vi.

<sup>14</sup> Kimberly Belcher, "A Theology of Marriage," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. Edward Foley (Chicago: LTP, 2019), 17.



“the nuptial blessing to be used in each particular case should be determined not only by the spirituality and needs of the couple and the assembly, but also with respect to the ecclesial spirituality of the local community and the prayer’s resonance with the proclaimed Scriptures.”<sup>15</sup>

Turner’s *Inseparable Love* provides a comprehensive, paragraph by paragraph commentary on the English translation of the second edition of the OCM. Turner’s stated hope is to help the church “celebrate well, in meaning and in symbol, the immeasurable mystery of inseparable love.”<sup>16</sup> The way he achieves this goal is illustrated by his commentary on paragraph 78, a rubric added to the second edition prohibiting the signing of the marriage record on the altar: “The Roman Ritual of 1614 had also instructed the priest to fill out the parish register with the pertinent information. The prohibition for doing this on the altar is not there, probably because it never occurred to people that someone might do it that way. The rubric here uncovers the existence of an errant contemporary pastoral practice.”<sup>17</sup> This comment reveals liturgy, history, custom, and a desire to inform to help presiders to avoid errors and to celebrate well.

Turner’s commentary includes some critique. He again notes that the English translation of paragraph 46, which relates to the entrance procession, “surprisingly omits important details in the Latin;” and he is mildly critical of the absence of a rubric specifying where the presider should stand during the Consent.<sup>18</sup> The strength of the book lies in its informative and meticulous treatment of the historical and theological development of each

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<sup>15</sup> Belcher, “Catholic Marriage,” 23.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Turner, *Inseparable Love: A Commentary on The Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the Catholic Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2017), xix.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 162.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 60, 80. For more on the liturgical issues involved here see Chapter Three below.

paragraph of the revised edition of the OCM, a treatment informed by privileged access to ICEL files.

Both Belcher's chapter and Turner's book provide a helpful resource for preparation for marriage, including preparation to celebrate the matrimonial liturgy well. Turner's book-length treatment allows him to be far more meticulous. In terms of deficits, both generally lack the critical and creative elements that Kevin Irwin terms theology *of* liturgy and theology *from* liturgy.<sup>19</sup>

### **1.1.2 Deficits in Current Theologies of Matrimony**

Contemporary theologies of matrimony reveal that there is a general lack of liturgical and theological attention being paid by scholars to the social benefits and responsibilities of matrimony. This deficit is somewhat surprising as successive magisterial documents give prominence to those social responsibilities.

The revised *Ordo* is a response to the decree of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that: "The marriage rite now found in the Roman Ritual is 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). Subsequent conciliar teaching reveals the relationship between these two factors. It is as the duties of the spouses are fulfilled that the grace of the sacrament is revealed: "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).

GS is the conciliar document which gives most explicit attention to marriage including consideration of the duties of the spouses. It identifies marriage and the family, human

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<sup>19</sup> See 1.2.3 below.

progress, life in its economic, social, and political dimensions, the bonds between the family of nations, and peace, as subjects arousing universal concern (GS 46). GS is consistent in its emphasis that the health of marriage is related to the health of the other four subjects of universal concern. The diverse benefits and purposes of matrimony have a very decisive influence on “the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole” (GS 48).

GS later expands upon the significance of the engagement of all Christians (including spouses) with the world, stressing the obligation to work with others to build a better world:

When man develops the earth by the work of his hands or with the aid of technology, in order that it might bear fruit and become a dwelling worthy of the whole human family and when he consciously takes part in the life of social groups, he carries out the design of God manifested at the beginning of time, that he should subdue the earth, perfect creation and develop himself. At the same time he obeys the commandment of Christ that he place himself at the service of his brethren (GS 57).

In summary, conciliar teaching accentuates that spouses have a duty to the world as well as to each other and to their children.

Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), reemphasises the teaching of GS. The sacrament of matrimony does not end with its liturgical celebration but continues throughout the life of the marriage where, in fulfilling their duties, the spouses demonstrate “the priestly role which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world.”<sup>20</sup> FC locates the responsibilities of the family in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer. Those responsibilities encompass four general tasks: 1) forming a community

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<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (1981), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html), (hereafter FC), article 55.

of persons; 2) serving life; 3) participating in the development of society; 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church (FC 17). Through the choices they make as they fulfil their quotidian duties, spouses can sanctify themselves, each other, their children, the Church, and the world. This sanctification is grounded upon the Creator’s gift of the sacrament of conjugal love: “this love God has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity ... such love pervades the whole of their lives: indeed by its busy generosity it grows better and grows greater” (FC 56 citing GS 49).

In its emphasis upon the social responsibilities of spouses, the Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) shows continuity with both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Familiaris Consortio*: “Married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations. With this, their affection does not diminish but is flooded with new light” (AL 181). Christian spouses help to build a better world by their witness as well as by their words: “by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society” (AL 184). Later AL cites the Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to detail the scope of the social duties of spouses which include “solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy” (AL 290).

While the magisterial documents highlight the social responsibilities of marriage, that emphasis is missing from the liturgical text and from commentary upon that text. The revised and expanded Introduction to the OCM retains references to GS from the first edition and adds references to two major documents dealing with marriage that emerged after the publication of

the first edition, FC and the revised *Code of Canon Law*, 1983.<sup>21</sup> However, neither the original references to GS, nor the additional references to the new documents, speak of the social responsibilities of marriage. This deficit is also evident in theological commentary. Patrick Lagges provides an exception. He notes the absence of any attention to this aspect of the Church's theology of marriage in the Introduction to the OCM, and minimal attention to it in the liturgy, concluding that "without more specific references to it ... and references as to how it can be lived out ... the societal dimension of marriage can be easily overlooked."<sup>22</sup>

Within theologies of marriage, theologians have generally noted the social responsibilities of marriage. In what has become an oft-quoted passage, Karl Rahner writes: "Marriage is not the act in which two individuals come together to form a 'we,' a relationship in which they set themselves apart from the 'all' and close themselves against this. Rather it is the act in which a 'we' is constituted which opens itself lovingly precisely to *all*."<sup>23</sup> For Michael Lawler, social responsibility is part of the Creator's plan: the goal of marriage "is the continuation of Christ's mission to establish the reign of God in the lives of the spouses, their family, and in the world in which they live."<sup>24</sup>

Cormac Burke contends that, while contemporary theologies emphasise the personalist aspects of marriage, "no Christian or truly human view can ignore its social aspects. Marriage is never a purely personal affair; it is also social. Married couples have rights and duties towards

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<sup>21</sup> AL was not published until 2016, long after the approval of the second edition of the OCM in 1990.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick R. Lagges, "Canonical Reflections on the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. Edward Foley (Chicago: LTP, 2019), 152.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Rahner, "Marriage as a Sacrament," in *Theological Investigations* 10 (London: Longman and Todd, 1973), 207.

<sup>24</sup> 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), 152.

the rest of society.”<sup>25</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that spousal growth from personalist aspects to wider concerns may be a critical factor in sustaining healthy marriages: “the friendship that may bring the two together as an individual couple has to grow and develop to include others, and has to broaden out to other tasks and other communities. The more this broadening takes place and the more multiple the relationships, the more solid the foundation for the marriage.”<sup>26</sup> James and Evelyn Whitehead voice a similar concern: they draw upon psychology to warn that “the absence of any movement beyond ‘Just us’ imperils a love relationship.”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, social responsibility is part of the very nature of liturgy and sacraments. Irwin stresses the ethical dimension of liturgy which links liturgy with life, here and now, particularly linking liturgy with “social justice, mission, service, and love.”<sup>28</sup> Contemporary sacramental theologies emphasise this relationship: “sacraments, therefore, are very particular signs and instruments of God’s presence to humanity, embodied in concrete historical contexts and communities ... and it is in their very concrete enactment, participation or *being lived that they reveal this God, that this God may be encountered.*”<sup>29</sup>

While most contemporary theologians of marriage at least note the importance of the social responsibilities of marriage, many also argue that this is an underdeveloped aspect requiring further elaboration. Typical is Schüssler Fiorenza: “To define marriage primarily in

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<sup>25</sup> Cormac Burke, *The Theology of Marriage: Personalism, Doctrine, and Canon Law* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 114.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Marriage," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 607.

<sup>27</sup> James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, "Promises to Keep: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. Edward Foley (Chicago: LTP, 2019), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, revised ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2018), 591.

<sup>29</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Symbols of who we are Called to Become: Sacraments in a Post-Secular and Post-Christian Society," *Studia Liturgica* 48, no. 1-2 (2018): 157.

terms of an interpersonal relation of two without recognizing the social and communal responsibilities that marriage entails is to offer a reductionistic view of marriage. *The communal and social view of marriage needs to be explicated*, especially in the face of an individualistic overemphasis on personal fulfillment.”<sup>30</sup>

According to Richard Gaillardetz the social responsibility of marriage is highly valued in the Orthodox tradition and “relatively undeveloped in most other Christian traditions.”<sup>31</sup> In the Catholic tradition, wherein Pope Francis laments “an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation” (AL 36), a wider social responsibility has been over-shadowed by the emphasis given to procreation. Social responsibility may be understood as an under-developed component of marital fruitfulness.<sup>32</sup> Increasing life expectancy and increasing rates of infertility suggest that marital fruitfulness should be considered more broadly, to include social responsibility as well as procreation.<sup>33</sup> As Ouellet observes: “The fruitfulness of marriage remains an underexploited topic in theology.”<sup>34</sup>

The literature reveals widespread acknowledgment of the social responsibility of marriage and increasing recognition that this is a topic which is both underdeveloped in theologies of marriage and which merits further development.

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<sup>30</sup> Fiorenza, "Marriage," 610. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 103.

<sup>32</sup> Belcher nominates both “physical procreation” and “spiritual fecundity” as ways that married couples participate in God’s creative action however, she provides no development of the notion of spiritual fecundity except to note that it is an essential aspect of the spouses’ life together. Belcher, "Catholic Marriage," 17, 24.

<sup>33</sup> “In Australia, a boy born in 2017–2019 can expect to live to the age of 80.9 years and a girl would be expected to live to 85.0 years compared to 51.1 and 54.8 years, respectively, in 1891–1900.” Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Deaths in Australia* (2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/life-expectancy>. “About one in 9 Australian couples of reproductive age experiences fertility problems.” Healthdirect, *Infertility* (2020), <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/infertility>.

<sup>34</sup> Marc Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization*, trans. Michelle K. Borrás and Adrian J. Walker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2015), 96.

### 1.1.3 Literature on Dialogue Between Theology and the Sociological Research into Marriage

*Gaudium et Spes* teaches that theology should be complemented with relevant social science research to assist the faithful to grow into a mature life of faith (to be made holy, and to be witnesses in the world to what we celebrate and believe): “sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology.”<sup>35</sup>

Pope John Paul II related this conciliar teaching to marriage, calling upon the Church to “apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving” (FC 4). He acknowledged that the Church constantly strives to develop a “more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage” (FC 4) and he placed a high value upon the potential of sociological and statistical research to contribute to this more profound understanding (FC 5). Pope Francis has continued this emphasis: the pastoral care of families needs to draw upon “the contributions of psychology, sociology, marital therapy and counselling” (AL 204).<sup>36</sup> The position of the magisterium on this issue is summarised succinctly and positively in the *Catechism*: “science and technology are precious resources when placed at the service of man and promote his integral development for the benefit of all.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “*Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” 1965, accessed 2 June, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), (hereafter GS), article 62.

<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere Pope Francis notes that the Catholic Church’s openness to dialogue with philosophical thought (including the thought of the natural, physical, and social sciences) has enabled the Church to produce various syntheses between faith and reason: “science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful to both.” Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, (2015), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), (hereafter LS), article 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd pocket ed. (Strathfield, N.S.W.: St. Pauls, 2000), (hereafter CCC), 2293.



In the theological literature, Rahner acknowledged both the importance of relating theology to its cultural context and the contribution that science and technology have made to shaping that context: “theology has the job of a dialogue with the contemporary person’s understanding of self and world; that means an interdisciplinary dialogue with the contemporary sciences as well.”<sup>38</sup>

Lieven Boeve promotes recontextualization which refers to the theological process of relating the received tradition to changed cultural contexts.<sup>39</sup> Accepting the contribution of science to those changed cultural contexts, he both advocates productive dialogue between Christian faith and scientific research, and provides a model to guide that process.<sup>40</sup> The first element of Boeve’s model entails believers exploring the results of scientific research.<sup>41</sup>

Scientific research has been underutilised in theologies of marriage. In the Catholic tradition there have been two ways of presenting theologies of marriage; marriage *in fieri* (marriage “in principle”), which predominates in the theological literature, and marriage *in facto esse* (marriage “in fact”).<sup>42</sup> FC models a theology of marriage *in fieri*, marriage as a set of theological principles. The abundant sociological and social-psychological research can inform theologies of marriage *in facto esse*. Thus, Michael Lawler argues persuasively that “sociology has an important part to play in manifesting and interpreting what the church *actually* believes and *ought* to believe in both faith and *praxis*.”<sup>43</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill detects

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, ed. Paul Imhof, Hubert Biallowons, and Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 324.

<sup>39</sup> See Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 130.

<sup>41</sup> The results of social-psychological research into what helps marriages to flourish and the other elements of Boeve’s model are explored in Chapter Seven below.

<sup>42</sup> Lagges, "Canonical Reflections " 150.

<sup>43</sup> Michael G. Lawler, "Faith, Praxis, and Practical Theology: At the Interface of Sociology and Theology," *Horizons* 29, no. 2 (2002): 202.

that “a crying need is an honest investigation of the human reality of marriage, incorporating testimony from married persons themselves, across cultures. The capacity of a human relation to function as a sign of a divine reality must necessarily build on the nature of the human signifier itself.”<sup>44</sup> The sociological research investigates the human reality of marriage and incorporates testimony from married persons, including persons from diverse cultures.

While both the magisterium and the theological literature are positive about, and actively encourage, dialogue with the sciences, the response from theologians has generally been slow. There are some positive signs that this may be changing as more theologians are turning to the social sciences as a source of reliable information on human experience, one of the traditional sources of theology. Thus, Michael Lawler and Todd Salzman have drawn upon research from the social sciences in some of their research related to marriage.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Antus draws upon medical research to encourage the Catholic Church to “take seriously the embodied realities of women’s lives.”<sup>46</sup> However, there has been no comprehensive study of the relationship between the theology of marriage explicit and implicit in the OCM and the social science research into what makes marriages successful.

#### **1.1.4 Deficits in the Literature**

The literature reviewed here identifies deficits in three central and potentially interrelated aspects of the liturgical theology of matrimony: theology *of* and *from* the liturgy,

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<sup>44</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Marriage," in *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ed. Michael J. Walsh (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1994), 328.

<sup>45</sup> Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Amoris Laetitia a Turning Point: Cohabitation Revisited," *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2019): 268-86; Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Catholic Doctrine on Divorce and Remarriage: A Practical Theological Examination," *Theological Studies* 78, no. 2 (2017): 326-45.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth L. Antus, "'A Woman's Pain Is Not a Gift': Toward Sexual Flourishing For All," in *Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Jason King and Julie Hanlon Rubio (Collegeville: Liturgical 2020), 44.

the social responsibilities of matrimony, and dialogue between theologies of matrimony and the social science research into successful marriages. These three areas of deficit offer scope for the type of productive research undertaken in this thesis.

## 1.2 Research Methods: Liturgical theology

Seeking to use OCM-2015Aus as a source for fresh theological thinking about marriage locates this thesis within the field of liturgical theology. Liturgical theology shares the subject matter of dogmatic and systematic theology; however, it brings a distinct perspective, adding the Church's liturgy to the traditional sources of theology – scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Liturgy is inherently theological:

The liturgy is an intrinsic part of the meta-narrative of Christian faith: God creating a world, placing a partner in it, who betrays him but is given the opportunity to restore what went wrong, and who is still on a journey toward final fulfillment. In that respect, liturgy is an essential element in the building and maintaining of God's reign. Liturgical theology does not differ from dogmatic, or systematic, theology in that it would deal with another "object" but because it takes another stance toward it. It starts from the Church's traditional and official ritual repertoire, not from doctrinal declarations or theological considerations.<sup>47</sup>

Joris Geldhof contends that it is helpful to view liturgical theology as a research program. Geldhof develops the work of Dutch theologian Erik Borgman, that God is a research program in the sense that it may be more productive to search, or research, where God is in the world, rather than who or what God is. Geldhof explains: "the task of theology, understood as a research program, is precisely to look for the traces of God's proximity and transformational capacity in the past, present and future of humanity."<sup>48</sup> Since liturgy is a privileged place where

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<sup>47</sup> Joris Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology," ed. John Barton, *Religion: Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (2015), <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-14>.

<sup>48</sup> Joris Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 4, no. 2 (2020): 7, <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/10.1163/24683493-12340010>.

God may be experienced,<sup>49</sup> liturgical theology, as part of the wider field of theology, is particularly appropriate for this task.

While SC required that the liturgy be studied under its theological aspects, the Church has been slow to respond.<sup>50</sup> Geldhof observes that, while it seems obvious that the liturgy contains and expresses theological content, there is a long tradition that the most appropriate and trustworthy bearer of the content of Christian belief is doctrine.<sup>51</sup> He identifies a phenomenon he terms *Liturgievergessenheit*, the widespread forgetting or neglecting of liturgy within theology in the recent past.<sup>52</sup>

Systematic theology's emphasis is largely upon thought, argument, and concepts; and among its output as a discipline area, little, if any, attention is given to the Church's liturgy. Eminent theologian, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's theology is representative. His systematic theology of marriage is based upon biblical teaching, Roman Catholic theological and church traditions, and contemporary systematic treatments. He devotes a single paragraph to the matrimonial liturgy noting that "the liturgical celebration of the sacrament of marriage within the Christian community symbolizes the meaning that marriage has for Christians within the context of Christianity."<sup>53</sup> Fiorenza is unrepresentative in that he does not completely neglect

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<sup>49</sup> "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations" and "Every liturgical celebration ... is a sacred action surpassing all others" (SC 7). Yet "in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims" (SC 8). "Now, we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor 13:12). "The liturgy will never be a totally satisfying or a complete experience of God." Kevin W. Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II* (Mahwah: Paulist 2013), 100. While the liturgy does not disclose the full experience of God it offers the clearest traces of the experience of God this side of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Morrill observes that fifty years after Vatican II "systematic theologians ... tended to consider liturgical theology an inferior intellectual exercise, at times even to the point of scorn." Bruce T. Morrill, "Sacramental-Liturgical Theology Since Vatican II: The Dialectic of Meaning and Performance," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 67 (2012): 1, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=79850253&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>51</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology."

<sup>52</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 8.

<sup>53</sup> Fiorenza, "Marriage," 606.

liturgy within his systematic theology. His reference to the liturgy is perhaps one of a number of hopeful signs that the position of liturgical theology is not as bleak as Geldhof suggests, that *Liturgievergessenheit werden überwinden* (*Liturgievergessenheit* will be overcome).<sup>54</sup> Another sign is Louis-Marie Chauvet's identification of four substantial shifts in Catholic sacramental thinking particularly since Vatican II; the first of these being a "return to liturgical action itself (celebration) as the first 'locus theologicus' of thinking about the sacraments."<sup>55</sup>

### 1.2.1 Liturgical Theology and Meaning

Schüssler Fiorenza's linkage of the liturgical celebration with the meaning that the faithful associate with marriage is significant because, from the mystagogical catecheses of the Patristic era to contemporary times, participation in liturgy has been a central means for the faithful to acquire meaning/understanding about their faith and this is a substantive aim of liturgical theology.<sup>56</sup> However, the relationship between liturgical participation and the development of meaning is not straightforward. As Geldhof observes: "Liturgical theology is the study of the meaning of Christian worship. This is a challenging task, because it is neither

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<sup>54</sup> One of the most significant of these signs is the extensive use of liturgical theology that Pope Benedict XVI employed in the whole of Part Two of the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Here he endorses the connection the synod of bishops made between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* and their stress upon the primacy of the liturgical action. Pope Benedict makes extensive use of the church's *orandi* as he develops the topic "The Eucharist: A Mystery to be Celebrated." Irwin notes that this "is a very important statement methodologically and in terms of theological content. This represents a very important example of the way the church's *lex orandi* can and should function." Irwin, *Context and Text*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> The other substantial shifts which Chauvet identifies are a recentering of the liturgy on the paschal mystery of Christ, a rebalancing of the Christological principle with a pneumatological principle, and an understanding of sacraments within the sacramental character of the Church. Louis-Marie Chauvet, "Sacrament," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1414.

<sup>56</sup> See Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse, 2nd ed. (New York: Faith Press, 1975, 1966); Margaret M. Kelleher, "Liturgy: An Ecclesial Act of Meaning," *Worship* 59, no. 6 (1985); Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," *Worship* 62, no. 1 (1988); Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance," *Worship* 67, no. 4 (1993); Robert F. Taft, "Mrs Murphy Goes to Moscow: Kavanagh, Schmemmann, and 'the Byzantine Synthesis,'" *Worship* 85, no. 5 (2011); Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology."

evident nor easy to define what the Christian liturgy actually is, let alone to determine what its meaning(s) could be.”<sup>57</sup>

It is helpful to distinguish the official or intended meanings of the *Ordo*, from the plethora of meanings that participants bring to, and take from, celebration of the liturgy.<sup>58</sup> To some extent the intended meanings may be discerned from the official statements relating to ritual texts (especially their *praenotandae*), and from the symbols, rituals, and the prayer texts that the Church chooses to include in ritual texts. Those choices are open to critique, implying a critical function for liturgical theology: that is, “critiquing the revised rites in terms of what they contain and raising questions about what might be contained in a new edition of the rite.”<sup>59</sup>

The background and understandings that participants bring to the liturgical celebration, especially the celebration of matrimony, can conflict with the official meanings of the *Ordo*.<sup>60</sup> For some couples, these differences are so great that they decline the sacramental celebration entirely.<sup>61</sup> This is undoubtedly a contributing factor to declining rates of Catholic marriage.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology."

<sup>58</sup> Those who construct the rite are but one component of a complex array of factors that contribute to the meaning communicated by the liturgy: “The meaning that is generated is shared, inherited, taught, enacted, culturally determined and affected by those who constructed the rite initially (historically and proximally), those who enact the rite in each instance (presider, faithful, God), and those who are the fully conscious and active recipients of the words/signs/symbols/symbolic ritual actions of the liturgy.” Clare V. Johnson, "*Sacrosanctum Concilium's* Principle of Liturgical Intelligibility," in *Vatican II: Reforming Liturgy*, eds. Carmel Pilcher, David Orr and Elizabeth Harrington (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2013), 50.

<sup>59</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Kelleher draws upon the work of Bernard Lonergan on horizons of meaning to distinguish public, official, and private meanings. The public world of meaning mediated by the Church’s liturgical celebrations “must be distinguished from the meanings that are personally appropriated by members of the assembly as well as from the meanings identified in official texts or commentaries on a rite, since individuals may not appropriate all that is publicly mediated and liturgical praxis may mediate meanings that are not included in the official rite.” Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," 6.

<sup>61</sup> For vivid examples of these differences, and the strategies of power which underlie them, see Bruce T. Morrill, "Performing the Rite of Marriage: Agency, Identity and Ideology," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2012): 93-105.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Two below.

What meanings participants take from the celebration of liturgy is complicated by the fact that liturgy is performative and that it includes symbolic and ritual material.<sup>63</sup> Symbols and rituals are multivalent, unleashing many potential meanings. For Irwin they express “what is really inexpressible” and therefore “priority is always given to symbolic engagement and liturgical participation through symbol as these draw the community to share more fully in the mystery that is God.”<sup>64</sup> The potency of symbol and ritual means that they, and not merely the words of the text, contribute much to the communication of meaning in liturgy. It is the entire liturgical celebration which is *theologia prima*,<sup>65</sup> which communicates meaning: “it is not the text, but rather the entire ritual which communicates this meaning, this *theologia prima*.”<sup>66</sup>

Where and when the liturgy is celebrated also contributes to the meaning it communicates: “the spatiotemporal environments where all kinds of celebrations and liturgical actions take place are co-constitutive for their meaning.”<sup>67</sup> Significantly, OCM-2015Aus paragraph 27 implies that the matrimonial liturgy be celebrated in a church and Canon 1118 requires that marriages involving a Catholic party are normally “to be celebrated in a parish church.” Celebration in a church communicates different meanings from those conveyed through celebration in a park or on a beach.

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<sup>63</sup> Symbols and rituals are related: rituals are symbolic actions. For the importance of symbols and rituals in liturgy See Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 81-86.

<sup>64</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> *Theologia prima* refers to the religious meaning expressed in the liturgical celebration; *theologia secunda* refers to subsequent reflection upon that meaning. For Aidan Kavanagh a liturgical act is *theologia prima* par excellence: “a liturgical act is a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral, and foundational kind.” Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 89.

<sup>66</sup> Taft, "Mrs Murphy Goes to Moscow: Kavanagh, Schmemmann, and 'the Byzantine Synthesis'," 405.

<sup>67</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 106.

### 1.2.2 Liturgical Texts

While acknowledging that liturgy is performative, liturgical texts are foundational to that performance. Ideally, liturgical texts encourage the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful,<sup>68</sup> which includes engagement with symbols and rituals. Geldhof observes that in liturgical theology there is an oscillating movement between only studying texts and not studying texts at all. He encourages a proper balance between these two factors, and challenges liturgical theologians to restore a sense of wonder by showing what texts are capable of conveying.<sup>69</sup> He summarises that potential, writing: “texts weave together layers of meaning, yield solidity to words, give shape to the imagination, and allow for conceptual analysis, comparison, and comprehension. And beyond comprehension, they both interrupt and enrich horizons of understanding. They are and stay a golden route to enter into liturgy.”<sup>70</sup> The texts of OCM2015-Aus, and the rite that it replaced, provide the bases for conceptual analysis, comparison, comprehension, and enriching horizons of understanding in this thesis.

### 1.2.3 Irwin’s Methods of Liturgical Theology

The text of OCM-2015Aus is used in this thesis as a golden route to enter into the matrimonial liturgy. The thesis is grounded in Irwin’s methods of liturgical theology.<sup>71</sup> For Irwin liturgy is, *inter alia*, primarily an act of theology: “liturgy is a structured and ritualized event in which the believing church addresses God, is drawn into an experience of the living

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<sup>68</sup> This was the aim which was to be “considered before all else” in the “restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy” (SC 14).

<sup>69</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 99.

<sup>70</sup> Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 99.

<sup>71</sup> From the range of methods that Irwin presents those appropriate for the particular research task may be selected and utilised. Geldhof evaluates Irwin’s *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, as “probably the most important reflection about method in the field of liturgical theology ... It indicates numerous ways in which one can pursue research in liturgical theology.” Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology as a Research Program," 122.



God, and expresses this belief through a variety of means.”<sup>72</sup> The thesis seeks to explore the multifaceted reality of the matrimonial liturgy and its celebration; to develop theology from the *Ordo*; and to offer both a critique of the revised *Ordo* and suggestions for improved celebrations in the future.<sup>73</sup>

Irwin’s methods constitute an appropriate core methodology for use in this thesis for at least three reasons. Firstly, they guide the development of a rich theology of sacraments drawn from their liturgical celebration.<sup>74</sup> The fundamental assumption is that “the liturgy can and should be the basis about what we understand the sacraments to be.”<sup>75</sup> Secondly, Irwin emphasises the relationship between liturgy and life. He stresses the addition of *lex vivendi* (the law of Christian living) to the maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*. As Irwin writes: “We gather to celebrate sacred realities in which we literally ‘take part’ in God, are shaped through Christ’s paschal mystery in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then *dismissed to live what we celebrate*.”<sup>76</sup> The experience of God and Gospel values in the celebration of the matrimonial liturgy, and reflection upon that experience, can enlighten the daily living of the ongoing sacrament of matrimony, including its social responsibilities.

Thirdly, in the context of the Church’s liturgical texts, Irwin makes a helpful methodological distinction between theology *from* liturgy and theology *of* liturgy. Theology from liturgy relates to what meanings, (that is, what theology) can be developed from the words, symbols, postures, and gestures that the Church includes in its revised rite. Irwin

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<sup>72</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 70.

<sup>73</sup> See Irwin, *Context and Text*, xxiii.

<sup>74</sup> This emphasis aligns with the first of the major shifts in contemporary sacramental theology identified by Chauvet. Chauvet, "Sacrament," 1414.

<sup>75</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, *The Sacraments: Historical Foundations and Liturgical Theology* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2016), 371.

<sup>76</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 70. Emphasis added.

underscores that: “the means of communication and interaction in liturgy, especially words and symbols, can be utilized as a generative source for developing theology.”<sup>77</sup>

Theology of liturgy incorporates liturgical theology’s critical function, that is, critiquing the decisions the church has made about, not only, what words, but also what rites, symbols, and gestures to include in its revised *Ordo* and making suggestions about what might be included in future revisions. This critical function implies consideration of context, for the cultural and socio-political situation of believers inevitably shapes their experience of liturgy. Liturgy is always celebrated “in a given culture, at a given time, in a given place by a particular people. The underlying dispositions and dynamics of that interaction need to be factored into the way constituencies experience the same liturgy in terms of what the published liturgical rites say and prescribe in relation to actual celebrations of the church’s liturgy.”<sup>78</sup> The significance of cultural context is directly relevant to two issues taken up in the thesis, the importance of recontextualization<sup>79</sup> and of inculturation.<sup>80</sup>

### **1.3 Marriage: A Subject of Universal Concern**

Marriage remains an issue of universal concern for the Church. This thesis utilises elements of Irwin’s method of liturgical theology to address three deficits in the theological literature. It offers a close study of the revised OCM presenting both a critical theology *of* the liturgy and developing theology *from* the liturgy; it develops the scope and meaning of the social responsibilities of marriage; and it engages in productive dialogue with social science research into what helps marriages to be successful. It seeks to contribute to the search for “the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young

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<sup>77</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 77.

<sup>78</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, xxviii.

<sup>79</sup> In Chapters Two and Five.

<sup>80</sup> In Chapter Three.

people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage” (AL 40).

## Chapter Two

### A Sacramental Malaise?

Enduring social and spiritual problems affecting the establishment and maturing of successful marriages, first underscored in *Gaudium et Spes* more than fifty years ago, prompted Pope Francis to call a Synod of Bishops to address these difficulties. The synod took place in two sessions via an Extraordinary General Assembly in 2014 and an Ordinary General Assembly in 2015. The Preparatory Document for the Synod acknowledges profound cultural changes, including widespread cohabitation, same-sex unions, a culture of non-commitment, and a presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary, which undermine the value of marriage today. The document realistically did not allocate all the culpability for the problems with marriage to an increasingly secular society. It also acknowledged that broader, profound spiritual issues were involved: “within the Church, faith in the sacramentality of marriage and the healing power of the Sacrament of Penance show signs of weakness or total abandonment.”<sup>81</sup>

Australian statistics point to a decline in marriage and particularly to a decline in the celebration of sacramental marriage.<sup>82</sup> Some scholars have argued that the problem extends beyond sacramental marriage; that there is a more general sacramental malaise, that there has been a decline in the perceived relevance of the sacraments in people’s lives overall, a decline in the sacramental understanding of reality.<sup>83</sup> This chapter analyses the statistics on marriage

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<sup>81</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization: Preparatory Document* (2013), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20131105\\_iii-assembly-sinodo-vescovi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-assembly-sinodo-vescovi_en.html).

<sup>82</sup> See 2.1 below.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2007); Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Towards a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans. Philip Milligan and Linda

in Australia and evaluates possible causes of, and potential solutions to, this sacramental malaise.

## 2.1 Sacramental Marriage: The Situation in Australia

The impact of changing cultural views upon marriage is reflected in the Australian statistics. The Australian population is turning away from marriage as an institution and the Catholic population is turning away from marriage as sacrament.<sup>84</sup> The turn from marriage is not uniform across social strata. There is evidence that the rich continue to marry while the disadvantaged increasingly miss out on the benefits of marriage.<sup>85</sup> In 1981, the year in which *Familiaris Consortio* (the Apostolic Exhortation from the previous synod on marriage and the family) was published, the Australian marriage rate was 7.6;<sup>86</sup> that rate had decreased to 4.5 in 2019.<sup>87</sup> This rate is inflated by the inclusion of groups previously ineligible to marry. The Australian Parliament amended the Marriage Act to enable same-sex couples to legally marry

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M. Cicone (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Edward J. Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1988).

<sup>84</sup> Trends in the United States are similar: the number of Catholic marriages declined from 350,745 in 1979 to 131,827 in 2019, and, in a statistic not readily available in Australia, the number of petitions for annulments dropped from a high of 72,308 in 1989 to 19,500 in 2019, indicating that fewer Catholics are marrying in the church and that fewer are seeking to use the annulment process. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *Frequently Requested Church Statistics* (Washington, DC, 2022), <https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter Seven below

<sup>86</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces Australia* (2002), 42, [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/4FF989BB8B911065CA256C1D000464D3/\\$File/33100\\_2001.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/4FF989BB8B911065CA256C1D000464D3/$File/33100_2001.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> The rate used here, technically “the crude marriage rate,” refers to number of marriages registered during a calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population at 30 June of the same year. It allows valid comparison in a growing population. Statistics from 2019 are used because the celebration of marriage was dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In 2020, 78,989 marriages were registered in Australia, a 30.6% decrease from 2019. The ABS notes that “restrictions put in place during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic including social distancing requirements, size limits on gatherings (including weddings) and travel restrictions had a direct impact on marriages in 2020. The decrease of 30.6% from 2019 to 2020 is the largest annual decrease in marriages ever reported by the ABS.” Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2020* (2021), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release>.

in Australia from 9 December 2017. Thus 2019 represents the second full year for which same-sex marriage data are available. There were 5,507 same-sex marriages in 2019, accounting for 4.8% of all marriages.<sup>88</sup>

The turn away from marriage as an institution is illustrated by a new statistic introduced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2018. The statistic, “Registered Relationships,” is compiled from the states’ relationship registers. Registration is available to adults who are in a relationship as a couple, regardless of sex. The Bureau notes that: “Whilst the number of registered marriages has slowly declined over time, the number of relationships registered are growing on an annual basis.<sup>89</sup> There were 14,626 relationships registered in 2017, over double the number registered only 5 years ago in 2013 (7,281).”<sup>90</sup>

For couples who do choose to marry the data show a substantial abandonment of religious marriage ceremonies. In 1981 the proportion of marriage ceremonies overseen by a minister of religion was 62.4%, with the remainder overseen by civil celebrants. Civil celebrants have overseen most marriages since 1999, with the proportion increasing to more than three-quarters (76.4%) of all marriages in 2016.<sup>91</sup> Table 2.1 presents statistics covering the period 1996-2016. It reveals the decline in the marriage rate and the strong trend, among those who do choose to marry, to have their marriage ceremony overseen by a civil celebrant rather than a minister of religion.

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<sup>88</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2019* (2020), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/2019>.

<sup>89</sup> Registration gives a relationship legal recognition and may provide financial advantages when dealing with government agencies such as Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office.

<sup>90</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2017* (2018), [https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3310.0Main%20Features32017?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2017&num=&view=.](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3310.0Main%20Features32017?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2017&num=&view=)

<sup>91</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2016* (2017), [https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3310.0Main%20Features112016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2016&num=&view=.](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3310.0Main%20Features112016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2016&num=&view=)

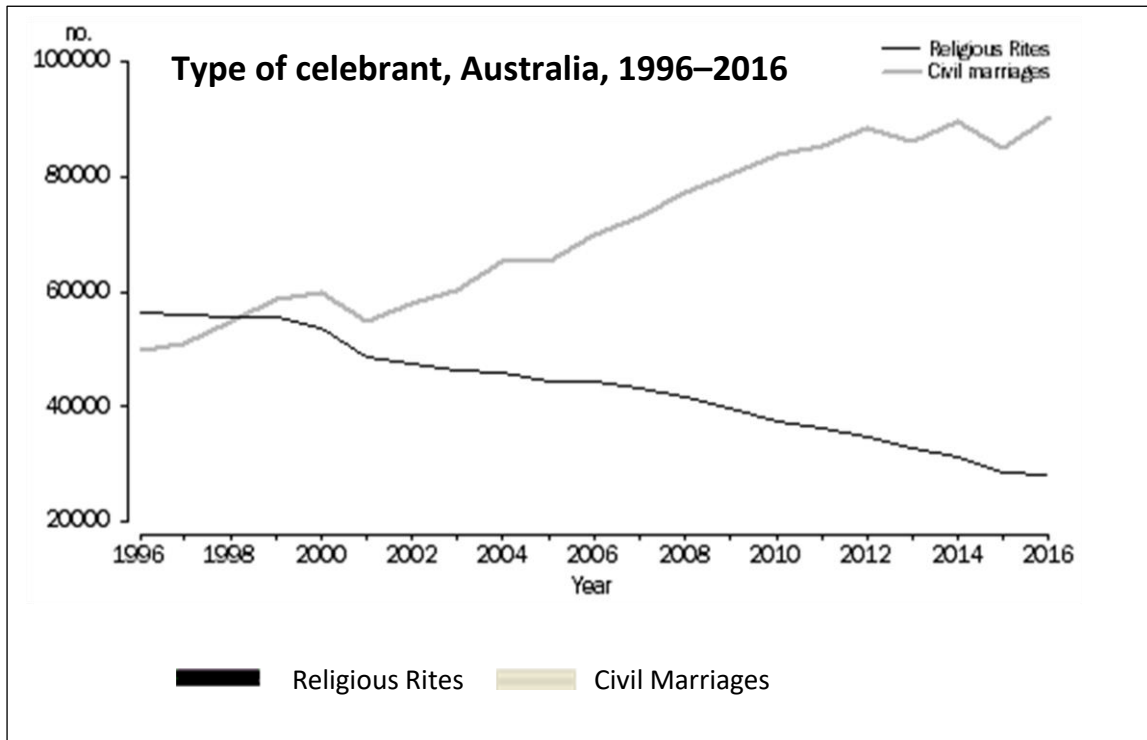
**Table 2.1. Selected marriage indicators, Australia 1996, 2006, 2016 <sup>92</sup>**

Indicator	1996	2006	2016
<i>Marriages registered</i>	106,100	114,222	118,401
<i>Crude marriage rate</i>	5.8	5.5	4.9
<i>Marriages performed by Civil celebrants</i>			
Number	49,641	70,105	90,458
Proportion %	46.8	61.4	76.4
<i>Marriages performed by Ministers of Religion</i>			
Number	56,462	44,117	27,901
Proportion %	53.2	38.6	23.6
<i>Marriages performed by Ministers of Religion (other than Catholic)</i>			
Number	37307	29603	19307
Proportion %	35.2	25.9	16.3
<i>Catholic rites</i>			
Number	19,155	14,514	8,594
Proportion %	18.1	12.7	7.3

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<sup>92</sup> Table developed from Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Marriages performed by various Ministers of Religion are not readily identifiable in ABS releases after 2016.

The increase in civil marriage rites and concomitant decline in religious marriage rites is shown clearly in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1 Increase in civil marriages and decline in religious marriage rites 1996-2016<sup>93</sup>**

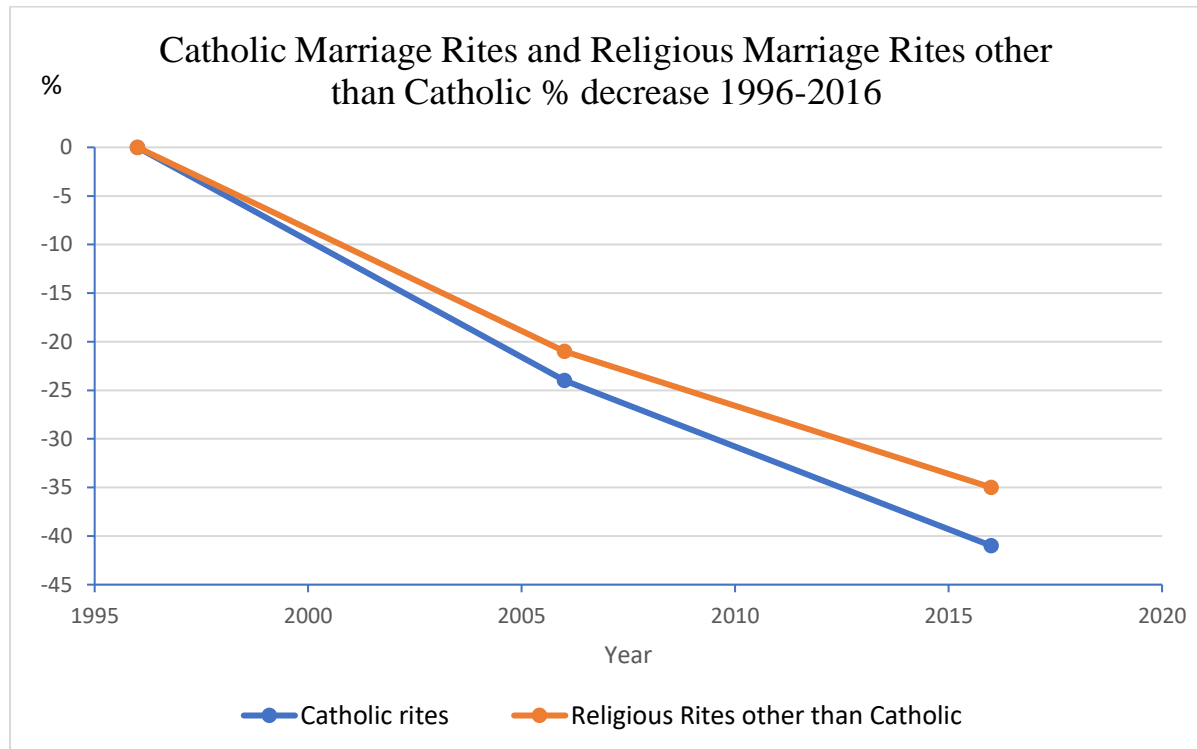
Further analysis of the Australian data reveals the magnitude of the decline in Catholic marriage. Table 2.1 shows that while the total number of marriages registered increased from 1996 to 2016 (the most recent available data), the number of marriages celebrated with Catholic rites declined steadily. These data also indicate that, while the number of marriages performed by ministers of religion (other than Catholic) declined dramatically between 1996 and 2016 (a 48.2% decline), the number of Catholic marriages declined even more dramatically (a 55.1% decline). The statistics reveal a decline in marriages celebrated with Catholic rites from 19,155 (1996) to 8594 (2016); that is a 55.1% decline, over the 20-year period. Catholics made up

<sup>93</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2016* (2017), [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3310.0Main%20Features112016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2016&num=&view=.](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3310.0Main%20Features112016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3310.0&issue=2016&num=&view=)



22.6% of the total Australian population in 2016, a decrease from 27.0% of the population in 1996,<sup>94</sup> yet Catholic rites made up just 7.3% of the marriages registered during that year.

Figure 2.2 reveals that the decline in participation in Catholic marriage rites is occurring more rapidly than the decline in participation in other religious marriage rites.



**Figure 2.2. Decline in Catholic marriage rites and religious rites other than Catholic 1996-2016<sup>95</sup>**

Further analysis of Figure 2.2 reveals that, while the rate of decline in Catholic rites slowed in the period 2006-2016, that declining trend has continued. Australian Bishop Anthony Fisher has courageously drawn attention to the magnitude of the problem: “When Catholics talk about ‘the vocations crisis’ they are usually bemoaning the numbers who have left the priesthood and religious life and the shortage of newcomers thereto. Yet the more

<sup>94</sup> National Centre for Pastoral Research, *Pastoral Research Online* (2019), <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Pastoral-Research-Online-Edition-44-April-2019.pdf#page=2>.

<sup>95</sup> Graph based on ABS data.

serious vocations crisis is in marriage. Far fewer people get married at all today and, of those who do, a far smaller proportion stay married than stay priests or religious.”<sup>96</sup>

These data point to a malaise with respect to sacramental marriage. To determine whether this malaise is restricted to marriage, or is more widespread, rates of participation in other sacraments need to be considered.

Participation in Christian liturgy is foundational to the formation of Christian identity. Sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet explains that, just as human language and culture shape human identity, Christian language and culture shape Christian identity.<sup>97</sup> Since they may be regularly repeated, the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist are particularly formative of Christian identity. Any decline in the participation rates in these sacraments is likely to have a negative impact upon participation in Christian marriage.

A 2019 report on Mass attendance indicates that the rate of regular Mass attendance in Australia is low and is declining. The number of people at Mass on a typical weekend in 2016 was about 623,000, or 11.8 per cent of the Catholic population. This represented a decline of 5.9 per cent, or around 39,000 people, from the 2011 count.<sup>98</sup> The decline in weekly Mass attendance in Australia echoes the situation in Europe and illustrates what Lieven Boeve terms the post-Christian nature of our broader cultural context.<sup>99</sup> Commenting on a similar decline in the USA Kevin Irwin notes that “for very many the regular celebration of Sunday liturgy has become an occasional religious service, the exact opposite of what liturgy should be.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Anthony Fisher, "The Gift and Graces of Marriage" (Faith in Marriage Conference, Parramatta, 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995), 45.

<sup>98</sup> National Centre for Pastoral Research, *Pastoral Research Online* More recent statistics are not yet available.

<sup>99</sup> Boeve, "Symbols of who we are Called to Become," 150.

<sup>100</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, xxx.

Regular celebration of the Sunday liturgy is crucial for the development of a rich sense of participation in the life of a faith community and this participation is largely what fosters Christian identity (cf. SC 14). Declining rates of participation in sacraments are of concern because the survival of liturgy and sacraments underpins the survival of the Church.

### **2.2.1 Causes of the Sacramental Malaise: Christ and the Church as Sacraments**

The statistics presented above provide clear support for Marc Ouellet's claim that "deep down, it is not marriage that is the problem; it is the whole sacramental system, which appears today to have lost any meaningful context."<sup>101</sup> Ouellet is commenting on the post-Vatican II theological context with its emphasis upon Christ and the Church as sacraments, a sacramental theology which he criticises as unclear regarding the relationship between Christ, the Church, and the sacraments since it has not delineated clearly the "part played by Christ and the Church in the sacramental action, and marriage in particular."<sup>102</sup> Irwin too expresses disquiet about possible negative consequences of this emphasis upon Christ and the Church as sacraments.<sup>103</sup>

Understandings of the Church as sacrament<sup>104</sup> developed in the work of Henri de Lubac,<sup>105</sup> Otto Semmelroth, Edward Schillebeekx, and Karl Rahner; theologians who were

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<sup>101</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 210.

<sup>102</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 210.

<sup>103</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "A Sacramental World - Sacramentality as the Primary Language for Sacraments," *Worship* 76, no. 3 (2002): 200-02.

<sup>104</sup> While Christ and the Church as sacraments are related, theological concentration has been upon the church as sacrament. For example, Rahner devotes one paragraph of his book to Christ as sacrament, the remainder is devoted to his attempt to show that "the church is truly the fundamental sacrament, the well-spring of the sacraments in the strictest sense." Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1974), 17.

<sup>105</sup> Reflecting more than twenty years after the council, Joseph Ratzinger, who attended all four sessions asserted that the Second Vatican Council "in all its comments about the Church, was moving precisely in the direction of de Lubac's thought." Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius 1987), 50.

influential both before and during the council. Vatican II scholar, Ormond Rush, records that the bishops accepted the notion of the Church as sacrament enthusiastically applying it in several overlapping senses: “the church is a sacrament of Christ; it is a sacrament of union with God; it is a sacrament of unity among human beings; it is a universal sacrament of salvation for the world.”<sup>106</sup> There is no explicit link here between the seven ritual sacraments and the Church as sacrament (except as an external sign instituted by God to give grace).

Irwin suggests that understandings of the Church as sacrament implicitly capitalized on “conventional theological language about privileged signs and symbols of God’s action among us in our world and in our human lives.”<sup>107</sup> The extent to which this image has contributed to a renewal and reinvigoration of the sacramental lives of the faithful is the key issue. The intention was noble. As Walter Kasper clarifies, the intentions of the council in giving prominence to the model of Church as sacrament, the key word is “in”: “the Church is *in* Christ like a sacrament.” The implication is that “the Church has no independent sacramental significance besides Christ, but only ‘in Christ’, for Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and human beings (1Tim. 2.5).”<sup>108</sup> The Church is a sacramental sign when it points to Jesus Christ and his cross; it has no independent sacramental significance.<sup>109</sup> In Kasper’s analysis the model of Church as sacrament was utilised by the council, not to encourage, but rather to overcome, ecclesiological triumphalism, clericalism and juridicism. When properly

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<sup>106</sup> Ormond Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2019), 95.

<sup>107</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 201.

<sup>108</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2015), 79.

<sup>109</sup> Rush’s study supports Kasper’s interpretation: “The sign cannot be an effective instrument if it does not authentically point to the one whom it is meant to signify.” Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 224.

understood and carefully presented the image of Church as sacrament does not divinize the Church but places it in the proper relationship with Christ.

Sacrament as image for the Church is but one of many images used in the documents of Vatican II. The image of the Church as “the People of God” (LG 9),<sup>110</sup> has entered the popular imagination in a way that the Church as sacrament has not. The “People of God” image highlights the humanity of the Church and its development within human history. It is an inclusive image emphasising the equality of all the baptised and their call to embrace their roles as priest, prophet, and king. It does not distinguish between clergy and laity: all are part of the people of God. Unlike the image of the Church as sacrament, the image of Church as the people of God has gained widespread acceptance: it has “spread with the speed of the wind and today is equally at home in the vocabularies of bishops, parish councils, professors and ordinary believers.”<sup>111</sup> Ratzinger expresses concern about the different fates of the two images, since the council “intended the two expressions to be mutually complementary; only against the background provided by the concept ‘sacrament’ can the concept ‘people of God’ become meaningful.”<sup>112</sup>

Sacraments are fundamental to unifying the faithful as the People of God: “the life of Christ is poured into believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified” (LG 7). Through the sacrament of matrimony,

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<sup>110</sup> "Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 1964, accessed 2 June, 2022, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), (hereafter LG), article 9.

<sup>111</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 45.

<sup>112</sup> Ratzinger shows that the notion of Church as sacrament is fundamental to Christians becoming the people of God. He draws upon historical criticism to show that the people of Israel were referred to as the “people of God” only in the moments when they were addressed by God and responded to his call. This is even more true in the New Testament and today. The communion of people is God’s initiative and God’s gift: “this nonpeople can become a people only through him who unites them from above and within: through communion with Christ. Without this christological mediation it would be presumptuous, if not actually blasphemous, for the Church to designate herself the ‘people of God.’” Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 45-55.

Christian spouses have their own special place among the people of God. Through the birth of children, they perpetuate the people of God in history. More radically they are called to signify in their married life “the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church” (LG 11). A sacramental malaise makes it more difficult for the faithful to become the People of God.

Formed by the sacramental liturgies, and the related exercise of the virtues, to become the people of God, the Church also becomes more clearly the sacrament of Christ; that is, an efficacious sign of grace. When the Church acts as the people of God “it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise” (LG 12). A decline in the celebration of sacraments limits the Church’s ability to become the people of God.

However, of the many images of the church presented in the documents of Vatican II it was the image of the Church as sacrament which became highly attractive to Roman Catholic theologians. Avery Dulles acknowledges the popularity of this image with theologians, and attributes that popularity to its ability to integrate diverse aspects of theology; it integrates the Church as institution and the Church as communion of grace, and it can help unite Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramentology.<sup>113</sup>

While emphasis upon the Church as sacrament has been prevalent in the work of theologians since Vatican II, questions have been raised about the extent to which this understanding has penetrated the wider Catholic sacramental imagination. The notion of the Church as sacrament is specialised and not easily converted into preaching. Dulles’ appraisal

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<sup>113</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 68.

that the metaphor of Church as sacrament “may not be the kind of image that can easily be popularized in our time,” may well be correct.<sup>114</sup>

Acceptance of the concept by the faithful is vital because the extent to which this thinking animates the lives of individuals and communities is the ultimate test of its effectiveness. While acknowledging all the good in the texts of Vatican II, Ratzinger insisted that the ultimate value of the Council “depends on those who will transform its words into the life of the Church.”<sup>115</sup> In relation to the notion of the Church as sacrament, Ratzinger asserted: “it becomes clear how far the Council is still ahead of us: *the idea of the Church as sacrament has hardly entered people’s awareness.*”<sup>116</sup>

Kasper arrives at a similar conclusion to those of Dulles and Ratzinger. For Kasper, despite the validity and richness of the model of the Church as sacrament, the theological complexity of the concept makes it difficult to communicate to the faithful. Kasper concludes that the description of the Church as sacrament “is still quite alien for the average Catholic perception of the Church and has remained the language only of academic theologians.”<sup>117</sup>

Failure of the idea of the Church as sacrament to enter popular awareness may be the result of a failure of catechesis, the complexity of the concept, or it may indicate a reluctance to accept the notion. Sacramental theologian Edward Kilmartin argues for the latter: many Christians find difficulty with the concept that “sacraments are really acts of the sinfully disposed Church.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 5.

<sup>115</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 378.

<sup>116</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell and Dame Frideswide Sandeman (Slough: St. Paul, 1988), 19. Emphasis added.

<sup>117</sup> Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, 78-79.

<sup>118</sup> Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice*, 206.

Awareness of the reality of a “sinfully disposed Church” has been highlighted by the essential work of the four-year Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which has compiled and analysed data on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church (and other institutions) for public consideration. In its final report in December 2017, the Commission reported that it had heard from 2,489 survivors about child sexual abuse in 964 different Catholic institutions, representing almost two-thirds (61.8 per cent) of survivors who reported child sexual abuse in religious institutions. The Commission’s investigation revealed numerous cases where senior officials of Catholic Church authorities knew about allegations of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions but failed to take effective action. The Commission concluded that “there were catastrophic failures of leadership of Australian Catholic Church authorities over many decades, particularly before the 1990s.”<sup>119</sup>

Decisive remedial action in relation to addressing clericalism and the sexual abuse crisis has been slow. Cardinal Seán O’Malley, archbishop of Boston and president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, stated in 2018 that failure to take rapid and effective action to address clerical sexual abuse will further threaten and endanger the already weakened moral authority of the Church and could destroy the trust required for the Church to minister to Catholics and to have a meaningful role in the wider civil society.<sup>120</sup> The weakened moral authority of the Church, undermines the credibility of conceiving of the Church as sacrament and makes all aspects of ministry to Catholics, including sacramental ministry, more difficult.

The Second Vatican Council’s endorsement of the analogy of the Church as sacrament ensured that this image became highly attractive to Roman Catholic theologians. Theological

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<sup>119</sup> *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, (2017), <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/religious-institutions>.

<sup>120</sup> Seán P. O’Malley, Statement of Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley (2018), <https://www.bostoncatholic.org/press-release/2018/07/july-24-2018-statement-cardinal-sean-p-omalley-ofm-cap>.



consideration of Christ and the Church as sacraments may have contributed to a broadening of the concept beyond the traditional seven sacraments of the Church. There has however been little preaching and catechesis on the topic,<sup>121</sup> and this, in combination with the highly publicised faults of the Church, has meant that understanding the Church as sacrament has largely not entered the Catholic corporate imagination and therefore is unlikely to have made a significant contribution to a decline in sacramental celebrations.<sup>122</sup>

### 2.2.2 A Decline in the Importance of Creation

Expanding understandings of ‘sacrament’ in magisterial documents and in theological discourse may have led some theologians to propose problematically that the primordial or foundational sacrament may be understood, not as Christ, nor the Church, but as the created world: “the original, visible sign of God’s grace is the world he entrusts to our care.”<sup>123</sup> For Theodore Runyon, God’s good creation is understood as the original sacrament in the sense that it is the first revelation of the goodness of God, the first sign mediating God’s love to human beings.<sup>124</sup>

Clarification of terminology is essential here because understanding creation as sacrament can be problematic. As outlined above, the faithful have been reluctant to accept the

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<sup>121</sup> Lizette Larson-Miller notes that a “lack of catechesis on sacramental theology” continues to be an issue for the Christian churches. Lizette Larson-Miller, “Reality of Presence in Virtually Mediated Sacramentality: Has Sacramental Theology Sustained Us?,” *Anglican Theological Review* 104, no. 1 (2022): 37.

<sup>122</sup> However, it may represent a missed opportunity to mine a rich concept and advance the understanding of the faithful beyond the most elementary of levels.

<sup>123</sup> Theodore Runyon, “The World as the Original Sacrament,” *Worship* 54, no. 6 (1980): 501. See also Sharon Delgado, *Love in a Time of Climate Change: Honoring Creation, Establishing Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Dorothy McDougall, “The Cosmos as Primary Sacrament: An Ecological Perspective for Sacramental Theology,” *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 81, no. 3-4 (2000).

<sup>124</sup> Pope Francis presents an understanding of the world as sacrament: “As Christians we are also called ‘to accept the world as a sacrament of communion ... the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet’” (LS 9 quoting Patriarch Bartholomew). Pope Francis may be using the term “sacrament” metaphorically rather than literally here. Later in LS he writes of the ritual Sacraments: “The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life” (LS 235).

notion of the Church as sacrament. Irwin has questioned the ease with which the hermeneutical and rhetorical assertions that Jesus and the church are sacraments have entered the theological mainstream following Vatican II.<sup>125</sup> He implies that further investigation of these concepts is needed. The proposal that creation be considered as a sacrament would also benefit from a similar level of theological investigation. It is preferable (as Irwin does) to distinguish sacramentality from sacraments. Sacramentality is the encompassing principle that provides the foundation for sacraments. Sacramentality, the principle that “God is disclosed and discovered here and now on earth and in human life,” is the ground on which sacraments per se are based.<sup>126</sup>

Irwin notes that the church’s magisterium, including the teaching of the Councils of Trent and Vatican II, has never given a definitive, binding definition of the term sacrament.<sup>127</sup> However, CCL1983 does provide a minimalist, legal definition.<sup>128</sup> The *Catechism* also provides an authoritative definition which gives due emphasis to the dispositions of the celebrating faithful.<sup>129</sup> Irwin provides an introductory definition which encompasses and expands upon key aspects of these statements:

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<sup>125</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 202.

<sup>126</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 201.

<sup>127</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 10.

<sup>128</sup> “The sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church. As actions of Christ and the Church, they are signs and means which express and strengthen the faith, render worship to God, and effect the sanctification of humanity and thus contribute in the greatest way to establish, strengthen, and manifest ecclesiastical communion. Accordingly, in the celebration of the sacraments the sacred ministers and the other members of the Christian faithful must use the greatest veneration and necessary diligence.” (c. 840).

<sup>129</sup> “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (CCC 1131). “Receive” is an unfortunate choice here for it emphasises passivity rather than the active participation of the faithful.

Sacraments are visible signs and effective means chosen by Christ and celebrated ritually in the community of the church to draw the church into an experience of Christ's paschal mystery by means of liturgical actions enacted through the power of the Holy Spirit with the active participation of the gathered assembly of faithful believers presided over by the church's ordained ministers using the sacred word of the Bible, rites, and actions accompanied by prayer texts that describe the saving act of God that is occurring through them.<sup>130</sup>

Sacraments are inseparable from their liturgical celebration and consequently Irwin's definition gives due emphasis to the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical action.<sup>131</sup>

The centrality of the community of the church, and liturgical actions including the proclamation of scripture readings, indicate that creation does not fit the definition of sacraments of the New Testament. It is preferable to speak of the sacramentality of creation rather than creation as sacrament and to emphasise, as Irwin does, the link between Christ and the sacraments, and to link theologies of the incarnation and of sacraments.<sup>132</sup> A positive theology of creation, with the incarnation and the principle of mediation,<sup>133</sup> undergirds the principle of sacramentality which, in turn, undergirds the celebration of sacraments.

Runyon does argue persuasively that the church has allowed the occlusion of the sacramentality of creation. Consequently, the church has settled for a limited and partial view

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<sup>130</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 10-11.

<sup>131</sup> Irwin's definition illustrates the complexity of the task. OCM2015-Aus, in accord with canon 1112, provides an option for the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony that is not presided over by the church's ordained minister. See *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the Presence of an Assisting Layperson* (OCM2015-Aus 118).

<sup>132</sup> Creation and the incarnation are related. Both are acts of God's loving self-communication, as are sacraments, which are elements of God's loving self-communication in new creation in Christ. The fundamental Christian understanding of the world and of its relation to God "is not to be found in the doctrine of creation, fundamentally important as this is. It is based on the history of salvation, which shows that the absolute, infinite and holy God wills in the freedom of his love, to communicate himself by grace ad extra to what is not divine." Karl Rahner, "Incarnation," ed. Karl Rahner, *Sacramentum Mundi* Online (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), [https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/search?s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.book.sacramentum-mundi&search-go=&s.q=Incarnation](https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/search?s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.sacramentum-mundi&search-go=&s.q=Incarnation).

<sup>133</sup> The experience of the divine in the sacramental liturgies is always mediated or revealed through the gifts of creation or the related work of human hands: "the sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life" (LS 235).

of sacraments, the church, and the Christian life. Church, sacraments, and the Christian life find their full meaning in the context of the world, particularly the transformation of the world in accordance with God's original plan.<sup>134</sup> That transformation will attain its full perfection only in the eschaton when "the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ" (LG 48). *Lumen Gentium* presents the eschaton not as the apocalyptic end of the world, but as a goal for the world. All humans are called to contribute to the achievement of this goal. In Runyon's view, in neglecting the world as sacrament, a world where humans are called to care for the world, to transform the world according to the Creator's original plan, the Church diluted the transforming power of Christ's kingdom by equating the kingdom with "an etherealized, neo-platonic heaven. This metaphysical version of the kingdom could exist as an alternative to this world without having any impact on the structures of this world."<sup>135</sup> Neglect of the sacramentality of creation may have contributed to a polarization of the sacred and the profane.

Elizabeth Johnson gave a fillip to critiques of neglect of the sacramentality of creation in her presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1996. She identified "the world as God's good creation" as a theme which was largely absent from contemporary theological endeavour.<sup>136</sup> Johnson urged theologians to turn to the heavens and the earth, a perspective to which she attached the same significance as the modern "turn to the subject," and the postmodern "linguistic turn." Failure to address the world as God's good creation, she argued, compromises the integrity of theology in two ways. Firstly, it represents a failure to

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<sup>134</sup> Recent magisterial documents redress this criticism: LS is a paean to the sacramentality of creation.

<sup>135</sup> Runyon, "The World as the Original Sacrament," 503.

<sup>136</sup> Elizabeth A Johnson, "Turn to the Heavens and the Earth: Retrieval of the Cosmos in Theology" (paper presented at the Catholic Theological Society of America, 1996).

examine the whole of reality in the light of faith. Secondly, it limits theology's potential contribution to religious praxis in a time of unprecedented ecological crisis.<sup>137</sup>

In Johnson's judgement creation has been marginalised in Christian life because, particularly since the Reformation, theologians have neglected the natural world. Johnson is referring to Western Christian theology. According to Eastern Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, for whom the created world is sacramental, neglect of the natural world has a much longer history in Western theology. For Schmemmann, in the Western mindset sacraments were set up in opposition to the world, and the theological preoccupation was with formal issues like the number of sacraments, their validity, and their institution. The West overlooked the rich "wood" linking sacraments to the natural world because of its focus on the "trees" of these formal issues.<sup>138</sup>

In her CTSA address, Johnson acknowledged that some theologians including Kevin Irwin, and Australians Tony Kelly, and Denis Edwards, had made a "turn to the heavens and the earth," and encouraged greater utilisation of the new framework it provided to address fundamental theological issues.<sup>139</sup> Johnson has made this turn central to her own work.<sup>140</sup> She has traced the decline of emphasis upon creation in the Christian tradition (with an attendant decline in emphasis upon the principle of sacramentality), demonstrating that for the first

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<sup>137</sup> Johnson, "Turn to the Heavens and the Earth," 1.

<sup>138</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The World as Sacrament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 23.

<sup>139</sup> Liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh might well be added to Johnson's list. For Kavanagh "cosmology is the foundation on which ecclesiology rests." The natural world is not a given but is rather an "artifact of divine and human intelligence; something shot through with intelligibility in each and all its parts, an intelligibility which goes beyond what can be known in laboratory and study by human minds alone." See Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 23-24.

<sup>140</sup> See Elizabeth A Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

fifteen hundred years of Christianity, creation (the natural world) as the bearer of God's presence was a serious subject of theology and preaching.<sup>141</sup>

Historical factors were operative in the decline in emphasis upon creation.<sup>142</sup> The Reformation and Enlightenment periods saw Catholic theology ignore the natural world largely for political reasons: "under pressure of repeated ecclesiastical censure, Galileo's not being the only case, Catholic theologians for the most part began to ignore the questions arising from a heliocentric and then evolutionary worldview. Theology became estranged from ongoing discoveries about the universe in the secular, and thus freer, disciplines."<sup>143</sup>

Eclipse of creation as a central theme of Western Christian theology led to a diminution in our sense of the material world as God's dwelling place, of the cosmos as revelatory of the gracious presence of God. These senses are basic to the principle of sacramentality: "the developed tradition of sacramental theology teaches that simple material things such as bread and wine, water, oil, the sexual union of marriage, when blessed by the ritual action and prayer of the church, can be bearers of divine grace. This is so, it now becomes clear, *because to begin with the whole physical world itself is a primordial sacrament*".<sup>144</sup>

For Johnson loss of the created world as a central religious idea produced an imbalance in emphasis upon the God of redemption (compared with the same God of creation) which led people of faith and their churches to a preoccupation with other-worldly concerns. A fuller Trinitarian understanding of the living God in creation is essential to allow love for God and

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<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth A Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 5-8.

<sup>142</sup> For David Brown, a preoccupation with power was involved. The Catholic Church sought to maintain complete control over sacramentality while, for the reformers, acceptance of the sacramentality of the universe would undermine the exclusive place of the Bible. David Brown, *God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation," 8.

<sup>144</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 150-51. Emphasis added.

neighbour to grow and to show in action in the real world.<sup>145</sup> The principle of sacramentality is grounded in action in the real world: “Sacramentality presumes engagement in the world and the use of the things on this earth; and this engagement in and through the sacred liturgy leads us to experience that which transcends this world, the transcendent yet immanent triune God.”<sup>146</sup> Neglect of a fuller Trinitarian understanding of the living God in creation parallels a decline in emphasis upon the principle of sacramentality.

Johnson is also concerned that an under-emphasis upon creation in Western Christian theology has contributed to humans ignoring the ecological crisis. Widespread acceptance of the scale of that crisis has prompted a rethinking. She writes: “The quest to find creation, this generation’s great intellectual religious adventure, is a matter of life or death.”<sup>147</sup> Under-emphasis upon creation in the Christian story may also have led to an erosion of the understanding and power of the principle of sacramentality, and thus may have contributed to the sacramental crisis.

Irwin takes up these issues with a more emphatic liturgical focus. He is also concerned about a possible over-emphasis upon the God of redemption in the liturgy. He argues that Catholic liturgical theology can make an important contribution to the recovery of the principle of sacramentality by ensuring that proper weight is given to the liturgical images of God as both creator and redeemer. These images are intrinsically related: “the creator God redeems and God’s redemption extends to all creation. The celebration of liturgy is thus based on the sacramental principle that the God of creation and redemption is operative in all our lives”.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Elizabeth A Johnson, "Is God's Charity Broad Enough for Bears?," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2015): 292.

<sup>146</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 215.

<sup>147</sup> Johnson, "Christianity and Ecology," 18.

<sup>148</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 209.

When gifts from creation are celebrated in sacraments, prayers are usually proclaimed “which name God as creator and redeemer and articulate how this gift from God is understood to reflect God’s creative and redemptive work on our behalf.”<sup>149</sup>

For Irwin “the liturgy manifests and always embodies the sacramentality of all of creation.”<sup>150</sup> In the liturgy, gifts from creation including water, bread, wine, and oil, but also the gifts of speech and gesture that build communication and communion, mediate God’s presence and love. A very positive theology of creation undergirds the principle of sacramentality. There is persuasive evidence that the last five hundred years of Christian theology and Christian liturgy have not successfully maintained a rich balance between theologies of creation and theologies of redemption. Creation as God’s first gift was, to some extent, eclipsed from the Christian worldview by an overwhelming emphasis upon salvation.<sup>151</sup> It seems probable that failure to develop rich and contextually appropriate theologies of creation may have undermined the operation of the principle of sacramentality to a far greater extent than emphases upon Christ and the Church as sacraments.

### **2.2.3 Insufficient Emphasis Upon the Importance of Theological Recontextualization**

The centrality of the principle of sacramentality to Catholic Christianity reveals the fundamental importance of recontextualization. The principle holds that all reality is potentially revelatory of God. When human understanding of reality changes, as our understanding of the natural world has through discoveries in the natural and physical sciences, that changed understanding must be examined in detail to explicate what it reveals of God. Recontextualization brings into dialogue the lived experience of individuals (the contemporary

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<sup>149</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "Sacramentality and the Theology of Creation: A Recovered Paradigm for Sacramental Theology," *Louvain Studies* 23 (1998): 164.

<sup>150</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 134.

<sup>151</sup> The emphasis given to creation in OCM-2015Aus is examined in Chapter Six.



person's understanding of self and world) and theology as a framework within which that lived experience may be understood.

It is not only changed understandings of the natural world that demand examination. Advances in social psychology and sociology, together with the events of history, have produced changed understandings of our self and our world, of culture. As Stephen Bevans explains: "Culture, human experience and history, if we are to be true to a real dynamic in Christianity's self-understanding, must be 'unpacked' of its sacredness."<sup>152</sup> According to the principle of sacramentality, all reality, including the natural world, but also culture, human experience, and the events of history, is sacramental, as it is potentially revelatory. All of these elements constitute a changing cultural context, and the received tradition may be illuminated again in relation to them.

Pope John Paul II questioned the adequacy of contemporary recontextualization. Noting that medieval theologians sought to understand the hylomorphism of Aristotelian natural philosophy and to test its value in illuminating the nature of the sacraments, he encouraged this kind of recontextualization to continue, not just in relation to contemporary philosophy but to all areas of human knowing, including science: "theologians might well ask, with respect to contemporary science, philosophy and the other areas of human knowing, if they have accomplished this extraordinarily difficult process as well as did these medieval masters."<sup>153</sup>

The previous section reviewed possible dysfunctional effects of inadequate attempts to relate the received tradition to a dramatically changed understanding of the natural world

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<sup>152</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 13.

<sup>153</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Reverend George V. Coyne S.J. Director of the Vatican Observatory* (1988), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19880601\\_padre-coyne.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19880601_padre-coyne.html).

derived from new discoveries in the physical and natural sciences. The sciences have a pervasive influence upon contemporary culture, yet for five hundred years of Christian history theologians were reluctant to give serious attention to the insights provided by their discoveries.<sup>154</sup>

Christian faith always exists in a particular cultural context. In Boeve's analysis, sacramental theology has not adapted to our current changed context; it has not been adequately recontextualized: "often when contextual sensibilities shift, the dominant form of tradition loses plausibility, bringing forth experiences of alienation. It is only by seeking a new relation between the received tradition and the changed context – resulting in a new form of tradition – that lost authenticity can be regained."<sup>155</sup>

Boeve's assessment of the existential threat to liturgy and sacraments, and indeed to Catholic Christianity, is similar to that perceived by Irwin. Boeve embraces the necessity for a contemporary rethinking: "the gap between classical sacramental theology and contemporary culture puts the very plausibility and relevance of the sacraments, and of Christian existence as a whole, under pressure."<sup>156</sup> Development of sacramental theologies which are faithful to both the tradition and to the contemporary cultural context is challenging as it requires a thorough understanding of both the tradition and the contemporary cultural context. In Boeve's judgment, failure to recontextualize adequately is a major aspect of the current sacramental

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<sup>154</sup> Consequently, young people perceive the church to be anti-science. Synod of Bishops, "*Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*" *Pre-Synodal Meeting Final Document* (2018), <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/final-document-from-the-pre-synodal-meeting.html>, paragraph 11.

<sup>155</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Thinking Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context: A Playground for Theological Renewal," in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Lambert Leijssen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 4.

<sup>156</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Theology in a Postmodern Context and the Hermeneutical Project of Louis-Marie Chauvet," in *Sacraments: Revelation of the Humanity of God: Engaging the Fundamental Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce T. Morill (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008), 14.

malaise. It is a goal of this thesis to contribute to the recontextualization of sacramental marriage.<sup>157</sup>

### 2.3 The Principle of Sacramentality

Irwin has argued consistently that a retrieval of the principle of sacramentality can provide a meaningful context for the survival of sacraments: “Liturgy and sacraments presume a sacramental worldview. Yet I would argue that sacramentality is in need of retrieval for the very survival not only of liturgy and sacraments but for Catholic Christianity itself.”<sup>158</sup> Irwin’s proposition is that one of the fundamental languages of liturgy is the sacramental world in which we live: “‘sacramentality’ comes first; rituals of liturgy and sacraments derive from it. Then they return us to this graced world. The celebrations of liturgy and sacraments are integral to and integrating of the Christian life lived in a sacramental world.”<sup>159</sup>

Irwin cites this definition of the principle of sacramentality from Richard McBrien:

all reality, both animate and inanimate, is potentially or in fact the bearer of God’s presence and the instrument of God’s saving activity on humanity’s behalf. This principle is rooted in the nature of sacrament as such, i.e., a visible sign of the invisible presence and activity of God. Together with the principles of mediation (God works through secondary agents to achieve divine ends) and communion (the end of all of God’s activity is the union of humanity), the principle of sacramentality constitutes one of the central theological characteristics of Catholicism.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> See particularly Chapter Five below.

<sup>158</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 197. See also: Kevin W. Irwin, "Liturgical Method: Issues for the Third Millennium," *Theology Digest* 44, no. 1 (1997); Kevin W. Irwin, "Liturgical Actio: Sacramentality, Eschatology and Ecology," in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context* ed. Lieven Boeve and Lambert Leijssen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001); Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*; Irwin, *The Sacraments*; Irwin, *Context and Text*.

<sup>159</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 200.

<sup>160</sup> Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 1148.

A corollary of the principle of sacramentality highlights human persons, the pinnacle of animate matter, as bearers of God's presence. We express our discipleship most fully in our actions, not purely in our beliefs. Actions here include active participation in the liturgy, and actions to implement the ethical implications of liturgy. Religious, moral, and social life are inseparable. As *Gaudium et Spes* teaches: "Though made of body and soul, man is one ... the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body" (GS 14). All of God's good creation is potentially the bearer of God's presence and an instrument of God's saving activity. Humans, created in the image and likeness of God, have boundless potential to bear God's presence and to act as instruments of God's saving activity.

The principle of sacramentality underpins every act of liturgy and assists the study of liturgy as it integrates "a number of interrelated factors and concepts, including (but not limited to) a theology of creation, the incarnation, and the principle of mediation, into our understanding of the liturgy."<sup>161</sup> The principle of sacramentality, by showing the interrelationship between fundamental elements of liturgy, can contribute to a clearer understanding of what liturgy is and does, and can make a positive contribution to helping liturgy and sacraments to thrive in our postmodern world.

Sacramentality is an all-encompassing concept; all reality has the potential to bear God's presence. Sacramentality is intimately related to creation. Herbert Vorgrimler links the sacramental principle to the creation of human beings in the image of God. Humans are created to mediate God's presence on earth, making it possible to "encounter God in encountering other human beings, to love God in loving other humans, and to honor God in honoring other human persons."<sup>162</sup> Thus the sacramental principle is "the real, and not only the imaginary or the

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<sup>161</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 125.

<sup>162</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. Linda M Maloney, third ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 13.

intellectual, making present of the one who and of himself cannot be visible in our human dimension.”<sup>163</sup> In the Judaeo-Christian tradition God also makes Godself present in history. In the Old Testament, God is present in the Passover of the Jewish people from their slavery in Egypt. God calls Israel to justice, liberation, and growth, teaching them what these principles mean through particular interactions with them during their forty years of wandering in the desert from slavery to the Promised Land. Through these interactions they become the people of God, a people who hear God’s word and do God’s will.

Vorgrimler makes a constructive distinction between sacramentality and sacraments. Since, according to the principle of sacramentality, all reality is potentially the bearer of God’s presence, experiences of the presence of God are open to any individual at all times. These experiences involve an individual’s response to a recognition of God’s presence and tend to have only individual validity.<sup>164</sup> Sacramentality means that the experience of God is open to all persons at all times. While sacramentality is pervasive, sacrament refers to a discrete event, recognised within a faith tradition, where there is a high potential to experience the presence of God. Sacraments have communal as well as individual validity. They always occur within the community of faith and have effects upon both that community and the individuals within it. One can detect the influence of Vorgrimler’s colleague Karl Rahner here.

### **2.3.1 The Principle of Sacramentality: Chauvet’s Contribution**

Louis-Marie Chauvet presents a sacramental worldview: “The ‘profane’ (that is, the natural) state of the world and of history is thus recognized as the possible sacramental place of a sacred history.”<sup>165</sup> This statement emphasises the world (including the natural world and

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<sup>163</sup> Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 13.

<sup>164</sup> Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 554.

human history) as the only possible location of an individual's awareness of the action of God, and a subsequent individual human response to that awareness.

Chauvet's sacramental-liturgical theology has much to offer in the quest for the recovery of a sacramental worldview. For Chauvet sacraments are inseparable from scripture and ethics and all three are held together, and situated in proper interrelationship, in the symbolic order of the Church's liturgy. It is the use of the fruits of the earth in the liturgy that reveals to us the sacred nature of the natural world. Sacraments "reveal to us the 'sacramentality' of the world as creation ... Sacraments are the great symbolic places which attest that the recognition of the grace of creation and the exigency of the counter-gift are inseparable."<sup>166</sup> It is possible to discern the grace of creation without sacraments, however sacraments confirm that grace and join it to the appropriate human response, the return-gift of working ethically to ensure that there is a place for all in our common home. Chauvet's project has been evaluated by Boeve as one of the better illustrations of contemporary sacramental recontextualization.<sup>167</sup>

### **2.3.2 The Principle of Sacramentality: Other Contemporary Contributions**

Bernard Cooke develops an understanding of sacramentality which encompasses more than the seven ritual sacraments. For Cooke, the teaching of Vatican II that the church is the fundamental sacrament means that all of the baptised "in the entirety of their lives and activity" are the fundamental sacrament.<sup>168</sup> Within the entirety of human life, it is especially the experience of human friendship and love that makes credible God's love for us: "in many instances, the love and concern between friends functions as a genuine, even if not religiously

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<sup>166</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 553-54.

<sup>167</sup> Boeve, "Theology in a Postmodern Context and the Hermeneutical Project of Louis-Marie Chauvet," 14.

<sup>168</sup> Bernard Cooke, "Sacraments," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* ed. Peter E. Fink (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1990), 1119.

formulated, revelation of what the saving love of God is all about.”<sup>169</sup> Thus, for Cooke, human friendship, and its paradigm, marriage, is the basic sacrament. However, basing sacraments on “friendship” and then on “marriage” is contested. In Irwin’s judgment: “that this kind of intimacy is possible or even desirable at moments of liturgy and sacrament is highly problematic, not to say very questionable and perhaps even unnecessary. Liturgy and sacrament are church events, celebrated in a community of believers, people who do not necessarily know one another, leading to communal self-transcendence.”<sup>170</sup>

Edward Kilmartin notes that the understanding that sacraments are part of the sacramentality of all creation and that sacramentality is foundational to the celebration of sacraments was pervasive in the Patristic Period and the early Middle Ages.<sup>171</sup> Since the Father creates all things through the Word, all creation bears the mark of God’s love. Within this worldview the sacramental liturgies of the Church “were valued as particular concentrations of the sacramental nature of all creation. They were interpreted as the highest manifestation of God’s presence in the whole of the cosmos.”<sup>172</sup> It is this theology of the sacramentality of all creation that Irwin seeks to retrieve, and to recontextualise as the foundation for sacraments.<sup>173</sup> As he explains: “‘sacramentality’ comes first; rituals of liturgy and sacraments derive from it.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Cooke, "Sacraments," 1121.

<sup>170</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, review of *The Essential Writings of Bernard Cooke: A Narrative Theology of Church, Sacrament, and Ministry*. By Bernard Cooke, with Bruce T. Morrill, *Horizons*, Volume 45, Issue 1, June 2018, pp. 181 – 182, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2018.17>

<sup>171</sup> Edward J. Kilmartin, "Theology of the Sacraments: Toward a New Understanding of the Chief Rites of the Church of Jesus Christ," in *Alternative Futures for Worship: Volume 1 General Introduction*, ed. Regis A. Duffy (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1987), 158.

<sup>172</sup> Kilmartin, "Theology of the Sacraments," 159.

<sup>173</sup> This changes the traditional directionality in which sacraments are usually considered, i.e., from Christ to the church to creation.

<sup>174</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 200.

In his writing on sacramentality, Rowan Williams adds an important Christological emphasis and stresses the link between the principle of sacramentality and the lives of Christians: “Sacramentality is not a general principle that the world is full of ‘sacredness’: it is the very specific conviction that the world is full of the life of a God whose nature is known in Christ and the Spirit ... We live in a world alive with God, but that life comes to light fully only when seen in connection with ‘Christ the Sacrament.’”<sup>175</sup>

Williams’ emphasis upon “fully” is helpful. The realisation that we live in a world alive with the life of God is a revelation that is available to the experience of all persons at all times if they are open to experiencing this revelation. However, the fullness of that experience as privileged encounter is only to be found in the experience of Christ in the sacraments.<sup>176</sup>

Lizette Larson-Miller includes a Trinitarian note in her definition of sacramentality, emphasising God’s continuing relationship with creation, and highlighting the incarnation as the confirmation that material, bodily entities can reveal God:

The Triune God of Christian understanding is the creator of everything that is, continues to interact with all of creation, is present in that interaction in many ways, chose, in their second person, to become one in flesh with humanity and immersed in all creation, is desirous of an ongoing relationship with humanity and creation, inspires and enables that relationship through their third person in particular, and is, above all, love – love *for* us.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Rowan Williams, "Foreword," in *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (London: Continuum, 2004), xiii.

<sup>176</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx contributed to this understanding. While we can become aware of God through creation, sacraments offer the possibility of a personal encounter: in sacraments “we encounter Christ in his mystery.” Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 3-4, 45.

<sup>177</sup> Lizette Larson-Miller, *Sacramentality Renewed: Contemporary Conversations in Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2016), 9, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=4659002>. Emphasis original.



The image of creation presented here is dynamic; the Trinity creates (*creatio ex nihilo*) and continues to create (*creatio continua*). It surpasses the either/or dichotomy of transcendence or immanence: God transcends creation yet continues to interact with it. The incarnation provides a new creation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit offers Christians the opportunity to experience the sacramentality of creation, that is, creation as bearer of the triune God's presence. The gift of the Spirit fortifies humanity to work so that all creation advances towards the ultimate purpose of new creation in Christ where God "who is the creator of all things may at last become 'all in all' thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude" (CCC 294 citing AG 2; 1 Cor 15: 28).<sup>178</sup>

Judith Kubicki's understanding of sacramentality presents a slightly different approach. Acknowledging a postmodern worldview that is relational, personal, and participatory, her emphasis is upon personal choice:

Sacramentality can be described as having one's eyes and ears attuned to the intimations of a benevolent God inviting us into a transforming relationship. It requires an openness of the imagination to being surprised by the presence of God in the mundane. In this way ordinary created realities serve as symbols or windows into the divine. A sacramental perspective enables us to view the world as the locus where God reveals Godself to us and where we respond to that revelation.<sup>179</sup>

Kubicki emphasises the individual human response to God's presence in creation. The world is alive with traces of a God who invites humans into a transforming relationship. For a sacramental event to occur a human response is required. Humans are free to cultivate, or to reject, an awareness of that presence; are free to respond, or not respond, to that presence; to develop, or not to develop, a sacramental perspective.

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<sup>178</sup> The gift of the Spirit is offered most abundantly through the sacraments.

<sup>179</sup> Judith Marie Kubicki, *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 16.

Kubicki cites and endorses Irwin's assertion that a sacramental perspective must be recovered if liturgy and sacraments are to survive; that is, if they are to continue to generate meaning.<sup>180</sup> The critical questions are then, how can we become more aware of the traces of God in the universe? How can we develop a sacramental imagination? For Kubicki a sacramental imagination "is nurtured by a posture of contemplative openness or receptivity to transcendence that is glimpsed in human experience that is local because it is inherently bodily."<sup>181</sup>

Irwin argues that sacramentality is "a prism, a theological lens through which we view creation and all that is on this good earth as revelations of God's presence and action among us here and now."<sup>182</sup> The implication is that Christians need to acquire and use this theological lens if liturgy and sacraments are to thrive and to generate ongoing, life-shaping meaning. How this might be achieved is implicit rather than explicit in Irwin's work.

Michael Himes offers a possible solution. For Himes the sacramental principle is fundamentally what makes Catholicism Catholic.<sup>183</sup> Some poets, as keen and close observers, have written of the natural world as potentially revelatory of the Divine. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) wrote:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

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<sup>180</sup> Kubicki, *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, 16.

<sup>181</sup> Kubicki, *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, 31.

<sup>182</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 210.

<sup>183</sup> Michael Himes, "Finding God in All Things': a Sacramental Worldview and Its Effects," in *As Leaven in the World*, ed. Thomas Landy (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001), 91.

In similar lines, from the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins (1844-1889), Himes locates what he terms the single most beautiful statement of the sacramental principle: “These things, these things were here and but the beholder/ Wanting.”<sup>184</sup> According to the sacramental principle, God’s grace is everywhere present yet often unnoticed. Himes maintains that education is, or can be, training in sacramental beholding: “anything that awakens, enlivens, and expands the imagination, opens the vision, and enriches the sensitivity of any human being is a religious act.”<sup>185</sup> This statement implies that teachers, and particularly teachers in Catholic educational institutions, whatever their discipline, are challenged to develop these qualities of imagination, vision, and sensitivity in themselves, and to develop sacramental beholding in their students.<sup>186</sup>

Kenan Osborne, who also accepts that the sacramentality of the universe is a key to understanding Christian sacraments in a postmodern world,<sup>187</sup> is critical of theologians like Kilmartin, Chauvet, and the authors of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for stating the foundational nature of the principle of sacramentality but not developing its relationship with the ritual sacraments: “the world-encompassing sacramental economy which is touched on in the first section of the *Catechism*, loses all significance when the individual sacraments are presented in the same *Catechism*.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Himes, "Finding God in all Things," 100.

<sup>185</sup> Himes, "Finding God in all Things," 100.

<sup>186</sup> Like Himes, Pope Francis encourages believers to seek to find God in all things. He too advocates the importance of developing attentiveness, of becoming better beholders. His stress is upon the relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment: “By learning to see and appreciate beauty we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple” (LS 215).

<sup>187</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist, 1999), 50-53.

<sup>188</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 52.

Osborne also emphasises that sacramentality is not a human action, but that it does involve a human response to God's action: sacramentality is "an action of God, a blessing, and a subsequent human response."<sup>189</sup> According to Osborne, sacraments involve an awareness of the action of God and the personal choice to respond. Sacraments are unique events in time and space for unique persons: "Sacramentality is profoundly temporal, profoundly spatial, and profoundly relative. God's blessing/action is a unique blessing/action at a unique time and in a unique space for unique people. Moreover, the human response to this divine blessing is a unique response at a unique time and in a unique space by a unique person."<sup>190</sup>

While this needs to be balanced by the fact that sacraments are corporate acts, celebrated in the Church, by the Church, and indeed, constituting the Church, the stress here is upon liturgy as primarily God's blessing/action, and secondarily as a response of the people of God; that is, the Church. Osborne's emphasis upon sacramental specificity, particularity, what he prefers to term, sacramental *Haecceitas* (the this-ness, the uniqueness of the particular sacramental event),<sup>191</sup> places no limits upon God's action, nor upon human response. Highlighting sacraments as unique, existential events that are immediate, local, and that invite a personal response, is congenial to postmodern sensibilities with their emphasis upon the particular and the local.

This emphasis also accords with *Sacrosanctum Concilium's* stress upon the active participation of the faithful, who should not be present at the sacramental celebrations as strangers or silent spectators, rather they should "take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration" (SC 48).<sup>192</sup> As Irwin explains,

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<sup>189</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 70.

<sup>190</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 70.

<sup>191</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 58.

<sup>192</sup> While SC 48 refers to the Eucharist, the principle applies to all of the sacramental celebrations.

sacraments combine a community aspect and a unique, existential aspect for those celebrating the sacrament: “Sacramental celebrations are just that, celebrations in communities of faith, whose appropriation of what is celebrated cannot be predetermined or preprogrammed.”<sup>193</sup>

Osborne’s emphasis upon sacramental *Haecceitas* clarifies what is meant by the sacramentality of the universe. For Osborne, claims that the world is a sacrament are facile and lacking meaning. He cites and expresses a preference for Chauvet’s position: “The ‘profane’ (that is, the natural) state of the world and of history is thus recognized as the possible sacramental place of a sacred history.”<sup>194</sup> This more nuanced statement emphasises the world as the only possible location of an individual’s awareness of the action of God, and a subsequent individual human response to that awareness. Osborne explains that “God’s creative action may be in every cloud and tree and river, but the sacramentality aspect takes place only when this action produces a subsequent reaction from some human person.”<sup>195</sup>

Accepting the world as the only possible location of an individual’s awareness of the action of God, Catherine Vincie argues for a wider vision of the world. According to Vincie, the Catholic understanding of sacramentality must be broadened in the light of new knowledge from cosmology on the origin and development of the universe: “Sacramentality in the light of the New Science must be a cosmic sacramentality that expands whatever we have developed to date to include the far reaches of the visible universe ... For believers, nothing exceeds or limits God’s desire for revelation and communication.”<sup>196</sup> The new cosmologies have revealed

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<sup>193</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 205.

<sup>194</sup> Chauvet cited in Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 67.

<sup>195</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments* 75.

<sup>196</sup> Catherine Vincie, *Worship and the New Cosmology: Liturgical and Theological Challenges* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2014), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=4546347>.

that humans share a common origin with all other animate and inanimate matter. This understanding may lead to an enhanced concern for other creatures and for the earth itself.

Vincie proposes that recognition of our interdependence with all creation provides another pointer to the Trinity as model for human behaviour. Jesus prayed that his disciples “May all be one” (Jn 17:20), revealing the Trinity in its mutual relationality, unity and generativity as the goal, and ultimate end, of human behaviour. This notion was taken up by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*: “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.” (LS 240). The principle of sacramentality is a constant reminder that everything is interconnected.

This interconnection is part of the bedrock of every act of liturgy. Irwin writes: “In liturgy and sacraments all that dwells on this good earth is orchestrated and respected as fellow creatures whose very life gives praise to God.”<sup>197</sup> Use of the word “orchestrated” is apt here. In liturgy and sacraments all the parts of God’s good creation are brought into harmony with the Creator’s original plan for creation. However, the new cosmologies remind us that we need to think beyond this “good earth.” As Vincie argues we need to adopt a cosmic view: we are beginning to understand that sacramentality “is not simply meant to advance the relationship between the individual and the living God: it is tied to the mutual salvation of the whole cosmos.”<sup>198</sup> The definition of the principle of sacramentality has been expanded: all reality, both animate and inanimate, is potentially or in fact the bearer of God’s presence and the instrument of God’s saving activity, not just on humanity’s behalf, but on behalf of the entire cosmos.

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<sup>197</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 186.

<sup>198</sup> Vincie, *Worship and the New Cosmology: Liturgical and Theological Challenges*.

Liturgical theologian Teresa Berger encouragingly observes that there has been a contemporary rediscovery of the sacramentality of the world as a necessary corrective to “a particular construal of the spiritual as otherworldly, church-focussed and priest centered.”<sup>199</sup> In considering the relationship between this broader notion of sacramentality and liturgy, she notes that: “turning to the liturgical tradition is not a turning away from other sites of sacramentality. It is, rather, a turning to all the other sites with utmost passion and clarity, a passion and clarity sharpened, deepened, and nourished by liturgy.”<sup>200</sup> Celebration of the sacramental liturgy clarifies and sharpens our vision of the sacramentality of the world.

Berger provides implicit support for Irwin’s thesis linking sacramentality and the survival of liturgy and sacraments. She claims that in their life experience (“the love shared around a breakfast table; the insights based on the playfulness of our cats”)<sup>201</sup> many women have discerned the sacramentality of the everyday. Many women regard the events of their daily lives as “deeply sacramental, pregnant with holiness and divine presence.”<sup>202</sup> Both the everyday lives of women and the sacramental liturgies share an emphasis upon materiality. The sacramental liturgies offer the possibility of a more intense experience of the divine presence. If women are more attuned to the sacramentality of the world one might expect this to be reflected in higher levels of participation in the sacramental liturgies. Berger observes that this is so: often women form “the majority of the liturgical assembly in local parishes.”<sup>203</sup> Berger’s

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<sup>199</sup> Teresa Berger, "Spying in the Promised Land: Sacramental Sights Through Women's Eyes" (paper presented at the CSTA Convention, St Louis, Missouri, 2012), 39.

<sup>200</sup> Berger, "Spying in the Promised Land," 38.

<sup>201</sup> Berger, "Spying in the Promised Land," 39.

<sup>202</sup> Berger, "Spying in the Promised Land," 39.

<sup>203</sup> Berger, "Spying in the Promised Land," 28.

observations are consistent with the link between awareness of the sacramentality of the world and participation in the sacramental liturgies of the Church.

Lieven Boeve employs the category of interruption to provide a contextually plausible and theologically legitimate understanding of the relationship between sacramentality and sacraments:

The sacramentality of life, clarified and celebrated in the sacraments, is no longer considered as a form of participation in a divine being, nor as an anticipation of a self-fulfilling development, but as being involved in the tension arising from the interruption of the divine Other into our human narratives, to which the Christian narrative testifies from of old. Sacramental living and acting thus presupposes the cultivation of a contemplative openness and testify in word and deed to that which reveals itself in this openness as a trace of God.<sup>204</sup>

Central to the celebration of the sacraments is the understanding that, while all of life is sacramental, Christianity is an incarnational religion. God is revealed most fully in the bodily, the material, in history, in the communal. Consistent with Rahner and Chauvet, Boeve's position is that the sacramentality of life is clarified and celebrated in the sacraments. For him sacramentality is no longer explained in pre-modern terms as "a form of participation in a divine being" but rather in postmodern terms as "the interruption of the divine Other into our human narratives." The Christian narratives (including the Liturgy of the Word in the sacramental celebrations) testify to the interruption of the divine Other. Sacramentality implies the cultivation of a contemplative openness to the possibility of interruption by the divine Other. There is also an ethical imperative related to the celebration of sacraments. Those who participate in sacraments testify in word and deed to the revelation of a trace of God. The sacraments as interruptive love become effective in the lives of Christians when both their

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<sup>204</sup> Lieven Boeve, *Lyotard and Theology: Beyond the Christian Master Narrative of Love* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014), 123.



private and public lives become focused upon “the option for the other, especially the excluded other, as a concrete incarnation of the Other.”<sup>205</sup>

Boeve has succeeded in developing a sacramental theology which is both plausible in the postmodern cultural context and theologically legitimate. He meets Osborne’s criterion of sacramental *Haecceitas* (the this-ness, the uniqueness of the particular sacramental event),<sup>206</sup> as central to understanding sacraments in a postmodern world. Boeve’s theology places no limits upon God’s action, nor upon human response. This theology, which highlights sacraments as unique, existential events that are immediate, local, and which invite a personal response to the interruption of the divine Other, is congenial to postmodern sensibilities.

### **2.3.3 The Principle of Sacramentality: A Solution to a Sacramental Malaise?**

The literature reveals developing and expanding understandings of the principle of sacramentality with a consistent theme that the celebration of sacraments does not involve a turn away from the world but rather a turn toward the world, with greater clarity and motivation to contribute to its transformation in accord with God’s original plan. The literature also reveals an emerging consensus supporting Irwin’s contention that “sacramentality is in need of retrieval for the very survival not only of liturgy and sacraments but for Catholic Christianity itself.”<sup>207</sup> “Retrieval” is apposite here for in Catholic theology retrieval “is not in the first instance an academic enterprise concerned with recovering parts of something, but is *fundamentally a recovery of something structurally whole.*”<sup>208</sup> Sacramentality and sacraments

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<sup>205</sup> Boeve, *Lyotard and Theology*, 122. The option for the other is foundational to Matrimony.

<sup>206</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments*, 58.

<sup>207</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 197.

<sup>208</sup> Jennifer Newsome Martin, "Only What is Rooted is Living: A Roman Catholic Theology of Ressourcement," in *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal*, ed. Darren Sarisky (London: Bloomsbury 2017), 97.

form a structural whole which requires retrieval *and* recontextualization. Retrieval of Patristic understandings of sacramentality alone is insufficient; these understandings need to be recontextualized for the present age.<sup>209</sup> A recontextualization of matrimony through the lens of the principle of sacramentality is explored in Chapter Five.

#### **2.4 Possible Causes of, and Solutions to, a Sacramental malaise**

The Australian statistics reveal a sacramental malaise which is not limited to, but which is starkly revealed by, a decline in sacramental marriage. However, the sacramental malaise is more widespread. Overall, the sacramental participation of God's people would appear to be languishing rather than flourishing.

A change as momentous as that which the statistics reveal is unlikely to have a single cause. This chapter has argued that insufficient theological and liturgical attention to the natural world, and inadequate theological recontextualization more generally, may have diminished the initial reception of, and the luminosity of, the principle of sacramentality and thus contributed to a decline in sacramental participation rates. The rich and credible theologies of Christ and the Church as sacraments developed before, during, and after the second Vatican Council are unlikely to have contributed to that decline because of the limited impact they have had upon the faithful.

Revision of a sacramental ordo provides an opportunity for recontextualization. The next chapter assesses the revision of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

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<sup>209</sup> Vatican II modelled that the fundamental principles of reform, *ressourcement* (return to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (updating), noting that they operate in dynamic interaction: "the need for constant renewal of the church demands re-receiving many of the past forms and practices of the tradition; interpretation of these past forms and practices for the present calls for critical adaptation for new times and contexts if genuine renewal is to take place." Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 17.

## Chapter Three

### The Revision and Enrichment of the Matrimonial Rite

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* decreed that: “The marriage rite now found in the Roman Ritual is 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). SC further decreed that matrimony is normally to be celebrated within the Mass; that, if celebrated apart from Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Nuptial Blessing were essential; and that the prayer for the bride be amended to remind both spouses of their equal obligations (SC 78). It also encouraged inculturation: “competent territorial ecclesiastical authorities were free to draw up their own rite suited to the usages of place and people” (SC 77).<sup>210</sup>

The first edition of the *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium* represents the church’s first attempt to revise and enrich the marriage rite in accord with the decrees of SC. The second typical edition of the same *Ordo* continues that reform and enrichment process. The new edition represents the culmination of a series of decisions about what to add, omit, or alter as part of the continuing reform process.<sup>211</sup> These decisions are of fundamental consequence: “The church’s decisions about what words, rites, symbols, and gestures to use matter a great deal since they comprise the church’s rule of faith, its *lex orandi*.”<sup>212</sup> Critique of these decisions is one of the ways in which liturgical theology can contribute to the sacramental life of the church.

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<sup>210</sup> In encouraging the inclusion of local traditions SC repeated the teaching of the Council of Trent: “if any regions are wont to use other praiseworthy customs and ceremonies when celebrating the sacrament of matrimony, the sacred Synod earnestly desires that these by all means be retained” (SC 77, citing Council of Trent, Session 24, November 11, 1563).

<sup>211</sup> The text also contains changes resulting from the new principles and norms for translations of liturgical texts in *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001).

<sup>212</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 63.

This critical function is an element of what Irwin terms “theology of liturgy”; it involves “critiquing the revised rites in terms of what they contain and raising questions about what might be contained in a new edition of the rite.”<sup>213</sup>

This chapter and the next examine OCM2015-Aus through the lens of critical liturgical theology. This chapter analyses and reflects upon that text, including what the ritual text instructs about non-verbal aspects of the celebration.<sup>214</sup> It pays particular attention to the changes from the first edition. The next chapter focusses upon the Liturgy of the Word, particularly the new scripture texts that have been added with this revision.

The evaluation criteria employed are those implicit in the decrees of SC; that is, to what extent is the revised *Ordo* enriched to signify more clearly the grace of the sacrament and to teach the duties of the spouses? What emphasis is given to the Liturgy of the Word and the Nuptial Blessing? To what extent are both spouses reminded of their equal obligations? What evidence is there of inculturation?

### **3.1 The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, 2015**

The *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium*, 1969 (hereafter OCM1969-Lat) represented the first attempt to revise the matrimonial liturgy in accord with the requirements SC. The second edition of the *Ordo*, approved in 1990 (OCM1990-Lat) refines and updates the first edition. Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), and the revised Code of Canon Law (1983), are referenced frequently in the second edition, testifying to the historical period of its development. The Introduction includes an entirely new Section II:

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<sup>213</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 88.

<sup>214</sup> While the words of the text are definitive, research reveals most of the affective meaning from an event is often 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.” See 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).

Duties and Ministries.<sup>215</sup> All of the footnotes in this new section, except for one reference to SC, relate to FC and the revised Code of Canon Law.

In March 2015 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference received the *recognitio* from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for an English translation of OCM1990-Lat for use in Australia. *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2015 represents the latest stage in the evolution of the matrimonial liturgy in the Australian context. It replaced the *Rite of Marriage*, 1984 (RM1984-Aus) a rearrangement and reprint of the 1970 translation of OCM1969-Lat approved for use in Australia in 1970.<sup>216</sup>

There was a significant time lag in the approval of the English translation of OCM1990-Lat.<sup>217</sup> The English translation, *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, became available in Australia in 2015. This text comes with a more literally translated title (RM1984-Aus was titled *The Rite of Marriage* in English).<sup>218</sup> OCM2015-Aus includes a greatly expanded Introduction of 44 sections compared with the 18 sections of RM1984-Aus, and as shown below, an enrichment of the rites and prayers, and an expanded set of scripture readings. The revised edition fittingly stipulates that at least one scripture reading that explicitly speaks of marriage must always be chosen for the liturgical celebration (OCM2015-Aus 90).<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> This section makes the revised *Ordo* consistent with the other ritual books all of which include a section on duties and ministries.

<sup>216</sup> *The Rite of Marriage: English Translation* (hereafter RM).

<sup>217</sup> The English language ritual approved for use in Australia is a translation rather than an adaptation. Edward Foley and Richard Fragomeni conclude from their international study of ritual books approved by the Vatican for the celebration of Matrimony that the Australian ritual text “introduces no significant ritual adaptations.” Edward Foley and Richard Fragomeni, “The Marriage Rites: An International Perspective,” in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. Edward Foley (Chicago: LTP, 2019), 77.

<sup>218</sup> The ritual text used in Australia until its replacement by the OCM was *The Rite of Marriage*, a translation of OCM1969-Lat by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Reference is also made in this chapter to the adaptations of OCM1990-Lat approved for use in the United States (OCM2016-USA) and England and Wales (OCM2015-E+W).

<sup>219</sup> These readings are designated in OCM2015-Aus by an asterisk.

Like RM1984-Aus, OCM2015-Aus permits matrimony to be celebrated within or without Mass. SC decreed that “Matrimony is normally to be celebrated within Mass” (SC 78). This represented a significant change from the pre-conciliar practice whereby the wedding of two Catholics took place directly prior to the celebration of Mass.

There are persuasive theological reasons why the celebration of matrimony within Mass remains the ideal. One of the main elements of the liturgy which is to stand out clearly is “Eucharistic Communion of both spouses and of others present, by which, above all, their charity is nurtured and they are raised up to communion with the Lord and with their neighbour” (OCM2015-Aus 35). As the great sacrament of unity, the Eucharist “is the very source of Christian marriage” (FC 57). In celebrating matrimony within Mass, the couple’s conjugal covenant is drawn further into the new and eternal covenant of Christ’s sacrificial love. Christ’s sacrificial love can infuse their own matrimonial relationship.<sup>220</sup>

However, OCM2015-Aus notes that there are occasions where “either by necessity or because of circumstances” matrimony is celebrated without Mass (OCM2015-Aus 79). The unique nature of the assembly that gathers for the matrimonial liturgy frequently qualifies as a compelling pastoral reason for celebration of matrimony without Mass. The problems that Turner identifies when a Catholic marries a baptised non-Catholic can also arise in these one-off assemblies: “Many of those participating will not know when to stand, sit, or kneel. They will be unfamiliar with the responses to the dialogues. They will not be sharing eucharistic communion. A wedding without Mass puts the entire congregation on more equal footing and invites a fuller sign of unity.”<sup>221</sup> An equal footing and a fuller sign of unity are meaningful as

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<sup>220</sup> Pope Benedict XVI called for a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and matrimony: “The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est: On Christian Love* (2005), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html), (hereafter DCE), article 27.

<sup>221</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 38-39.

the purpose of the assembly is to celebrate the equality and the unity of the couple. For exactly these kinds of pastoral reasons celebrations of matrimony in Australia are predominantly without Mass.<sup>222</sup> Consequently this chapter focusses upon Chapter II of OCM2015-Aus, The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Without Mass.

### 3.1.1 OCM: The Introductory Rites

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Without Mass begins with the Introductory Rites. The purpose of the introductory rites is to prepare the assembly for an act of worship, to welcome the ritual participants, and to “dispose them inwardly for the celebration” (OCM2015-Aus 52). Bugnini explains that “the welcome is meant as a sensitive human gesture that will bring the couple, their relatives, and their friends into an atmosphere of spiritual fellowship.”<sup>223</sup> In the first form of the introductory rites of the OCM2015-Aus, the Minister<sup>224</sup> meets the couple to be married at the door of the church and warmly greets them, showing that the Church shares in their joy (OCM2015-Aus 80). The procession, which then takes place “in the customary manner,” (OCM2015-Aus 81) continues the focus upon the couple. The procession constitutes a specific formal use of baptised bodies in worship. One of the meanings conveyed by our participation in liturgical processions is that we are always on a journey on this earth; both the

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<sup>222</sup> See “Sacramental marriage: the situation in Australia,” 2.1 above.

<sup>223</sup> Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990), 701.

<sup>224</sup> Terminology relating to liturgical leadership is potentially confusing in OCM2015-Aus. The Introduction refers to “the person assisting” who asks for and receives the consent of the contracting parties (OCM2015-Aus 35). This term gives due emphasis to the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament. However, Chapter I uses the term “Priest” and Chapter II the term “Minister” allowing for the fact that the liturgical leader in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass may be a priest or a deacon. Chapter III, The Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the presence of an Assisting Layperson uses the term “assisting layperson” for the person who “directs the whole celebration of Marriage” (OCM2015-Aus 119). This thesis utilises the term from the text, that is “Minister.” However, it notes that this term may diminish the ministerial roles of bride and groom and that in Australia the term is usually associated with Protestant clerics: a “minister” is a “clergyman esp. in the various Protestant Churches.” Bruce Moore, *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 689.

journey and our ultimate destination are important. The action of the entrance procession, at the beginning of the celebration, can make a significant non-verbal contribution to the entire liturgy. Celebrated well, and involving both bride and bridegroom, the procession can signify matrimony as a journey of bride and bridegroom together.

The rubric that “the procession to the altar then takes place in the customary manner” (OCM2015-Aus 81) may cause some confusion; confusion that may result in diminishment rather than enrichment of the rite. The rubric is not referring to the traditional Western cultural procession where the bride enters on the arm of her father, a vestige from mediaeval times when this aspect of the marriage ceremonies 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). OCM2015-Aus 81 is referring to the first option for the liturgical procession which was conceptualised in the post-Vatican II reform of the liturgy and detailed in the previous edition of the rite (RM1984-Aus 20).<sup>225</sup> These details are explicit in OCM1990-Lat but are presented in a potentially confusing summary in the English translation as shown in Table 1 below:

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<sup>225</sup> However, there are two options because there were opposing views within the Consilium charged with the post-Vatican II reform of the marriage liturgy. “There were those who saw the rite as possibly giving rise to discrimination: for the wealthy, reception at the door of the church, with a great deal of pomp and ceremony; for the poor reception at the altar. Others disliked the idea of a procession through the church and other possible drawbacks. All agreed that room must be made for a rite of reception, precisely in order not to lose an opportunity of placing the couple and the assembly in the atmosphere proper to a sacramental celebration.” Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, 702.



**Table 3.1. Comparison of Article 46 in the Latin original, the Grey Book draft, and OCM2015-Aus.**

<i>Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium</i> , (OCMLat-1990) <sup>226</sup>	<i>Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> Second Edition, ICEL Grey Book, draft translation, 2013	<i>The Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> , (OCM2015-Aus).
46. Deinde fit processio ad altare: praecedunt ministrantes, sequitur sacerdos, deinde nupturientes, quos iuxta consuetudines locorum saltem parentes et duo testes honorifice comitari possunt ad locum ipsis praeparatum. Interim fit cantus ad introitum.	46. The procession to the altar then takes place: the servers go first, the Priest follows, and then the couple who, according to local custom, may be accompanied as a sign of honor by at least their parents and the two witnesses, to the place prepared for them. Meanwhile, the Entrance Chant takes place.	46. The procession to the altar then takes place in the customary manner. Meanwhile, the Entrance Chant takes place.

OCM1990-Lat makes clear that in the rite’s preferred option<sup>227</sup> for the entrance procession to the altar, “the servers 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.” The CDWDS’s<sup>228</sup> omission of this fuller description in some editions of the OCM (including the Australian edition) is difficult to

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<sup>226</sup> The guidelines for translation are given in *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001) which emphasized that the translation should be as close to the Latin original as possible (rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language). It was not until 2017 in his motu proprio, *Magnum principium*, that Pope Francis gave bishops’ conferences greater freedom in the translation of liturgical texts.

<sup>227</sup> The Church’s preferred option is usually listed first in its ritual books.

<sup>228</sup> The Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS/ Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments from Pentecost 2022) has the responsibility for approval of new editions of the Church’s ritual books.

explain. Turner shows that the rubric “the procession to the altar then takes place in the customary manner” (OCM2015-Aus 81) allows a range of possibilities:

Ideally, there is one procession up the aisle, led by a person carrying the cross, others with candles, the reader, the deacon, and the priest. The attendants come next, followed by the groom with his parents and the bride with hers. The couple will be exchanging mutual consent; they may anticipate this by entering equally in the procession. Another version would have the bride and groom coming last, arm in arm. All of these faithfully carry out the English translation of OCM 46. Unfortunately, so would a practice of having the priest enter last.<sup>229</sup>

The possibility of having the priest enter last is ritually unfortunate as it implies that he is the minister of the sacrament. The groom entering with his parents and the bride with hers may recall vestiges of marriages arranged by parents rather than the sacrament being the free choice of bride and groom (cf. OCM2015-Aus 94). The bride and groom coming last, arm in arm, preceded by both sets of parents is preferable. In this option, the bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament are accorded due and equal prominence in the liturgical procession. Not just the bride’s father but both sets of parents are honoured and invited to be part of the entrance procession.<sup>230</sup> This entrance procession acknowledges that the couple are ministers of the sacrament, accords them the place of honour, the last place in the liturgical procession, and helps to create an atmosphere proper to this unique sacramental celebration.

The rubric states that “the procession to the altar then takes place in the customary manner. Meanwhile, the Entrance Chant takes place” (OCM2015-Aus 81). The entrance chant has a fourfold purpose: “to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and

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<sup>229</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 61.

<sup>230</sup> Pope Francis notes that newly married couples need “to disengage from their parents” (AL 235). Involving both sets of parents in the entrance procession can ritualise this disengagement. The couple enters the church with their parents, recognising their gratitude to their parents, but at the end of the liturgy will leave together without them, indicating disengagement from their parents, that their primary commitment is now to their spouse.

accompany the procession of the priest and ministers”.<sup>231</sup> Fostering the unity of those who have gathered and linking their thoughts to the mystery of the festivity are particularly relevant to the matrimonial liturgy. The traditional Western cultural procession where the bride enters on the arm of her father may encourage those present to become spectators rather than a liturgical assembly. Liturgy planners in Australia are advised that “it is usually difficult to have congregational singing when the bride is walking down the aisle. Organ/Instrumental music is normally best during this moment of the rite.”<sup>232</sup> Organ/Instrumental music which enhances the spectacle is often selected. Congregational singing, which can foster the unity of those who have gathered, is then left until everyone is in position. The traditional Western cultural procession can detract from the fundamental liturgical role of the Introductory Rites which is to unify this unique assembly for an act of worship.

According to Irwin, attention to the importance of bodily actions has been a neglected aspect of the reform of the liturgy.<sup>233</sup> He observes that while initiation rites always preference immersion over pouring, actual celebrations often utilise pouring. There is a need “to evaluate whether actual celebrations reflect what the rites say.”<sup>234</sup> Similarly, and unfortunately, what OCM2015-Aus says and presumes about the entrance procession is often not reflected in actual celebrations of the rite. There is a liturgical-theological rationale for the preferred entrance procession, just as there is for immersion.<sup>235</sup> The preferred procession recognises bride and

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<sup>231</sup> *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 2012.  
<https://www.liturgybrisbane.net.au/media/1454/girm-2012-for-australia.pdf>, (hereafter GIRM), article 47.

<sup>232</sup> “Marriage,” Catholic Australia, accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.catholicaustralia.com.au/the-sacraments/marriage>.

<sup>233</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 180.

<sup>234</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 180.

<sup>235</sup> Immersion is preferred because baptism celebrates dying to sin and rising to new life: “we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too we might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Immersion ritualizes this transformation more expressively. According to Thomas Aquinas: “burial is more clearly represented by immersion: wherefore this manner of baptising is more frequently in use and more commendable” *STh.* III, q. 66, a. 7, ad 2.

groom equally as ministers of the sacrament and as equal partners in matrimony. Catechists, pre-marriage educators and presiders have much work to do to educate couples and assemblies on the importance of fidelity to the bodily actions preferred in the various rites. As Pope Francis reminded liturgists in 2017: “In truth, we know, that the liturgical education of Pastors and faithful is a challenge to be faced ever anew.”<sup>236</sup>

### 3.1.2 Greeting Those Present

When the couple have arrived at their place,<sup>237</sup> and after the Sign of the Cross, the minister welcomes them and those present with the Scriptural greeting:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ (OCM2015-Aus 86).

The minister assisting then continues to address the couple and those present and, as the rubrics state, “to dispose them inwardly for the celebration of Marriage” (OCM2015-Aus 87). The fundamental import of the disposition of the assembly and particularly the couple is stressed in SC: “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 mind be attuned to their voices, and they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain” (SC 11). The first option provided in OCM2015-Aus for this address is an addition which enriches the rite. It has abundant potential to dispose the couple and the assembly inwardly for the celebration of matrimony. It explains the nature of the celebration and inspires the participation of the assembly:

We have come rejoicing into the house of the Lord  
for this celebration, dear brothers and sisters,

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<sup>236</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter in the form of a Motu Proprio “Summa familiae cura” instituting the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Matrimonial and Family Science*, 19.09.2017 (2017), <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/09/19/170919e0.html>.

<sup>237</sup> This precise place is not specified, giving some flexibility.

and now we stand with N. and N.  
on the day they intend to form a home of their own.  
For them this is a moment of unique importance.  
So let us support them with our affection,  
with our friendship,  
and with our prayers as their brothers and sisters.  
Let us listen attentively with them  
to the word that God speaks to us today.  
Then, with holy Church,  
let us humbly pray to God the Father,  
through Christ our Lord,  
for this couple, his servants,  
that he lovingly accept them, bless them,  
and make them always one (OCM2015-Aus 87).

The address begins with a series of statements which prepare the assembly for an act of worship, welcome and focus upon the ritual participants, and introduce the sacrament being celebrated. It concludes by praying that God accept, bless, and preserve the unity of this couple. The language is inclusive (“we”), yet the focus is still upon the bride and groom, whose names are used. Those present literally stand with them in the church and are now invited to stand in support of them during their married life. The minister assisting uses the inclusive “our”: “So let us support them with *our* affection, with *our* friendship, and with *our* prayers as their brothers and sisters.” Near the conclusion of the liturgy the assembly will be given an invitation and a period of silence to begin what is intended to be continuing prayerful support for this bride and groom.<sup>238</sup>

The opening address calls upon the assembly to begin supporting the bride and groom by listening attentively with them to the Word that speaks, not just to bride and groom, but to all present. A further connection between religious and everyday life is made in the parallel between the “house of the Lord” and a “home of their own.”

A prayer for the couple including their names: “pour out your grace on these your servants (N. and N.)” follows the opening address. The rubric has been reduced to: “Then,

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<sup>238</sup> See 3.1.9 below

with hands extended, he says this prayer” (OCM2015-Aus 89). The rubric it replaces: “The priest invites all to pray, and after a moment of silent prayer, he says” (RM1984-Aus 40), employs the power of silence to encourage the assembly to begin their prayerful support of the couple. This small change may diminish, rather than enrich, the potential of the Introductory Rites to bring the assembly into “an atmosphere of spiritual fellowship.”<sup>239</sup>

### **3.1.3 The Liturgy of the Word**

OCM2015-Aus identifies the Liturgy of the Word as the first of the main elements which are to stand out clearly in the celebration of matrimony. The Liturgy of the Word expresses “the importance of Christian Marriage in the history of salvation and the functions and duties of Marriage to be attended to for the sanctification of the spouses and of their children” (OCM2015-Aus 35). In a substantial enrichment from RM1984-Aus, OCM2015-Aus now specifies that “at least one reading that explicitly speaks of marriage must always be chosen” (OCM2015-Aus 90). Readings that explicitly speak of marriage are indicated with an asterisk (OCM2015-Aus 179-222). This requirement should make the task of the homilist more clearly focussed. In RM1984-Aus the minister gives a homily drawn from the sacred texts: “he speaks about the mystery of Christian marriage” (RM1984-Aus 42). In a subtle change to the rubrics, OCM2015-Aus has: “the minister in the homily uses the sacred text to expound the mystery of Christian marriage” (OCM2015-Aus 91). The term “expound” conveys a sense of explication, of a convincing and persuasive exposition. The requirement to use at least one of these key texts helps to emphasise the sacred nature of the matrimonial liturgy.

Turner reflects upon the challenges and opportunities provided by the homily:

It requires extra work to reflect on the unique lives of each couple and the readings that will be heard at their wedding, but the results can make a lasting impact. Many photographers come to weddings prepared to shoot a complete video, and any individual participant may post the action as a

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<sup>239</sup> Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, 701.

livestream on the Internet. The preacher's words may reach a broader audience than he ever imagined, and they may be preserved in family lore and on Internet sites for ages unending. Some preachers prefer not to have their words recorded, but they have no control over the many ways it can happen. If the homily is not good enough for the world to hear, then it is not good enough for the gathered assembly.<sup>240</sup>

As well as the identification of readings that speak explicitly of marriage, five new readings were added in the 1991 revision of the rite, one Old Testament reading and four from the New Testament. These additional scripture texts, and the significance of the Liturgy of the Word more generally, are examined in Chapter Four.

### **3.1.4 The Celebration of Matrimony: The Questions before the Consent**

The Celebration of Matrimony begins with the Questions before the Consent. The rubric states: "With all standing, including the couple and the witnesses, who are positioned near them, the minister addresses the couple in these or similar words" (OCM2015-Aus 93).<sup>241</sup> The rubrics give no direction as to where the minister should stand. The minister's role as a witness is emphasised if they stand at the front of the assembly in the centre aisle of the nave. In this way the minister leads the assembly in their role as witnesses. His stance here also emphasises the ministerial roles of the bride and groom who turn to face the assembly.

Dearly beloved,  
you have come together into the house of the Church,  
so that in the presence of the Church's minister and the community  
your intention to enter into Marriage  
may be strengthened by the Lord with a sacred seal.  
Christ abundantly blesses the love that binds you.  
Through a special sacrament  
he enriches and strengthens  
those he has already consecrated by Holy Baptism,  
that they may be faithful to each other for ever  
and assume all the responsibilities of married life.

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<sup>240</sup> Turner, "Rebooting the Catholic Wedding," 18.

<sup>241</sup> The posture of standing acknowledges that all present, and not just the official witnesses, have a role as witnesses.

And so, in the presence of the Church,  
I ask you to state your intentions (OCM2015-Aus 93).

This significant paragraph, with its proclamation that it is the couple's association with Christ through baptism that will be further strengthened and enriched through this sacrament, summarises well the theology of the matrimonial liturgy. While the words of the text have been enriched, an opportunity has been missed to enhance the actions to signify more clearly the grace of the sacrament. Consideration might be given to lighting the paschal candle and to including a renewal of baptismal promises to strengthen the links to baptism. It is perhaps surprising that the rubrics allow the presider to craft their own similar words. One wonders how similar the alternative words really are. As Irwin notes: "any adjustments should reflect what the original proposed texts say."<sup>242</sup>

OCM2015-Aus makes subtle yet enriching changes to the questions before the consent. The first question in RM1984-Aus: "have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourself to each other in marriage?" is now rendered: "have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?" (OCM2015-Aus 94). "Wholeheartedly" conveys enthusiastic, one hundred percent commitment. The sexist form of RM1984-Aus's second question: "Will you love and honour each other as man and wife (not husband and wife) for the rest of your lives?" (RM1984-Aus 24) is eliminated and replaced with: "Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage,<sup>243</sup> to love and honour each other for as long as you both shall live?"

The questions before the consent highlight the ideals of matrimony: freedom of choice, wholehearted commitment, fidelity to each other, and the acceptance and upbringing of

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<sup>242</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 260.

<sup>243</sup> OCM-2015Aus uses both terms Matrimony and Marriage.



children (OCM2015-Aus 94). The inclusion of these questions met with some opposition in the Consilium during the initial post-Vatican II reform of the rite. Some members regarded the questions as an inconsequential repetition of what is done during preparation for marriage. However, there is value in this public profession: “this public profession strengthens and intensifies the commitment the couple is taking on in the sight of God.”<sup>244</sup> It also makes an emphatic teaching statement to the gathered assembly.

### 3.1.5 The Consent

After the Liturgy of the Word, the Consent is the second of the main elements of the celebration of matrimony which is to stand out clearly (OCM2015-Aus 35). OCM2015-Aus refers jarringly to “the consent of the contracting parties” (OCM2015-Aus 35). “Covenanting” parties would have been both more felicitous and more accurate. The consent is the central moment of the matrimonial liturgy, for a marriage “is established by the conjugal covenant, that is, the irrevocable consent of both spouses, by which they freely give themselves to each other and accept each other” (OCM2015-Aus 2). Just as God creates by God’s word in Genesis 1, it is the couple’s words that create the marriage. Just as God’s light illuminates all creation, the words of consent “illuminate the meaning of all the signs that follow ... these words cannot be reduced to the present; they involve a totality that includes the future: ‘until death do us part’” (AL 214). The words of consent constitute the form of the sacrament of matrimony,<sup>245</sup> the matter of the sacrament is the consummation of the marriage.<sup>246</sup> The form and the matter

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<sup>244</sup> Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, 702.

<sup>245</sup> Consequently, the words may not be altered by couple’s seeking to write their own words of consent.

<sup>246</sup> The Scholastic distinction between matter and form may still be helpful. Aquinas and his contemporaries used the example of a statue to explain the relationship between matter and form. At a simple level the marble is the matter of the statue, the form is the particular shape the artist creates from the marble. Applied to sacraments the material element (the matter) is given particular meaning by the sacramental formula spoken during the rite (the form). In contemporary Australian culture sexual intercourse has a range of meanings. The words of consent give a particular meaning to matrimonial sexual intercourse.

are integrally connected. In the words of consent both spouses promise to give the gift of themselves and accept the gift of the other. In the matter of the sacrament the spouses give intimate personal expression to their exchange of consent. Sexuality is potentially a source of joy and pleasure which strengthens the matrimonial relationship: “The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones. Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions promote the mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will” (GS 49). Pope 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).<sup>247</sup> In terms of Karl Rahner’s notion of real symbol,<sup>248</sup> the gift of the body in the marital sexual relationship helps to make actual, real, and present the gift of the whole person.

In the Latin tradition the couple exchange consent, not vows. Despite popular (and some scholarly)<sup>249</sup> usage, the various orders in OCM2015-Aus appropriately at no stage refer to vows.<sup>250</sup> Consent with its connotation of freely giving themselves to each other and accepting each other is quite distinctive from vows, which is the term used in relation to consecrated religious profession.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> This statement illustrates the relationship between marital sexual intercourse and the fullness of conjugal love: conjugal love is “a totality in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul” FC 13.

<sup>248</sup> Karl Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol” in *Theological Investigations 4* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 225.

<sup>249</sup> See Belcher, “Catholic Marriage,” 19.

<sup>250</sup> The term “vow” appears twice in OCM2015-Aus. Once in the Introduction in the quote from Tertullian: “How wonderful the bond of the two believers: one in hope, one in vow ...” (OCM2015-Aus 11). The second use of the term is in The Order of Blessing a Married Couple Within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage where the Priest says “Turn to the Lord in Prayer, that these vows may be strengthened by divine grace (OCM2015-Aus 275). OCM1990-Lat has *promissiones*. “Promises” would be a more accurate translation.

<sup>251</sup> There is a problematic relationship between the use of the term “consent” in the OCM and the use of the same term in Australian law in regard to sexual activity and whether or not it is a crime. Prior to 1980 it was generally not possible for a man to be charged with, and prosecuted for, raping his wife. The marital rape immunity was based on historical notions that women became men’s property on marriage, and that

Also, unlike the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,<sup>252</sup> OCM2015-Aus does not explicitly refer to the spouses as ministers of the sacrament. Turner observes that this omission is probably out of respect for Eastern Rites. However, he acknowledges that the spouses are effectively, ritually, and symbolically ministers of the sacrament.<sup>253</sup> The ministerial roles of the spouses is an exercise of their priestly ministry, conferred upon them at baptism.<sup>254</sup>

The presider (priest, deacon, or lay person) is rightly termed the “person assisting” (OCM2015-Aus 35) as the couple ritually minister the sacrament to each other through their individual declarations of consent. It is notable that OCM2015-Aus now includes “The Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the Presence of an Assisting Layperson” (OCM2015-Aus 118-151) validating that the presence of an ordained minister is not essential for the celebration of this sacrament.<sup>255</sup>

The minister invites the couple to declare their consent, emphasising both the sacred and public contexts of that consent:

Since it is your intention to enter into the covenant of Holy Matrimony,  
join your right hands and declare your consent

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through marriage women consent, on a continuing basis, to sex with their spouse. This no longer holds true in law across Australia and in many overseas jurisdictions.

<sup>252</sup> “According to the Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ’s grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church” (CCC 1623).

<sup>253</sup> In Eastern Rites the priest is regarded as minister of the sacrament as the priest’s blessing is understood to establish the marriage. See Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 91.

<sup>254</sup> Preparation for matrimony provides a pastoral opportunity to remind couples of this and other aspects of their rich baptismal endowment, particularly in relationship to matrimony: “Through Baptism, which is the Sacrament of faith, a man and a woman are once and for all incorporated into the covenant of Christ with the Church in such a way that their conjugal community is assumed into Christ’s charity and is enriched by the power of his sacrifice” (OCM2015-Aus 7).

<sup>255</sup> The Introduction decrees that: “Where there is a shortage of Priests and Deacons, the Diocesan Bishop can delegate laypersons to assist at Marriages ... A suitable layperson is to be selected, who is capable of giving instruction to those preparing to be married and able to perform the Marriage liturgy properly. The layperson asks for the consent of the spouses and receives it in the name of the Church” (OCM2015-Aus 25). This change, which enacts the revised Code of Canon Law, provides a possibility for a liturgical leadership role for women. This chapter “The Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the Presence of an Assisting Layperson” (Ch 3) is included in OCM2015-E+W but not in OCM2016-USA.

before God and his Church (OCM2015-Aus 95).

The language here of “covenant” and of “Holy Matrimony’ is an enrichment from RM1984-Aus’s “Since it is your intention to enter into marriage” (RM1984-Aus 45). The minister invites the couple to join their right hands. According to Turner the couple join their right hands “in a symbol of expressing their will to give themselves to each other.”<sup>256</sup> While holding right hands has a long biblical and secular history,<sup>257</sup> a richer symbol of the couple’s will to give themselves totally to each other may be shown by the contemporary preference of couples to hold both hands.<sup>258</sup> This potentially richer symbol should be considered for Australian inculturation.

The preference of OCM2015-Aus is that the consent be declared in a way that emphasises the ministerial roles of bride and groom.<sup>259</sup> Pastorally there is value in encouraging bride and groom to learn these words by heart so that they may declare them wholeheartedly. An alternative is for them to hold the Church’s ritual book and to proclaim the words in turn. The rubric states clearly and simply: “The bridegroom says” (OCM2015-Aus 96).

I, N., take you, N., to be my wife.  
I promise to be faithful to you.  
in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health,  
to love you and honour you  
all the days of my life (OCM2015-Aus 96).

The bride says:

I, N., take you, N., to be my husband ...

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<sup>256</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 89.

<sup>257</sup> The right hand is referred to in God’s covenant with God’s people: “For I the Lord your God, hold your right hand” (Is 41:13). Historically, Roman sarcophagi showing a man and a woman joining hands give evidence of their marriage. See Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 90.

<sup>258</sup> See Daniel McGrath, "Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant: A New Model for Pre-Marriage Education based upon the Rite of Marriage" (Master's Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2015), 133-34.

<sup>259</sup> The ministerial roles of bride and groom may be further emphasized if the presider leaves the sanctuary during the consent. This is possible as the rubrics do not stipulate where the presider should stand.

The emphasis here is upon accepting the gift of the other. Theologically this acknowledges that all of creation, including one's spouse, is gift. We are invited to accept God's gifts and to respond.

The only significant change from RM1984-Aus is the emphasis upon fidelity: "I promise to be *faithful* to you," from: "I promise to be *true* to you" (RM1984-Aus 45). True and faithful are synonyms, however faithful provides greater clarity in this covenantal context where the couple declare their consent before God who is faithful.<sup>260</sup> The term "faithful" also echoes the fact that matrimony is an act of faith which can only be enacted by those who live their baptismal faith.

OCM2015-Aus includes an alternative form of the declaration of consent which is not part of OCMLat-1990 nor OCMLat-1969. It was a special English language alternative included in RM1984-Aus. The alternative form derives from the Sarum Rite or Sarum Use, a version of the Roman Rite used at Salisbury Cathedral from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries and does not use the term "faithful" nor the term "promise".<sup>261</sup>

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 (OCM2015-Aus 96).

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<sup>260</sup> "True" has a diffuse range of meanings. Social psychology has identified with precision what being faithful means in long term relationships like matrimony: "trust, loyalty, and commitment are necessary for a long-term relationship to succeed (e.g., there will be no secrets, deceptions or betrayals)." John Mordechai Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," in *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, ed. Alan S. Gurman (New York: Guilford, 2015), 155.

<sup>261</sup> Searle and Stevenson cite the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Sarum Manual to show that a rich, public ceremony of consent (which took place at the Church door) had developed by that time. The bridegroom took the bride's hand as he pledged: "I, N., take the, N. to be my weddyd wyfe, to haue and to holde (from this day forward), for better for wurs, for richer for porer, in syckenes and in helthe tyll deth us departe." The bride then pledged with similar words. Mark Searle and Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 163.

There is a surprising omission in OCM2015-Aus, OCM2015-E+W and OCM2016-USA include an additional line:

in sickness and in health,  
**to love and to cherish**  
until death do us part (OCM2016-USA 96).<sup>262</sup>

Without this line there is no reference to love and honour/cherish in the alternative form of the declaration of consent. It is an omission which reduces the potential of the rite to teach the duties of the spouses. Love is emphasised in the first form: “to love you and honour you all the days of my life.” God’s love and the couple’s love are pervasive themes from the opening prayer “that they may be confirmed in love for one another” (OCM2015-Aus 89), to the blessing at the end of the celebration: “May God the eternal Father keep you of one heart in love for one another” (OCM2015-Aus 248). At the central moment of the liturgy, when the couple establish their matrimonial covenant by their declaration of their consent to accept the gift of each other, specific reference to love and to cherish is desirable if not essential.<sup>263</sup>

### 3.1.6 The Reception of the Consent

The reception of the consent contains one of the most significant changes in the revision and enrichment of the marriage rite after the Second Vatican Council. As Turner explains:

In the Roman Ritual of 1614, after the couple answered the question giving their consent, the priest asked them to join their hands. Then he said, “I join you together in matrimony. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” He could use other words according to a local rite. He then sprinkled the couple with blessed water. The priest had an active role in

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<sup>262</sup> In OCM2016-USA this addition was made at the suggestion of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. See Hilgartner and Merz, *Guide for Celebrating Matrimony*, 46.

<sup>263</sup> Loving and cherishing are foundational to matrimony: “Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between eros and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature” (Pope Benedict XVI, DCE 11).

commanding the joining of the couple's hands following their consent, and in declaring that he had joined them in matrimony.<sup>264</sup>

By removing the statement "I join you together in matrimony," the reform of the rite clarified the duties of the spouses and their ministering of the sacrament to each other. It is the couple who by their declarations of consent join themselves in matrimony. It is the couple themselves who will be invited to respond to the grace of the sacrament each day of their matrimonial life. It is the role of the minister to pray that God will bless and strengthen the consent that the couple have declared before the Church.

The minister assisting says:

May the Lord in his kindness strengthen the consent  
you have declared before the Church,  
and graciously bring to fulfillment his blessing within you.  
What God joins together, let no one put asunder (OCM2015-Aus 98).

OCM2015-Aus restores an alternative option for the reception of the consent which was missing from RM1984-Aus:

May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,  
the God who joined together our first parents in paradise  
strengthen and bless in Christ  
the consent you have declared before the Church,  
so that what God joins together, no one may put asunder (OCM2015-Aus 98).

The Jesus of the Gospel of Matthew teaches that God's reference to God's self as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob reveals that "He is God not of the dead, but of the living" (Mt 22:32). It is the God of the living who created marriage by joining Adam and Eve and it is the God of the living who is called upon to strengthen and bless in Christ the consent that this particular couple has declared before the Church.

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<sup>264</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 97-98.

### 3.1.7 The Blessing and Giving of Rings

In December 1563 the Council of Trent decided that it could not itself undertake the task of reforming the liturgical books and delegated that task to the pope. The *Misale Romanum* which contained the texts used in the celebration of the Mass appeared in 1570 yet Catholics had to wait until 1614 for the publication of the revised marriage rite. The *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 respected local rites and was designed to serve as a model for reform of those local rites: it was “less a nuptial liturgy than a formula for ensuring that all the conditions for a clearly valid marriage [were] met.”<sup>265</sup>

The revision included a blessing of *the* ring:

Bless, O Lord,  
this ring which we bless in your name,  
so that she who shall wear it,  
remaining totally faithful to her husband,  
may remain in peace and in your will,  
and live always in mutual charity.  
Through Christ ...<sup>266</sup>

In the post-Vatican II revisions of the *Ordo* the blessing and giving of rings occurs immediately after the central sacramental moment of the marriage liturgy, the Consent. The blessing and giving of rings involves a ritualization of the Consent, and it corresponds with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’s definition of a sacramental: “these are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments: they signify effects, particularly of a spiritual kind, which are obtained through the Church’s intercession. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy” (SC 60).<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 184.

<sup>266</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 186.

<sup>267</sup> Thomas Aquinas wrote that sacramentals (which he related to sacraments) are “a kind of disposition to the sacraments” (*STh* III q.65. a.1. ad 6). Celebrated well, the exchange of rings can contribute to a positive disposition of the couple and the assembly towards the entire sacramental event.



The rings as sacramentals are blessed. OCM2015-Aus has added sprinkling of the rings with blessed water as an option.<sup>268</sup> This option, which recalls baptism, further ritually enhances the blessing of the rings. The words of the Blessing: “May the Lord bless these rings which you will give to each other as a sign of love and fidelity” (OCM2015-Aus 100), and the words used by the couple indicate that this exchange is a sign of the promises made at the Consent: “N., receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity” (OCM2015-Aus 101). “Receive”, is an enrichment on the “take”, of the previous edition (RM1984-Aus 28); it indicates more clearly that love and fidelity, of which the rings are signs, are gifts offered by one’s spouse.

The Blessing and Giving of Rings is given inconsequential attention in the liturgy. It is not listed among the main elements of the celebration which are to stand out clearly (OCM2015-Aus 35). This represents a missed opportunity in the matrimonial liturgy. The blessing and giving of rings involve the exchange of a material substance that is both a fruit of the earth, and a work of human hands. This connection is not made in the preferred nor the optional blessings (OCM2015-Aus 100, 229, 230). Nor is a link made to salvation history, thus reducing the potential theological and liturgical richness of the blessing prayer. As Irwin explains in relation to the blessing of baptismal water:

When the prayer of blessing lyrically recounts how water has been used in salvation history as a rich symbol of God’s graciousness, what occurs here and now is that the contemporary community is drawn into the sweep of saving history in this act of blessing God. Blessing prayer thus reminds us of what God has done through these paradigmatic acts. They also thus remind us that this same God acts in these same ways here and now. Reliance on saving history reminds us that our own personal and collective histories are similarly blessed by God’s presence and action.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> In “The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage” the rings “may be honoured with an incensation” (OCM2015-Aus 278).

<sup>269</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 226.

The gifting of rings has an ancient origin. The Genesis account of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah records that Abraham's servant, seeking a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, gives Rebekah a gold ring and two gold bracelets (Gen 24:22). God promises Isaac that salvation will come through his descendants: "all the nations of the earth shall gain blessings for themselves through your offspring" (Gen 26:4). The couple celebrating their marriage are part of this great sweep of salvation history. A selection from this chapter (Gen 24:48-51, 58-67) is included in OCM2015-Aus and is designated as a reading that speaks explicitly of marriage. Salvation comes from God alone, yet God's salvation comes through a people, the people of Israel, and now through the Church as the People of God. Salvation is a process which continues. Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the couple celebrating marriage and their descendants are called to be part of the process that brings God's salvation to the world.

In Ezekiel 16, God is portrayed as a husband who seals the covenant with his bride Jerusalem by adorning her with jewels "I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head" (Ez 16:11-12). As scripture scholar Barbara Reid notes, in biblical times as now, rings were given "as signs of commitment and unending fidelity. Human pledges of enduring love symbolized in the exchange of rings are patterned after the utterly reliable promises fulfilled by the Holy One."<sup>270</sup> The underwhelming exchange of rings in OCM2015-Aus misses an opportunity to remind the bride and groom, and those celebrating with them, of this rich biblical legacy. However, OCM2015-Aus, like RM1984-Aus, does emphasise an *exchange* of rings (that is, both bride and groom receive a ring); it does not focus solely on adorning the female, rather it continues to highlight bride and groom as equal partners.

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<sup>270</sup> Barbara E. Reid, "What's Biblical about ... Rings?," *The Bible Today* 52, no. 5 (2014): 304.

### 3.1.8 The Universal Prayer

RM1984-Aus required that the prayer of the faithful used “formulas approved by conferences of bishops” (RM1984-Aus 29). Turner notes that “few if any conferences ever did this.”<sup>271</sup> This rubric has been removed from OCM2015-Aus. The revised rubrics are extensive with respect to the Universal Prayer:

- a) first, the minister says the invitation to prayer;
- b) the invocations of the Universal Prayer with the response of the faithful follow, but in such a way that the individual invocations should be consistent with the Nuptial Blessing yet should not duplicate it (OCM2015-Aus 103).

OCM2015-Aus provides appropriate models of the invitation, the invocation, and the response of the faithful to guide the couple (and those helping them to prepare their matrimonial liturgy), to craft their own prayers of the faithful. The models provided pray for the couple; their relatives, friends and all who have assisted them; for young people preparing for marriage; for families throughout the world; for family members who have died; and for the Church, the holy people of God (OCM2015-Aus 252).

Paul Covino observes that the “communitarian character” of the matrimonial liturgy required by OCM 28 has “by and large, remained an elusive goal in the celebration of marriage.”<sup>272</sup> Carefully crafted prayers of the faithful, proclaimed well, can invite the participation of the faithful and contribute to the communitarian character of the celebration.

After the Universal Prayer, the rubrics state: “If Holy Communion is not to be distributed, The Lord’s Prayer follows” (OCM2015-Aus 103c). The Lord’s Prayer is always said at matrimony without Mass providing an opportunity for more members of what is often a diverse assembly to participate.

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<sup>271</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 116.

<sup>272</sup> Paul Covino, “Christian Marriage: Sacramentality and Ritual Forms,” in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 109.

### 3.1.9 The Nuptial Blessing

In their historical study of the marriage liturgy, Mark Searle and Kenneth Stevenson found that two central, intertwined movements determine the clarity and the success of any Christian marriage rite: “Human resolve, on the one hand, expresses the commitment of the man and the woman to marry each other before God. Divine blessing, on the other hand embodies the fact that the couple seek God’s presence and strength.”<sup>273</sup> In the Consent the man and the woman express their commitment to marry each other before God. In the Nuptial Blessing they seek God’s presence and strength.

The earliest surviving texts of the marriage liturgy include Nuptial Blessings. The earliest comes from the *Veronense Sacramentary*, a 7<sup>th</sup> century collection which contains the variable parts of the Roman rite of the Mass liturgy. The formula of blessing begins with a reference to God as creator:

Father, creator of the world,  
you gave life to every living creature  
and commissioned [human beings] to multiply.  
With your own hands, you gave Adam a companion:  
bones grown from his bones, to signify identity of form  
yet wondrous diversity.  
Thus your command to share the marriage bed,  
to increase and multiply in marriage, has linked the whole world together  
and established ties among the whole human race.

Later in the blessing, reference is made to women of the Old Testament who played key roles in salvation history:

May she prove loving to her husband, like Rachel;  
wise, like Rebecca;  
long-lived and faithful, like Sarah.

The blessing ends with an eschatological note:

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<sup>273</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 1.

And may she come at last  
to enjoy the repose of the blessed  
and to the heavenly kingdom.<sup>274</sup>

The Nuptial Blessing options in OCM2015-Aus show similarities to, and differences from, this early text. Each begins by addressing God as creator:<sup>275</sup>

O God, who by your mighty power  
created all things out of nothing,  
and when you had set in place  
the beginnings of the universe, formed man and woman in your own image,  
making the woman an inseparable helpmate to the man,  
that they might no longer be two but one flesh,  
and taught that what you were pleased to make one  
must never be divided (OCM2015-Aus 105).

Each of the blessings ends on an eschatological note:

And grant that,  
reaching at last together the fullness of years  
for which they hope,  
they may come to the life of the blessed  
in the Kingdom of Heaven (OCM2015-Aus 105).

The 7<sup>th</sup> century text has an exclusive focus upon the bride:

May discipline lend strength to her frailty  
as she devoutly serves the living God.  
Loyal to one bed  
may she flee all unlawful relations.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 42-43.

<sup>275</sup> Links between the Nuptial Blessing and creation are examined more fully in Chapter Six.

<sup>276</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 43-44.

This focus reflects a cultural presupposition of the time; that is, that “God made man in his own image, whereas woman was made in the image of man: her weakness derives from the fact that she reflects the image of God only indirectly!”<sup>277</sup>

The Introduction to OCM2015-Aus classifies “the venerable prayer by which the blessing of God is invoked upon the bride and bridegroom” as a major element of the liturgy which is to stand out clearly during the celebration of marriage (OCM2015-Aus 35).<sup>278</sup> It reminds spouses of their equal obligations rectifying the corresponding statement in the previous edition which referred to “the special nuptial blessing *upon the bride*” (RM1984-Aus 6, emphasis added). OCM2015-Aus signifies more clearly the grace of the sacrament as it corrects a lacuna in the previous edition which did not include an invocation of the Holy Spirit. It adds an appropriate rubric to the blessing prayers: “the minister, standing and turned toward the bride and bridegroom, with hands extended over them, says the following prayer” (OCM2015-Aus 105).

The Introduction to OCM2015-Aus stresses the role of the Holy Spirit: through this sacrament the Holy Spirit brings it about that Christian spouses “strive to nurture and foster their union in equal dignity, mutual giving, and the undivided love that flows from the divine font of charity” (OCM2015-Aus 9).<sup>279</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental liturgies. It teaches that “the epiclesis is at the heart of each sacramental celebration, most especially of the Eucharist” (CCC 1106). However, while the introduction to OCM2015-Aus identifies the “venerable prayer by which the blessing of God is invoked upon the bride and bridegroom,” as one of the main elements of the

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<sup>277</sup> Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 41.

<sup>278</sup> Catholic weddings now always include the Nuptial Blessing. This represents another significant change from pre-conciliar practice where at times, for example, during Lent, the Nuptial Blessing was excluded.

<sup>279</sup> This is a significant enrichment: the Introduction to RM1984-Aus makes no mention of the role of the Holy Spirit.

celebration of marriage which is to stand out clearly, (OCM2015-Aus 35), the word epiclesis does not appear. In liturgical prayers the term “epiclesis” is usually restricted to the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the eucharistic prayer.

This difference in usage points to an important theological distinction. In an influential study Jean-Marie Tillard analysed the structure and contents of blessing prayers in the Church’s liturgy.<sup>280</sup> Tillard concluded that liturgical blessings are primarily concerned with consecrating persons and not things. It is basically only in the Eucharist that the epiclesis brings about a change in the nature of things, the bread and wine, justifying the restriction of the usage of the term “epiclesis” to this context.

Each of the Nuptial Blessings now includes an explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit. The minister, standing and turned toward the bride and bridegroom, with hands extended over them,<sup>281</sup> says a prayer which includes one of the following options: “Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit (OCM2015-Aus 105), “pour into their hearts the power of the Holy Spirit” (OCM2015-Aus 242), and “may the power of your Holy Spirit set their hearts aflame from on high” (OCM2015-Aus 244). Each option expresses faith in the transformative power of the Spirit. Christ’s Church petitions the Father to pour the power of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the bride and groom illustrating the Trinitarian nature of the liturgy: “the liturgy as initiated by, sustained in, and reaching its perfection through the Trinity.”<sup>282</sup>

The sequence of petitions in the Nuptial Blessing, which now more clearly remind both spouses of their equal obligations, is that the couple “may remain faithful in the marriage covenant”; that they may “bear true witness to Christ before all”; and only then, that they may

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<sup>280</sup> Jean-Marie Tillard, "Blessing, Scaramentality and Epiclesis," in *Blessing and Power*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985).

<sup>281</sup> With hands joined if the person assisting is a layperson (OCMAus-2015, 140).

<sup>282</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments," in *Preserving the Creation: Environmental Theology and Ethics*, ed. Kevin W. Irwin and Edmund D. Pellegrino (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 81.

“be blessed with children, and prove themselves virtuous parents” (OCM2015-Aus 105). Their fidelity to each other is the ground on which their witness to Christ will develop, and both their fidelity and witness will provide an appropriate basis for them to become co-creators of children.

The blessing emphasises that loving unity is a gift of the Spirit:

Pour into their hearts the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Grant, O Lord,  
that, as they enter upon this sacramental union,  
they may share with one another the gifts of your love  
and, by being for each other a sign of your presence,  
become one heart and one mind (OCM2015-Aus 242).

It acknowledges supernatural life and eschatological realities:

Grant, Holy Father,  
that desiring to approach your table  
as a couple joined in marriage in your presence,  
they may one day have the joy  
of taking part in your great banquet in heaven (OCM2015-Aus 242).

The Nuptial Blessing illustrates the potential of silence to contribute to the complexus of signs that comprise the sacred liturgy. Introducing the Nuptial Blessing the minister says:

Now let us humbly invoke God’s blessing  
upon this bride and groom,  
that in his kindness he may favour with his help  
those on whom he has bestowed the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The rubric states: “And all pray in silence for a while” (OCM2015-Aus 104; RM1984-Aus did not require silence at this point). As the assembly invokes God’s blessing and prays silently for this bride and groom the rite anticipates that they (the assembly) may come to experience our need for God and for one another in the *communio* of the Church, an experience



that allows the liturgy to “shape, form, and reform us in the numerous and varied ways that only the liturgy can do.”<sup>283</sup>

There is some debate about the placement of the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Adrien Nocent queries whether it really belongs in the blessing of the spouses which is not, strictly speaking, sacramental, and suggests that it be better placed in the consent which constitutes the sacrament in which the Spirit acts.<sup>284</sup> Conferences of Bishops have the freedom to change the order of the parts of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM2015-Aus 41.3). The Bishops of France, “one of the countries that has done the most experimentation with the marriage rites,”<sup>285</sup> have included an option to move the Nuptial Blessing to after the exchange of rings, thus bringing the invocation of the Holy Spirit closer to the consent which, potentially, signifies more clearly the grace of the sacrament.

### **3.1.10 The Conclusion of the Celebration**

The conclusion of the matrimonial liturgy varies depending upon whether Holy Communion is to be distributed. The distribution of Holy Communion is optional in the Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass. The common practice in Australia is for Holy Communion not to be distributed. If this is the case, then immediately after the Nuptial Blessing, the minister assisting blesses all present saying:

May almighty God bless all of you, who are gathered here,  
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (OCM2015-Aus 106).<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, lviii.

<sup>284</sup> Adrien Nocent, "The Christian Rite of Marriage in the West," ed. Anscar J. Chupungco, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies, Volume IV: Sacraments and Sacramentals* (2016), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=4573265>.

<sup>285</sup> Foley and Fragomeni, "The Marriage Rites:," 74.

<sup>286</sup> The rubrics and the text of the blessing are different if the person assisting is a layperson (OCMAus-2015 150).

The absence of rubrics for the dismissal represents a missed opportunity to strengthen the liturgy-life connection. The Mexican edition of the *Ordo* provides an appropriate model:

*The dismissal may be done with the following words that make evident the mission and marital witness in the church.*

Give witness in the Church and in the world; give the gift of life and love that you have celebrated.

In the peace of Christ, go to serve God and your brothers and sisters.<sup>287</sup>

The rubrics do note that “it is a praiseworthy practice to end the celebration with a suitable chant” (OCM2015-Aus 107). This praiseworthy practice is rarely observed at Australian weddings. Much work still needs to be done to meet the requirement that “the chants to be sung during the Rite of Marriage should be appropriate and should express the faith of the Church” (OCM2015-Aus 30).

### **3.1.11 Revision of the Church’s Ritual Books**

Liturgy is an act of theology through which we enter “into the otherness of the infinite and transcendent God through the very human means of texts and rites, words and gestures, speech and symbolic action, all involving the body and the human senses.”<sup>288</sup> Consequently, the adequacy of the Church’s selection of texts and actions in the revision of its rites is a matter for careful evaluation. Revision of a sacramental rite represents an attempt to respond to the decrees of SC, but also to changed cultural contexts like the widespread espousal of gender equity, and changed theological contexts like the implications of the revised Code of Canon

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<sup>287</sup> *Ritual del Matrimonio* (Mexico), cited in Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 265.

<sup>288</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 63.

Law and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.<sup>289</sup> The revised rite itself provides a new context within which the matrimonial liturgy is celebrated.

This chapter has presented a critique of the texts and actions of the second Australian edition of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. The evaluation criteria employed are those implicit in the decrees of SC; that is, to what extent is the new *Ordo* enriched to signify more clearly the grace of the sacrament and to teach the duties of the spouses? What emphasis is given to the Liturgy of the Word and the Nuptial Blessing? To what extent are both spouses reminded of their equal obligations? What evidence is there of inculturation?

In relation to the evaluation criteria implicit in the decrees of SC, enrichment to the texts of the rite has brought greater clarity to the grace of the sacrament and to the duties and equal obligations of the spouses. This is evident in the Introduction, in the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the bride and bridegroom, and in the emphasis given to the Liturgy of the Word and the Nuptial Blessing.

OCM2015-Aus might be further enhanced by enriching its actions particularly by bringing greater clarity to the entrance procession, by enhancing the exchange of rings, by underscoring the connection between baptism and matrimony, and by further highlighting the role of the couple as ministers of matrimony. Consideration might be given to the renewal of baptismal promises if the spouses are both baptized persons, and to lighting the paschal candle. Bishops in French speaking countries have used the flexibility encouraged by the *Ordo* to include an option for the couple to offer their own prayer before the prayer of the Faithful further accentuating their role as ministers of this sacrament.<sup>290</sup> OCM2015-Aus demonstrates little or no evidence of this flexibility, nor any evidence of inculturation.

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<sup>289</sup> Liturgy and theology have a symbiotic relationship: "There is a reciprocity between liturgy and theology that operates in ritual evolution ... in the sense that changed liturgical rites often reflect developments in theology and changed rites can (and should) influence theology." Irwin, *Context and Text*, 112.

<sup>290</sup> Foley and Fragomeni, "The Marriage Rites:," 75.

OCM2015-Aus was also enriched by the addition of five new scripture texts. Since sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy (SC 24), the next chapter appraises the new scripture texts that were added to the second edition.

## Chapter Four

### Scripture Readings Added to the Second Edition of the *Ordo*

The revised *Ordo* contains five additional scripture readings. This chapter evaluates the extent to which the matrimonial liturgy is enriched by these additions. The evaluation is again guided by criteria implicit in the decrees of SC: that is, to what extent is the revised *Ordo* enriched to signify more clearly the grace of the sacrament and to teach the duties of the spouses? What emphasis is given to the Liturgy of the Word? To what extent are both spouses reminded of their equal obligations? Since the Liturgy of the Word acts in concert with the other components of the liturgy (SC 24), a further criterion is relevant: that is, the degree of alignment between the events and ideas proclaimed in the scripture readings and the official meanings of the ritual texts and actions of OCM2015-Aus.<sup>291</sup> This criterion finds support in one of Jan Michael Joncas' principles of religious ritual: that is, "the communicative potential of religious ritual declines when official, public, and private meanings are in conflict or opposed."<sup>292</sup>

#### 4.1 The Liturgy of the Word in the Celebration of the Liturgy

Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged that the faithful are not always conscious of the connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament, and that the people of God need to be educated in the character of the God's word in the liturgy to allow them to make the fruitful connection between God's activity in salvation history and God's

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<sup>291</sup> This criterion is strictly applicable only to readings which speak explicitly of marriage; that is, in terms of additional scripture texts, the reading from Proverbs.

<sup>292</sup> J. Michael Joncas, "Ritual Transformations: Principles, Patterns, and Peoples," in *Toward Ritual Transformation: Remembering Robert W. Hovda* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2003), 54.

action in their individual lives.<sup>293</sup> He called for “a deeper investigation of the relationship between word and sacrament in the Church’s pastoral activity and in theological reflection” (VD 53). This section integrates some contemporary understandings of that relationship.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasises the importance of the Liturgy of the Word: “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 ... and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning” (SC 24).<sup>294</sup> To underscore the intimate connection between scripture and the Church’s rites SC required that “in sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy scripture, and it is to be more varied and *suitable*.” (SC 35.1, emphasis added).

The link between scripture and sacrament arises from the link between God’s word and God’s actions, a link which was emphasised in *Dei Verbum*. God’s plan of revelation “is realised by the deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and proclaim the mystery contained in them” (DV 2).

This inner unity of words and actions is emphasised in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:3). There is no separation between what God says and what God does: the word of God is active, it is creative, it is performative. Pope Benedict XVI emphasised the performative nature of the word of God: “the relationship between word and sacramental gesture is the liturgical expression of

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<sup>293</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini: On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2022 (2010), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html), (hereafter VD), article 53.

<sup>294</sup> Vatican II saw the promotion of scripture as fundamental to the reform of the liturgy: “to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony” (SC 24).

God's activity in the history of salvation through the *performative character* of the word itself" (VD 53, emphasis original).

Irwin illuminates the performative character of the scriptures when they are proclaimed in the liturgy, explaining that:

They "perform," "enact," and "do" the saving things among us that they describe. When the Scriptures are proclaimed in the liturgy, that proclamation joins us to the events or ideas they are recounting. They are always "symbolic" - the Greek verb *sympallein* means "to throw together" or "to put in a relationship" ... The proclamation of the word is a highly *symbolic* action.<sup>295</sup>

The proclamation of the scriptures in the liturgy is symbolic in the original sense of that term. Full, conscious, active participants in the liturgy are joined to the saving events or ideas proclaimed. The contribution that silence can make to the symbolic action of the proclamation of the word is underlined in the *Lectionary*,<sup>296</sup> the GIRM,<sup>297</sup> and the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.<sup>298</sup> Silence affords participants an opportunity to be embraced by, and to embrace, the word.

In the sacramental celebrations, as the reforms of Vatican II attest, liturgical word and liturgical action are inseparable, for both are part of God's creative word enacted in the

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<sup>295</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 252-53. Emphasis original.

<sup>296</sup> "The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation ... The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer. Proper times for silence during the liturgy of the word are, for example, before this liturgy begins, after the first and the second reading, after the homily." Catholic Church, *Lectionary: General Introduction*, (provided by the Liturgy Office England & Wales), <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/Lectionary.pdf>, article 28.

<sup>297</sup> "During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, adapted to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared" (GIRM 56).

<sup>298</sup> "The Liturgy of the Word is a crucial element in the celebration of each of the sacraments of the church; it does not consist simply in a series of readings one after the other; it ought to involve as well periods of silence and of prayer." Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), [https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm), Section IV.

sacrament as unified word-act: “the liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship” (SC 56). The reforms of SC brought this unity to all sacramental celebrations.

This intimate connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the sacramental liturgy is a relatively recent development. Karl Rahner notes that from Augustine until Vatican II the emphasis in Roman Catholic sacramental theology was upon the differentiation, rather than the integration, of word and sacrament: “the only task for theology [was] to work out the difference between sacrament and word as clearly as possible.”<sup>299</sup> That differentiation showed in the sacramental liturgies of the time: it was not until the 1969 *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium* that word and sacrament were integrated in the marriage liturgy. With that reform, the couple exchanged their consent immediately after they heard the word of God proclaimed and preached.

The unity of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament has progressed strongly since the Second Vatican Council. Louis-Marie Chauvet constructs his sacramental theology on the intimate connection between scripture, sacraments, and ethics: “there is something sacramental about the Scriptures, in the sense that they are the sacrament of the word of God, and that, conversely, the sacraments of faith exist only as the crystallization of this word.”<sup>300</sup> Chauvet’s metaphor of the sacraments as the crystallization of the word of God with its connotation of purification, solidification, and manifestation shows clearly the ineluctable link between the two.

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<sup>299</sup> Karl Rahner, “What is a Sacrament?,” in *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976), 137.

<sup>300</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2001), 43.



Irwin has made the critical connection between the sacramental-liturgical experience, reflection upon that experience, and the everyday life of the individual or couple: he links *lex vivendi* to *lex orandi, lex credendi*.<sup>301</sup> Chauvet's sacramental theology focusses more distinctly on the place of scriptures in this linkage: sacraments are essentially the symbolic expression of the passage from the scriptures to ethics.<sup>302</sup>

The linkage between scriptures and ethics is implicit in the matrimonial liturgy. The first of the Nuptial Blessings prays:

And now, Lord, we implore you:  
may these your servants  
hold fast to the faith and keep your commandments;  
made one in the flesh,  
may they be blameless in all they do;  
and with the strength that comes from the Gospel  
may they be true witnesses to Christ before all (OCM2015-Aus 105).

In matrimony, the strength that comes from the Gospel informs the ethical action of the spouses to one another, and in ever widening circles beyond them, so that they become true witnesses to Christ.

These developing understandings of the nexus between word and actions in the sacramental liturgies allow David Power to affirm that the principle that word and rite belong together in constituting a sacrament is taken as *foundational* in contemporary sacramental theology.<sup>303</sup> This principle requires a wholistic approach to word and rite; that is, it requires studying "the relation between Word proclaimed, prayers of blessing, and ritual action, rather

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<sup>301</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 91.

<sup>302</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 66.

<sup>303</sup> This principle expresses a twentieth century elaboration in sacramental theology which emerged in response to the neo-Scholastic mechanistic and atomistic emphasis upon matter and form in relation to the requirements for valid celebration; the reformers' (particularly Luther's) emphasis upon the Word of God and of faith; and a growing understanding of the inseparability of sacraments and their liturgical celebration.

than isolating a consideration of matter and form from the celebration as a whole.”<sup>304</sup> The additional scripture readings in OCM2015-Aus need to be considered, not in isolation, but rather in their relationship to the other elements of the rite.

## 4.2 The Word of God in the Sacrament of Matrimony

In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict stressed the importance of the word of God in the sacrament of matrimony: “it must never be forgotten that the word of God is at the very origin of marriage (cf. Gen 2:24) and that Jesus himself made marriage one of the institutions of his Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:4-8), elevating to the dignity of a sacrament what was inscribed in human nature from the beginning.” (VD 85).<sup>305</sup>

The Introduction to OCM2015-Aus also stresses the importance of the Liturgy of the Word as one of the main elements of the celebration of matrimony. This section of the liturgy is to “stand out clearly,” as the Liturgy of the Word expresses “the importance of Christian marriage in the history of salvation and the functions and duties of marriage to be attended to for the sanctification of the spouses and their children” (OCM2015-Aus 35). OCM2015-Aus appropriately requires that the engaged couple should choose the readings from sacred scripture for their marriage liturgy with their pastor (OCM2015-Aus 29);<sup>306</sup> that at least one reading that explicitly speaks of marriage must be chosen (OCM2015-Aus 55);<sup>307</sup> and that in his homily the minister is required to use the sacred text “to expound the Mystery of Christian Marriage, the

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<sup>304</sup> David N. Power, "Sacraments in General," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress 2011), 479-80.

<sup>305</sup> The word of God at the origin of marriage in Genesis 1 and 2 is explored in Chapter Five.

<sup>306</sup> Involving the engaged couples in the choice of readings provides them with the opportunity to select readings that are suitable for their marriage liturgy, that speak to them and to those that they invite to that liturgy.

<sup>307</sup> OCM2015-Aus 55 also strengthens the requirement that during Easter Time, if there are to be three readings, the first reading should be from the Book of Revelation rather than from the Old Testament.

dignity of conjugal love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people” (OCM2015-Aus 57).

### **4.3 Linking Word and Sacrament**

The Liturgy of the Word is a central element in the sacramental celebration of matrimony as it is a highly symbolic action. As outlined above, “when the Scriptures are proclaimed in the liturgy, that proclamation joins us to the events or ideas they are recounting.”<sup>308</sup> The homily is a critical component of the Liturgy of the Word in helping to join bride, bridegroom and the whole assembly to the events or ideas proclaimed in the Scriptures.<sup>309</sup> Irwin notes that, in the celebration of the sacraments, the homily “often acts as a bridge between scriptural words and enacted rites that follow.”<sup>310</sup> Elsewhere he is more specific calling for evaluation of “how well homilies relate the Scripture readings with the sacramental acts that accompany them. Are Word and sacrament experienced as and perceived to be correlative?”<sup>311</sup> Applying Irwin’s method to matrimonial liturgies the question becomes: do homilies contain any reference to the intrinsic connection between scriptures proclaimed and the sacramental acts that accompany them, particularly exchange of consent?

### **4.4 The Scripture Texts Listed in OCM2015-Aus**

OCM2015-Aus identifies scripture texts that explicitly speak of matrimony and requires that at least one of these texts must always be chosen for proclamation in the liturgical

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<sup>308</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 253.

<sup>309</sup> “The minister in the homily uses the sacred text to expound the mystery of Christian marriage, the dignity of conjugal love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people” (OCM2015-Aus 91).

<sup>310</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 257.

<sup>311</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "Liturgical Theology," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990), 731.

celebration (OCM2015-Aus 55). Table 4.1 lists texts to be used in celebrating matrimony, with those that explicitly speak of marriage shown in bold.

**Table 4.1. Texts to be used in the celebration of marriage (\*Readings that explicitly speak of marriage shown in bold, (OCM2015-Aus 179-222)<sup>312</sup>**

Readings from the Old Testament	Readings from the New Testament	Gospel Readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Genesis 1:26-28, 31*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>Genesis 2:18-24*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>Tobit 7:6-14*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>Tobit 8:4-8*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31*</b></li> <li>❖ Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16; 8:6-7</li> <li>❖ <b>Sirach 26: 1-4, 16-21*</b></li> <li>❖ Jeremiah 31: 31-32a, 33-34a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Romans 8: 31b-35, 37-39</li> <li>❖ Romans 12: 1-2, 9-18 (or 12: 1-2, 9-13)</li> <li>❖ Romans 15: 1b-3a, 5-7, 13</li> <li>❖ First Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20</li> <li>❖ First Corinthians 12:31 - 13:8a</li> <li>❖ Ephesians 4:1-6</li> <li>❖ <b>Ephesians 5: 2a, 21-33* (or 5:2a, 25-32)</b></li> <li>❖ Philippians 4: 4-9</li> <li>❖ Colossians 3: 12-17</li> <li>❖ Hebrews 13: 1-4a, 5-6b</li> <li>❖ <b>1 Peter 3: 1-9*</b></li> <li>❖ 1 John 3: 18-24</li> <li>❖ 1 John 4: 7-12</li> <li>❖ Revelation 19: 1, 5-9a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Matthew 5: 1-12a</li> <li>❖ Matthew 5: 13-16</li> <li>❖ Matthew 7: 21, 24-29 (or 7: 21,24-25)</li> <li>❖ <b>Matthew 19: 3-6*</b></li> <li>❖ Matthew 22: 35-40</li> <li>❖ <b>Mark 10: 6-9*</b></li> <li>❖ <b>John 2: 1-11*</b></li> <li>❖ John 15: 9-12</li> <li>❖ John 5: 12-16</li> <li>❖ John 17: 20-26 (or 17: 20-23)</li> </ul>

#### 4.5 Scripture Texts Added in the 1990 Revision

Five new readings were added in the 1990 revision of the rite, one Old Testament reading and four from the New Testament. These additional readings are shown in relation to those retained from the 1969 edition in Table 4.2 below:

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<sup>312</sup> Responsorial Psalms are not included in this table. The pericope from Ps 127 (128) is also designated as a reading that explicitly speaks of Marriage (OCM2015-Aus 206).

**Table 4.2. Texts to be used in the Rite of Marriage (new readings shown in bold)**

Readings from the Old Testament	Readings from the New Testament	Gospel Readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Genesis 1:26-28, 31*</li> <li>❖ Genesis 2:18-24*</li> <li>❖ Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67*</li> <li>❖ Tobit 7:6-14*</li> <li>❖ Tobit 8:4-8*</li> <li>❖ <b>Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31*</b></li> <li>❖ Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16; 8:6-7</li> <li>❖ Sirach 26: 1-4, 16-21*</li> <li>❖ Jeremiah 31: 31-32a, 33-34a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Romans 8: 31b-35, 37-39</li> <li>❖ Romans 12: 1-2, 9-18 (or 12: 1-2, 9-13)</li> <li>❖ <b>Romans 15: 1b-3a, 5-7, 13</b></li> <li>❖ First Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20</li> <li>❖ First Corinthians 12:31 - 13:8a</li> <li>❖ <b>Ephesians 4:1-6</b></li> <li>❖ Ephesians 5: 2a, 21-33* (or 5:2a, 25-32)</li> <li>❖ <b>Philippians 4: 4-9</b></li> <li>❖ Colossians 3: 12-17</li> <li>❖ <b>Hebrews 13: 1-4a, 5-6b</b></li> <li>❖ 1 Peter 3: 1-9*</li> <li>❖ 1 John 3: 18-24</li> <li>❖ 1 John 4: 7-12</li> <li>❖ Revelation 19: 1, 5-9a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Matthew 5: 1-12a</li> <li>❖ Matthew 5: 13-16</li> <li>❖ Matthew 7: 21, 24-29 (or 7: 21,24-25)</li> <li>❖ Matthew 19: 3-6*</li> <li>❖ Matthew 22: 35-40</li> <li>❖ Mark 10: 6-9*</li> <li>❖ John 2: 1-11*</li> <li>❖ John 15: 9-12</li> <li>❖ John 5: 12-16</li> <li>❖ John 17: 20-26 (or 17: 20-23)</li> </ul>

\*Readings that explicitly speak of marriage

#### 4.5.1 Additional New Testament Readings

Readings that do not explicitly speak of marriage are included in the Liturgy of the Word because they do speak of living the Christian life. Scripture scholar Robert Morgan maintains that Paul’s enduring legacy stems from his insistence that the Spirit of God guides a Christian life “summed up in the dialectic of freedom and service ... in faith, hope and above all love.”<sup>313</sup> Readings which express Paul’s enduring legacy are completely appropriate for the matrimonial liturgy which accentuates the free choice (“have you come here to enter into marriage ... freely and wholeheartedly?”) to serve one’s spouse (“are you prepared ... to love

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<sup>313</sup> Robert Morgan, "Paul's Enduring Legacy," in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, ed. James Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 253.

and honour each other for as long as you both shall live?")<sup>314</sup> in matrimony which is a sacrament of "faith hope and above all love."

#### 4.5.2 Romans 15: 1b-3a, 5-7, 13

Commentators often characterise Romans 1–11 as "theology," and 12:1–15:13 as "ethics," or more helpfully "embodying the gospel" or becoming a living witness.<sup>315</sup> The reading from Romans 15 exhorts hearers to think of their "neighbours and help them to become stronger Christians" (15:3); it emphasizes perseverance and tolerance: "And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus" (15:5);<sup>316</sup> and prays that, "the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove by faithful love all bounds to hope" (15:13).

This reading resonates with themes that have found continuing prominence in Church teaching on matrimony. A primary duty of matrimony is that of helping one's spouse, who is also one's neighbour, and with whom, one comprises a domestic church (LG 11), to become a better Christian. *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). Pope Francis takes up this theme, and the other themes presented in Romans 15, in *Amoris Laetitia*. Foundational to the personal growth which occurs

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<sup>314</sup> The minister addresses these questions to the bride and groom immediately after the Word has been proclaimed and preached and immediately before the central sacramental moment of the liturgy, the Consent (OCM2015-Aus 94).

<sup>315</sup> See Charles Cousar, "Romans," ed. David Petersen and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The New Interpreter's® Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), <https://ezproxy.acu.edu.au/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=857358&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>316</sup> The significance to matrimony of tolerance as active acceptance of the otherness of one's spouse, is developed further in Chapter Five below.

within marriage is growth in the spouses' Christianity: "the gift of God's love poured out upon the spouses is also a summons to growth in grace" (AL 134).

#### **4.5.3 Ephesians 4:1-6**

The author's purpose in this text is to build unity in the church at Ephesus. The call for unity in the church is grounded in a shared faith and a shared baptism just as matrimonial unity is ideally grounded in a shared faith and a shared baptism.<sup>317</sup> This text also speaks of timeless marital themes of selflessness, unity, hope, and openness to living a Christian life guided by the Spirit: "Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called" (Eph 4: 2-4). The elements which build the communion of the faithful in the church also build the communion of the spouses in matrimony.

#### **4.5.4 Philippians 4: 4-9**

Paul's letter to the Philippians is the most joyful letter of the Pauline corpus.<sup>318</sup> This pericope with its opening verse: "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness" (4:4), is an appropriate addition to OCM2015-Aus considering the festive character of the celebration of this sacrament. Like the text from Romans, it exhorts tolerance: "Let your tolerance be evident to everyone" (4:5). It also encourages positivity which

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<sup>317</sup> "By means of baptism, man and woman are definitively placed within the new and eternal covenant, in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church. And it is because of this indestructible insertion that the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator, is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power" (FC 13).

<sup>318</sup> "In this short letter, the apostle mentions some form of rejoicing or joy at least sixteen times." Carla Swafford Works, "Philippians," ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *The Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (London: SPCK, 2014), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=1717457>.

is important not only in the church community but also to the spousal relationship:<sup>319</sup> “Finally, brothers [sic],<sup>320</sup> fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” (Phil 4:5-8).

#### 4.5.5 Hebrews 13: 1-4a, 5-6b

In this pericope from Hebrews, the author outlines ethical principles foundational to the development, growth, and cohesion of a Christian community:<sup>321</sup> “Continue to love each other like brothers [sic],<sup>322</sup> and remember always to welcome strangers ... Keep in mind those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body. Marriage is to be honoured by all ... God himself has said: I will not fail you or desert you” (13:1-5). The virtues that are promoted to build the Christian community – hospitality, compassion, chastity, eschewal of greed, and hope – are wholly relevant to the matrimonial liturgy wherein the spouses form a new Christian community, a community that images the formation of the first Christian communities under the power of the Spirit.<sup>323</sup>

The New Testament readings added to the second edition explore the virtues that guide the Christian life and build the Christian community. Except for some unfortunate gendered language noted above, they emphasize equality, mutuality, and remind both spouses of their equal obligations. They are appropriate, enriching additions to OCM2015-Aus.

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<sup>319</sup> The contribution that positivity can make to the matrimonial relationship is examined in Chapter Seven below.

<sup>320</sup> NRSV has “Finally, beloved ...”

<sup>321</sup> R. McL Wilson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 240.

<sup>322</sup> NRSV has “Let mutual love continue.”

<sup>323</sup> See Fiorenza, “Marriage,” 604-05.



## 4.6 A Reading from the Book of Proverbs

The reading from the book of Proverbs is significant in that it is the only Old Testament reading added during the 1990 revision, and the only new reading adjudged to speak explicitly of marriage. A close analysis reveals that this text may be a problematic inclusion in the matrimonial liturgy.

### 4.6.1 The Text

A perfect wife – who can find her?  
She is far beyond the price of pearls.  
Her husband’s heart has confidence in her,  
from her he will derive no little profit.  
Advantage and not hurt she will bring him  
all the days of her life.  
She is always busy with wool and with flax,  
she does her work with eager hands.  
She sets her hands to the distaff,  
her fingers grasp the spindle.  
She holds out her hands to the poor,  
she opens her arms to the needy.  
Charm is deceitful, and beauty empty;  
the woman who is wise is the one to praise.  
Give her a share in what her hands have worked for,  
and let her works tell her praises at the city gates.  
(OCM2015-Aus 184, Jerusalem Bible translation).

### 4.6.2 The World of the Text

The introduction to the Book of Proverbs attributes the book to Solomon: “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel” (Prov 1:1). The consensus of commentators is that in attributing Proverbs to Solomon the author(s) of the text intended that readers should accept the wisdom in Proverbs as equivalent to that of Solomon. The declared purpose of the book is educational: “to teach knowledge and prudence to the young” (Prov 1:4). It presents the advice of both parents to their son. Proverbs aims to teach an Israelite boy to “build the house of his life in wisdom, and the poem of womanly wisdom provides a living demonstration of the place

a wise woman might have in that project.”<sup>324</sup> Proverbs’ final poem (10:10-31) makes an important completion to the basic house-building metaphor for wisdom: the young male has almost completed construction of his house and the wise woman represents one final adornment. To emphasise the value of this adornment the text provides the most extensive description of the worth and roles of a perfect wife in the whole of the Old Testament.<sup>325</sup>

The subject of this text is described as a perfect wife (a worthy wife, NRSV) but more often as a virtuous woman (KJV), a woman of worth,<sup>326</sup> a woman of substance,<sup>327</sup> a woman of strength,<sup>328</sup> a noble woman.<sup>329</sup> It has been observed that “the Hebrew Bible is a book that was primarily written by men, for men, and about men, and thus the biblical text is not particularly forthcoming when it comes to the lives and experiences of women.”<sup>330</sup> This text is exceptional in that it provides some detail of the life and experience of a noble woman of the time. Applying a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion to this text, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza finds that it exemplifies the rule that “the formal canons of codified patriarchal law are generally more restrictive than the actual interaction and relationship of women and men and the social interaction they govern.”<sup>331</sup> Thus, while women were categorised with children and

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<sup>324</sup> Alan Moss, *Proverbs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 150.

<sup>325</sup> Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 54.

<sup>326</sup> Raymond Apple, "The Two Wise Women of Proverbs Chapter 31," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2011): 178.

<sup>327</sup> Christine Roy Yoder, "Proverbs," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 241.

<sup>328</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10 - 31* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 888.

<sup>329</sup> Tremper Longman, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 539.

<sup>330</sup> Susan Ackerman, "Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible," ed. John Barton, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.45>.

<sup>331</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1995), 108-09.

slaves for religious purposes in rabbinic Judaism, the economic initiative and business acumen of the “good wife” in this text are taken for granted.

In traditional Jewish sources, there are three dominant understandings of the woman described in the poem. She represents Jewish womanhood, she is the paradigm of the wife who is her husband’s support and help, or she is a symbol of wisdom.<sup>332</sup>

#### **4.6.3 The World in Front of the Text**

The bride and groom and the family members and friends that they invite to their matrimonial liturgy are the audience of this text today. In Australia, the median age at marriage for males in 2019 was 32.3 years, and the median age at marriage for females was 30.5 years.<sup>333</sup> Typically, they were born in the 1980’s into a society which proclaimed gender equality: the federal Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act was introduced in 1986 to promote equal employment opportunity for women. Traditional male breadwinner arrangements have declined since the 1960s and by 2012 both partners of couple families in Australia were likely to be employed.<sup>334</sup>

The religious education of Roman Catholic couples presenting for marriage was influenced by the Second Vatican Council’s definition of marriage as an intimate partnership of life and love (GS 48). This teaching, as theologically developed, has presented couples with the vision of the marriage ideal as “an equal communion of loving partnership in which each

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<sup>332</sup> Apple, "The Two Wise Women of Proverbs Chapter 31," 179.

<sup>333</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2019*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release>.

<sup>334</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia, 2012*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1301.0Main+Features452012>.

seeks the good of the other and both share in serving family and community”.<sup>335</sup> The actions and signs of the marriage liturgy, which stem from the Roman Catholic understanding of the couple themselves as the ministers of the sacrament, particularly the preferred entrance procession (where the couple enters together preceded by the priest), and preference for the declarative forms of the consent and the exchange of rings, highlight the fundamental equality of bride and groom.

A contradiction with this emphasis upon equality arises from the Proverbs text in its overwhelming emphasis upon the bride, and its presentation of a long-discarded paradigm of the ideal wife as her husband’s support and help while it is silent on a similar role for the husband.<sup>336</sup> To many hearers today, the text’s dominant message is patriarchal and patronising of women. Biblical scholar Christine Roy Yoder comments:

Most women regard the “woman of substance” as a mixed blessing. Aspects of her depiction reinforce the values and customs of a patriarchal culture. The poet objectifies her, describing her as something to be found and purchased ... she is desirable for the “loot” – the imported delicacies, real estate, money and status – she brings her husband ... while some women say they know a “woman of substance,” far more consider her a “superwoman” – another unrealistic and dehumanising depiction of women created to entice and promote the values of men.<sup>337</sup>

This text’s reinforcement of the values of an ancient patriarchal culture conflicts with the current Roman Catholic understanding of marriage as a radically equal partnership. It does not remind both spouses of their equal obligations. The ideas proclaimed in this text conflict

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<sup>335</sup> 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), 68.

<sup>336</sup> Perhaps to redress this imbalance the bishops’ conference of French Canada, which has published its own wedding lectionary suggesting appropriate psalms with specific readings, pairs the Proverbs reading with Psalm 112 (OCM 205). See Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 225.

<sup>337</sup> Yoder, "Proverbs," 241.

with the official meanings of the rite resulting, according to Joncas' principle, in a potential decline in the communicative potential of the marriage liturgy.<sup>338</sup>

#### 4.6.4 The Inclusion of the Proverbs Pericope in OCM2015-Aus

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* decreed that the marriage rite was 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) Consequently a study group, assisted by another group tasked to advise on scripture readings, was established to revise the rite.

Turner's research reveals the background to the inclusion of this reading from Proverbs. The text was part of the scripture study group's initial recommended list of readings, but it was not accepted for the first edition (OCM1969-Lat). It appears for the first time in the second edition (OCM1990-Lat).<sup>339</sup> It is interesting to speculate as to why this text was rejected for the first revision of the rite. Perhaps the study group charged with the revision of the rite were more acutely aware of SC's requirement that the duties of the *spouses* were to be taught while this text concentrates on a patriarchal culture's perception of the duties of only one spouse, the bride. Perhaps the study group could find little in this text that related to the grace of the sacrament which is primarily intended "to strengthen the couple's love" (CCC 1641). While conjugal love is emphasised in Chapter 5 of Proverbs, it is absent from Proverbs 31:10-31. Amy Plantinga-Pauw explains that "Life with the Woman of Substance seems devoid of the marital passion advertised in Proverbs 5:15-20. Her husband hardly seems 'intoxicated always by her love' (5:19a). Indeed, she seems to have little time for him."<sup>340</sup> Perhaps in the heyday of the women's movement the study group was more sensitive to the patriarchal values

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<sup>338</sup> Joncas, "Ritual Transformations," 54.

<sup>339</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 227.

<sup>340</sup> Amy Plantinga-Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 134.

expressed in the text. One might suspect then that this text was accepted for the 1990 revision of the rite because it aligned well with emphasis upon the differentiated complementarity of women and men which Pope John Paul II promoted between 1979 and 1984.

There are positive elements of the text. Pope Francis observes that, from the very first pages of the Bible work is presented as an essential part of human dignity, and that this text presents the dignity of “the labour of mothers within the family” (AL 24). Perhaps it was included to increase respect for the work of wives and mothers in traditional societies. The heading given to this reading (*Give her a share in what she has worked for*) suggests a plea for more equitable treatment of women.<sup>341</sup> Pope Francis notes that while there have been significant advances in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done (AL 54).

In addition, the perfect wife’s marriage is not narrowly focussed upon herself, her husband, and her domestic life. She hears, and responds generously to the cry of the poor: “She holds out her hands to the poor, she opens her arms to the needy” (31:20). The text speaks explicitly of marriage in highlighting the family and the social responsibilities of marriage, yet it does so by focussing only upon one of the spouses rather than both.

The revised *Ordo* makes a significant change in its first paragraph emphasising that the matrimonial covenant “derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1). This proclamation and a recovery of creation in scripture studies may have also influenced the inclusion of this text in OCM1990-Lat.<sup>342</sup> Proverbs contributes to Wisdom literature’s celebration of God’s loving, creating, and sustaining the world by drawing on female imagery

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<sup>341</sup> The heading to each text is “chosen carefully (usually from the words of the text itself) in order to point out the main theme of the reading.” *Lectionary: General Introduction*, article 123.

<sup>342</sup> See Chapter Five below.

of the divine.<sup>343</sup> Whenever God creates, Woman Wisdom was there (8 :27). Proverbs 31:10-31, in presenting a human embodiment of what it means to be wise, suggests to scripture scholar Terence Fretheim that the “powerless,” unpretentious way in which women worked in ancient Israelite culture might be an essential element in how wisdom is to be characterised: “The image of the ‘Woman/Wife of worth’ in Prov 31:10-31 is a supreme embodiment of such wisdom. Might a right definition of power be at stake in the use of female imagery for wisdom? The power of wisdom is a power in, with, and under rather than power over; it is a power that is committed to the dynamics of genuine relationship.”<sup>344</sup> This is the kind of wisdom that is revealed in creation and the Incarnation; the kind of wisdom that sets the ideal for matrimony.<sup>345</sup>

Finally, the house building metaphor of Proverbs has current relevance to marriage. The research-based “Sound Relationship House Theory”, developed by psychologists John and Julie Gottman, is used widely in both relationship education and couple therapy.<sup>346</sup> Planning and building a house together is utilised as a metaphor for building a positive and lasting relationship. The emphasis is upon both partners working together to strengthen trust and commitment and ultimately, to create shared meaning. Building marriage’s house of wisdom requires joint planning and construction. It is an edifice that the spouses design and construct together. It is an edifice that requires constant maintenance and repair, and it is the life-long partnership of working together on this task that builds matrimonial wisdom, that makes marriage a pathway to holiness.

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<sup>343</sup> See Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 141.

<sup>344</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 210-11.

<sup>345</sup> This argument is developed in Chapter Five.

<sup>346</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 132.

#### 4.6.5 The Proverbs Pericope: An Inappropriate Addition?

This Proverbs text also appears in the Church's *Lectionary for Mass*, as the first reading for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. Its link there to the Gospel, (Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents), seems to emphasise the woman's diligence, persistence, and dynamism prompted by her fear (respect) of the Lord. The responsorial psalm, the Church's prayerful response to the first reading, tends to confirm this view: "Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways!" (Ps 128:1).

In the context of the Sunday liturgy, Australian scripture scholar, Brendan Byrne, cautions against making links to marriage. The text, he writes, "hardly escapes the prevailing Old Testament sense of a wife as basically the possession of her husband, whose honour is at stake in all that she says and does. The stress upon industry and competence, the negative remarks about charm and beauty, show up the absence of any positive evaluation of sexuality in a way that a sacramental sense of marriage could build upon."<sup>347</sup>

If Byrne is correct, and it is not possible to build a sacramental sense of marriage upon this text in the Sunday Liturgy, how can it be possible to do so in the matrimonial liturgy, where building a sense of sacramental marriage is a primary intention? This is not to deny the principle that the same text may be interpreted differently in different liturgical contexts,<sup>348</sup> but rather to claim that the culturally limited, one-sided description of spousal roles in this text would make it difficult for couples who present for marriage in the contemporary Australian cultural milieu to respond to the text with assent and appropriation.

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<sup>347</sup> "Homily notes: 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 19 November ", 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://australiancatholics.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=54322#>.

<sup>348</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 207.



It seems unlikely that many contemporary Australian couples and their pastors would choose this reading for their marriage liturgy.<sup>349</sup> Sacraments “not only presuppose faith, but by words and ritual elements they also nourish, strengthen and express faith” (SC 59). The ritual elements of the marriage liturgy emphasize oneness, equality, and mutuality. The words of the New Testament readings added in the latest revision of the rite also emphasize these ideals, the words of Proverbs 31:10-31 do not. This text fails to teach the duties of the spouses and particularly to remind both spouses of their equal obligations.

#### 4.7 A Significant Omission

Recent exegesis of the letters of Paul indicates that there is at least one significant omission from the set of readings shown in Table 1. Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians 7 is a text which has been frequently used through the long history of Western matrimonial liturgies.<sup>350</sup> It is a text which speaks explicitly of marriage; the NRSV chapter heading reads “Directions concerning Marriage;” in commentary the chapter has been classified as “Concerning Marriage and Sexual Relations;”<sup>351</sup> and it is a text which emphasises the mutuality and equality of Christian spouses.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Such a choice accords with the general principles listed in the introduction to the *Lectionary*: “When a choice is allowed between alternative texts ... the first consideration must be the best interests of those taking part ... The issue may arise when it is feared that some text will create difficulties for a particular congregation.” *Lectionary: General Introduction*, Article 81. For some congregations in some cultures the ideas expressed in this text may represent an advance in the emancipation of women.

<sup>350</sup> 1 Cor 7:1-10 and Matt 19:1-6 are the New Testament texts which have been utilised most frequently in Western marriage rites through the ages. See Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 4.

<sup>351</sup> Maria A Pascuzzi, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," ed. Daniel Durkin, *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2009), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/reader.action?docID=4837474&ppg=2>.

<sup>352</sup> OCM2015-Aus refers to 1 Corinthians 7 twice (footnotes 14 and 18) in developing its introductory section on the Importance and Dignity of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

In this text Paul responds to a maxim that the Corinthians have conveyed to him; “It is well for a man not to touch a woman” (7:1). The maxim is framed in patriarchal terms; it concerns the behaviour of men. Paul’s response to this assertion is direct, unambiguous, and even-handed in its treatment of women as well as men: “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (7:2-4). For commentator J. Paul Sampley these verses depict marriage as “a relationship in which husbands and wives have equal standing and equal authority over the body of the other one.”<sup>353</sup>

Other scripture scholars, including historically oriented New Testament scholars, have noted the significance of the symmetry and reciprocity of these phrases as indicative of the equality of wife and husband.<sup>354</sup> According to Philip Payne the “strikingly egalitarian understanding of the dynamics of marital relations expressed in Paul’s symmetry throughout this passage is without parallel in the literature of the ancient world.”<sup>355</sup> Richard Hays agrees, noting, that in this text the marriage partners are “neither placed in a hierarchical relation with one over the other nor set apart as autonomous units each doing what he or she pleases. Instead, the relationship of marriage is one of mutual submission, each partner having authority over

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<sup>353</sup> J. Paul Sampley, "1 Corinthians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 750.

<sup>354</sup> Commenting on the patriarchal nature of marriage in Greco-Roman culture at the time Paul was writing, Jouette Bassler observes that Paul not only asserts that women and men were equal sex partners within Christian marriage but that he also “sanctions for women a life without marriage, and thus a life permanently free from all the hierarchical strictures of that relationship. Paul thus opens wide the door to social independence for those women gifted with celibacy.” Jouette M. Bassler, "1 Corinthians," ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *The Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (London: SPCK, 2014), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=1717457>.

<sup>355</sup> Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, 106-07.

the other.”<sup>356</sup> Hays evaluates Paul’s vision of marriage, with its rejection of male dominance and its replacement with a mutual commitment to meet the needs of one’s spouse, as “paradigm shattering.”<sup>357</sup>

OCM2015-Aus is not the only significant Church document to overlook 1 Corinthians 7. Luke Timothy Johnson criticises Pope John Paul II’s extensive, scripturally based, general audiences which were collected and published as *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*,<sup>358</sup> for giving scant or no attention to this text. According to Johnson, 1 Corinthians 7, “truly does reveal the mutuality and reciprocity – and complexity – of married love.”<sup>359</sup>

Mutual submission is at the heart of matrimony established through the conjugal covenant by which the spouses “freely give themselves to each other and accept each other” (OCM2015-Aus 2). In Kenneth Bailey’s reading, giving the gift of oneself and receiving the gift of one’s spouse is implicit in 1 Cor 7:3 and 1 Cor 7:5a: the marital relationship is “presented as a positive ‘right’ that each partner is expected to *give as a gift* to the other. The husband and wife are equal in this regard. Neither partner is to demand those rights, rather each is to *give gifts* to the other.”<sup>360</sup> This reading undergirds the teaching of OCM2015-Aus and, as commentator Stanley Marrow observes, expresses the fundamental nature of marriage: Paul’s

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<sup>356</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 116.

<sup>357</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians*, 131.

<sup>358</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997).

<sup>359</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "A Disembodied 'Theology of the Body'," *Commonweal* 128, no. 2 (2001): 13.

<sup>360</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 201. Emphasis original.

emphasis upon mutual submission “gives expression to the very essence of the bond that makes Christian marriage what it is.”<sup>361</sup>

First Corinthians 7 provides the most extensive New Testament teaching about sexuality. Michael Lawler, and his colleagues summarise the significance and profound influence of this text: “When a Christian man and a Christian woman marry, first-century Paul suggests the covenant they make with one another is a covenant of equal and intimate partnership, and it embraces their human sexual activity within it. It is a suggestion that the Second Vatican Council will pursue twenty centuries later (GS 48).”<sup>362</sup>

GS changed the primacy formerly given to the procreative aspect of human sexuality and gave at least equal emphasis to the unitive dimension of marital sexuality, resulting in the understanding that marital sexuality is noble, worthy, and contributes to the personal and spiritual growth of the couple. It is in this more nuanced and positive understanding of marital sexuality that GS is “most discontinuous with previous church teaching.”<sup>363</sup> GS teaches that married couples are “to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection,” and it cites 1 Cor 7:3-6 among several scriptural texts as the basis of this teaching (GS 49).

A particularly apposite verse appears later in 1 Corinthians 7: “But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind” (7:7). Paul makes clear here that married life is a charism (a gift from God), while the celibate life is a different charism.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Stanley B. Marrow, *Paul for Today's Church: A Commentary on First Corinthians* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2013), 74-75.

<sup>362</sup> Michael G. Lawler, Eileen Burke-Sullivan, and Todd A. Salzman, *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes Then and Now* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2014), 120.

<sup>363</sup> 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), 113.

<sup>364</sup> Influential feminist Pauline interpreter Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza reads 1 Corinthians as an unequivocal affirmation of “the equality and charismatic giftedness of women and men in the Christian community.” Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 235.

The words do not allow the persistent, one-sided interpretation that the celibate life was a charism, but married life was not.<sup>365</sup>

This verse provides the foundation for the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* that “by reason of their state and rank in life [Christian spouses] have their own special gift among the people of God” (LG 11). The teaching is repeated in the Introduction to OCM2015-Aus: spouses “have their own place and gift among the People of God” (OCM2015-Aus 8). This verse and the teaching derived from it have helped to clarify that married life is equivalent in sanctity to Orders and the single state.

Paul calls upon the authority of the Lord to teach the prohibition of divorce, again providing more paradigm shattering material for both Jews and Gentiles: “To the married I give this command – not I but the Lord – that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (I Cor 7: 10-11).<sup>366</sup>

In 1 Cor 7:14 Paul proclaims that matrimony sanctifies and saves: “the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Cor 7:14). For Ladislav Orsy this teaching that the grace of matrimony makes the union, and indeed the whole family, holy is “as close as it can be to an up-to-date and articulate description of a sacrament.”<sup>367</sup>

In echoing this theological position *Gaudium et Spes* develops the ultimate meaning of the sacrament (the *res tantum*) explaining that, by virtue of matrimony “as spouses fulfil their

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<sup>365</sup> Marrow, *Paul for Today's Church*, 76.

<sup>366</sup> In reiterating the teaching of Jesus forbidding divorce Paul's position is “more stringent than anything found either in Judaism or in Greco-Roman culture”, Hays, *First Corinthians*, 120.

<sup>367</sup> Ladislav Orsy, “Faith, Sacrament, Contract, and Christian Marriage: Disputed Questions,” *Theological Studies* 43, no. 3 (1982): 380.

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). OCM2015-Aus reemphasises this point stating that by the sacrament of matrimony, spouses “help one another to become holy” (OCM2015-Aus 8). Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians encompasses and exceeds these statements by emphasising that through the power of the sacrament the spouses are made holy (even if one spouse is not a believer), and this holiness extends to any children of the union as well.<sup>368</sup> As Marrow notes, “if what this verse says of ‘mixed,’ that is, believing and unbelieving, partners be true, how much truer would it be of marriages between two Christians!”<sup>369</sup> 1 Cor 7 emphasises the equality of bride and groom and speaks to key issues taken up in OCM2015-Aus on the importance and dignity of the sacrament: matrimony provides a pathway to holiness and thus Christian spouses have their own special place among, and gift to offer to, the people of God.

In his reflections upon 1 Cor 7:1-7 Sampley identifies two particularly noteworthy aspects of the passage. Firstly, Paul confirms here that “human beings are sexual creatures for whom sexual passion, expressed in the marital context, is a legitimate and appropriate part of human experience.”<sup>370</sup> Secondly, the emphasis upon mutuality and equality in the marital sexual relationship has implications for the whole relationship: “Paul’s view of this shared authority honors both the needs and the rights of each sexual partner. And by extrapolation, wives and husbands could work at honoring one another’s needs and rights in all aspects of

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<sup>368</sup> The *Catechism* emphasizes conversion in its interpretation of this verse: “sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion” (CCC 1637).

<sup>369</sup> Marrow, *Paul for Today's Church*, 80.

<sup>370</sup> Sampley, "1 Corinthians," 752.

their shared lives.”<sup>371</sup> Mindful that the proclamation of the scriptures in the liturgy joins us to the ideas proclaimed, these ideas expressed in 1 Cor 7:1-7 are especially pertinent to the declaration that the couple will make to “love you and honour you all the days of my life” (OCM2015-Aus 96).

#### **4.7.1 Possible Reasons for the Omission of this Text**

There are at least three identifiable factors which may have contributed to the omission of First Corinthians 7 from the 1990 revision of the rite. Firstly, Paul’s work was influenced by a mistaken belief that the end times were near: “for the present form of this world is passing away” (7:31). Paul’s expectation of the imminent *parousia* may explain his less than enthusiastic support for marriage. His general advice to the Corinthian Christians is conservative: “Remain in the condition to which you were called” (7:17). On the other hand, Paul’s expectation serves to remind us that all Christians live in eschatological times; they live in the tension between the already and the not yet; they proclaim a kingdom of justice, love and peace which is now present in nascent form; they believe, that when the Lord returns, that kingdom “will be brought into full flower” (GS 39). This is reflected in liturgy: “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God” (SC 8). As Paul writes later in 1 Corinthians: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face” (13:12).

Secondly, Paul advocates marriage as a remedy for concupiscence: it is because of cases of sexual immorality that “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (7:2). Marriage is supported to prevent evil rather than to promote good. He advises the unmarried and the widows that it is better for them to remain unmarried, as he himself is,

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<sup>371</sup> Sampley, "1 Corinthians," 752.

unless concupiscence is a problem. Then they should marry “for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (7:8-9). Despite this negative context Paul still has much to say that is constructive about marriage.<sup>372</sup>

Thirdly, there may be a lingering unfortunate connotation from earlier translations of 7:3. The version that Pius XI used in *Casti Conubii* (1930) is translated as: “Let the husband render the debt to the wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband.”<sup>373</sup> This translation tends to emphasise contractual rights exchanged by the spouses rather than a covenantal gifting of the spouses’ entire selves. One deleterious effect of this formulation was that it allowed the interpretation that “the rights [of marriage] are not one’s own rights to be respected, but rights over the other which potentially subvert consent and at worst justify rape in marriage.”<sup>374</sup> Recent, more accurate translations obviate this problem, yet casting conjugal relations as a debt or obligation owed by the partners to each other is a view which persisted in the Catholic tradition until it was replaced by the more positive and personalist language of *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>375</sup> The acceptance of GS’s more positive language has now largely dispelled the dysfunctional effects of that earlier translation.

#### **4.7.2 First Corinthians 7: A Time to Reconsider?**

In 1988 Pope John Paul II wrote that: “the awareness that in marriage there is ‘mutual subjection of spouses out of reverence for Christ,’ and not just that of the wife to the husband,

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<sup>372</sup> The consensus of recent exegetes is expressed by Loader: what Paul has to say of marriage itself “is reasonably positive.” William R. G. Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 155.

<sup>373</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii: On Christian Marriage* (1930), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19301231\\_casti-connubii.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html), paragraph 25, (hereafter CC).

<sup>374</sup> Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition*, 158. See also; John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

<sup>375</sup> Married couples are “to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection,” (GS 49).



must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behaviour and customs.” The Pope continued: “Saint Paul not only wrote: ‘In Christ Jesus ... there is no more man or woman,’ but also wrote: ‘There is no more slave or freeman.’ Yet how many generations were needed to be realized in the history of humanity [until] the abolition of slavery.”<sup>376</sup> Establishing mutuality and equality as the norm in Christian matrimony is a greater human challenge, in Pope John Paul’s estimation, as overcoming the evils of slavery.

The actions and signs of OCM2015-Aus, particularly the preferred entrance procession (where the couple enters together preceded by the priest), preference for the declarative forms of the consent and the exchange of rings, the exact symmetry of the words used by bride and groom in the consent and the exchange of rings, and the emphasis upon the couple themselves as the ministers of the sacrament, highlight the fundamental equality of bride and groom. It is surprising then that 1 Cor 7:1-7, a paradigmatic Scriptural expression of the equality and mutuality that Pope John Paul II called for, is not among the texts to be used in the celebration of matrimony.

#### **4.8 Scripture Readings Added to the Second Edition**

The four New Testament readings added in the 1990 revision of the OCM have the potential to enrich the rite. The Proverbs text is problematic in its failure to remind both spouses of their equal obligations. However, First Corinthians 7, a text which speaks much more explicitly about matrimony than Prov 31:10-31, emphasises the equal obligations of both spouses, expresses the essence of Christian marriage, and is central to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and OCM2015-Aus on Christian marriage should be available as a choice for the matrimonial liturgy.

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<sup>376</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (1988), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html), article 24.

## Chapter Five

### Matrimony Derives its Force and Strength from Creation

OCM2015-Aus makes a substantial change in its very first paragraph proclaiming that: “the matrimonial covenant ... derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1). The paragraph that it replaced emphasised that “married Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and his Church” (RM1984-Aus 1).

This chapter examines the bases of the teaching that the matrimonial covenant derives its force and strength from creation and particularly the Scriptural warrant for this claim. It concludes that there is an inseparable Scriptural and theological link between matrimony and care for creation. The implications of this teaching for matrimony as a sacrament to be lived in everyday life are also explored.

#### 5.1 Images of the Matrimonial Relationship

Historically, the sacramental status of Christian marriage has been based on the teaching of Ephesians 5 that marriage images the union of Christ and his Church. In 1439 the Council of Florence affirmed marriage as one of seven sacraments since it is “the sign of the union of Christ and the church.”<sup>377</sup> However, using the Christ-church relationship from Ephesians as a primary model for understanding the matrimonial relationship between husband and wife is problematic because marriage precedes the Church.<sup>378</sup> While the Matrimonial ideals

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<sup>377</sup> Jacques Dupuis and Josef Neuner, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001), 766.

<sup>378</sup> Rahner writes: “Marriage is a sign. It possesses this character prior to any theological consideration and prior to its bearing upon the relationship between Christ and the Church, because in itself it has a physical and social dimension of reality.” Rahner, “Marriage as a Sacrament,” 202.

of permanence, fidelity, and fruitfulness might provide a constructive image for the Christ-church relationship the image is not reversible.<sup>379</sup> The use of the Christ-church relationship as a model for the husband-wife relationship introduces a hierarchical emphasis to the relationship between spouses.<sup>380</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza presents a compelling summary of its shortcomings: in this image “Christ is the one who rules, who saves, and who heals. The church is the one who is obedient and who needs healing and salvation. The application of such symbolism to the marriage relation between husband and wife places the husband in the role of ruler and savior and the wife in the role of sinner and subordinate.”<sup>381</sup>

Scripture scholar Carolyn Osiek goes further to argue that the language, imagery, and metaphors of Eph 5:22-33 have maintained their status and power because they serve the interests of those who seek to oppress women: “casting the church as feminine, and above all as bride of Christ, far from enhancing the dignity of women, has in fact done harm to perception of the capacity of women to image the divine, and thus of women’s fundamental human and Christian dignity.”<sup>382</sup>

Continued misuse of the language, imagery, and metaphors of Eph 5:22-33 contradicts the church’s affirmation of the full equality of women and men in matrimony, a contradiction

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<sup>379</sup> The Old Testament uses human marriage as a metaphor for God’s faithfulness to Israel. The author of Ephesians reverses the comparison and uses Christ’s relationship with the church as a model for human marriage. See Elizabeth Johnson, “Ephesians,” ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *The Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 835.

<sup>380</sup> Rahner argues that the commonplace reading of this text as the man representing Christ and the woman representing the church is a distortion coloured by the historical and social factors of the times. For Rahner, the central teaching of Ephesians 5:29-33 is that the love of wife and husband parallels the love of Christ and Christ’s Church: “the unity of love itself in *one* flesh and in one body constitutes the parallel between Christ-church and marriage.” Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 419. Pope Francis acknowledges that the Christ-Church analogy is “imperfect” and proposes instead an analogy with the incarnation: by becoming one flesh spouses “embody the espousal of our human nature by the Son of God” (AL 73). The incarnation is of course a supreme affirmation of the goodness of creation.

<sup>381</sup> Fiorenza, “Marriage,” 603.

<sup>382</sup> Carolyn Osiek, “The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): A Problematic Wedding,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32, no. 1 (2002): 38.

which is magnified by the distortions that can result from its use. Thus, RM1984-Aus refers to the “special nuptial blessing on the bride” (RM1984-Aus 6), consistent with imagery that casts the wife in the roles of sinner and subordinate greatly in need of blessing. The Eph 5 image is not as heavily emphasised in OCM2015-Aus which refers more appropriately to the blessing upon “the bride and bridegroom” (OCM2015-Aus 35).<sup>383</sup>

Continued use of the Eph 5 Christ-church relationship as a model for the matrimonial relationship has not disappeared entirely from OCM2015-Aus. OCM2015-Aus has almost identical language, and has identical footnotes, with paragraph 1 of RM1984-Aus which states: “By the Sacrament of Matrimony Christian spouses signify and participate in the mystery of unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church ...” (OCM2015-Aus 8, citing Ephesians 5:25). The emphasis here is rightfully upon the couple who, graced by the sacrament of matrimony, display a unity and fruitful love which can signify the relationship between Christ and the Church.

A firmer foundation for matrimony as Christian sacrament than the image from Ephesians 5 is provided in paragraph 5 of OCM2015-Aus: “Christ the Lord, making a new creation and making all things new, has willed that Marriage be restored to its primordial form and holiness in such a way that what God has joined together, no one may put asunder, and raised this indissoluble conjugal contract to the dignity of a Sacrament ...” (OCM2015-Aus 5).

In their attempt to clarify Church doctrine on marriage the bishops at Vatican II honoured matrimony by linking it to creation, the beginning and foundation of all God’s works (CCC 198): “The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by his laws” (GS 48). It is this teaching which underpins the assertion

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<sup>383</sup> Vestiges of the notion that the bride is in greater need of blessing than the groom remain in church teaching. “The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God’s blessing on the new couple, *especially the bride*” (CCC 1624, emphasis added). The requirement of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that “the prayer for the bride [be] duly amended to remind both spouses of their equal obligation to remain faithful to each other ...” (SC 78) has still not been fully implemented.

that “the matrimonial covenant ... derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1). The next section develops the links between creation and matrimony.

## 5.2 Sacred Scripture, Creation, and Matrimony

Sacred scripture is the primary source of creation theology and is of fundamental importance in the celebration of sacramental liturgies. SC underscores the importance of the Liturgy of the Word in liturgies, noting: “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 ... and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning” (SC 24). The actions and signs of the matrimonial liturgy derive much of their meaning from the scripture readings of the liturgy. In OCM2015-Aus the first two options for the First Reading are the Genesis accounts of Creation: excerpts from the Priestly (P) account (Gen 1:26-28, 31) and the Yahwist (J) version (Gen 2:18-24).<sup>384</sup> Both texts are designated by OCM2015-Aus as readings that speak explicitly of marriage.

Old Testament scholar Phyllis Bird identifies both the foundational contribution to Christian theology and the limitations of the Genesis accounts of creation, noting that:

They provide an inexhaustible source for theological reflection by the general nature of their statements, by the ambiguity and tension of juxtaposed accounts, and by their silences. They are also insufficient, requiring the larger canonical witness and the contributions of modern science and historical experience. And they are deformed, as well as limited, by the circumstances in which they were created and transmitted. All of these features are highlighted when attention is focused on the question of gender.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Recent scholarship contends that this division may be oversimplistic. P is now regarded as a redactor who deliberately placed the two versions together. “A theologically coherent perspective on creation, which the P writer presumably had, is to be found in these two chapters *in interaction with each other*. This is the only *canonical* perspective on creation Genesis makes available to us.” Terence E. Fretheim, “Creator, Creature, and Co-Creation in Genesis 1-2,” in *What Kind of God?: Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim*, ed. Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 197. Emphasis original.

<sup>385</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, “Bone of my Bone and Flesh of my Flesh,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (1994): 528.

While they do need to be supplemented by the larger canonical witness, the contributions of modern science, and historical experience, the Genesis accounts of creation are still foundational to the Catholic understanding of both creation and matrimony.<sup>386</sup> Some of both the inexhaustible richness and the limitations of the Genesis creation accounts are revealed in the material which follows.

### 5.2.1 Augustine's Interpretation of the Genesis Creation Narratives

Patristic theologian and exegete Augustine of Hippo (354-430) gave considerable attention to the accounts of creation in the first three chapters of Genesis.<sup>387</sup> His writings made a foundational contribution to the Christian doctrine of creation. While other patristic theologians wrote on marriage, (for example, Tertullian [c.155-c.220] is cited in the Introduction to OCM2015-Aus<sup>388</sup>) Augustine was probably the first to write extensively on the purposes of marriage,<sup>389</sup> and for that reason it is appropriate to survey his work here. In his theology of creation, he made compelling cases for creation as the work of the Trinity, for the goodness of creation, for *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), and for *creatio continua* (continuous creation in the present).

Prior to his conversion and baptism, Augustine had been a follower of Manichaeism, a form of Gnosticism which emphasised the dualism of the spiritual and the material realms. At

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<sup>386</sup> “Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts [the first three chapters of Genesis] remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the ‘beginning’ creation, fall, and promise of salvation” (CCC 289).

<sup>387</sup> Augustine worked on his interpretation of the creation accounts in Genesis from his baptism in 387 until his mature years as Bishop of Hippo. He deals with the topic in *A Commentary on Genesis: Two books against the Manichees* (398), *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, *The Confessions*, his comprehensive commentary *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: A Commentary in Twelve Books* (415), and in *The City of God*.

<sup>388</sup> “How wonderful the bond of the two believers: one in hope, one in vow, one in discipline, one in the same service” (OCM2015-Aus 11).

<sup>389</sup> See Gerald O'Collins and Mario Farrugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 290.

the age of twenty-nine he became aware of the fallacies of Manichaeism. In his *Confessions* Augustine counters Gnostic claims of material creation emanating from a lesser deity by highlighting the beauty and goodness of material creation. For Augustine, heaven and earth cry out that they have been created by God: “You, therefore, Lord, made these things [heaven and earth]; Thou who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou who art good, for they are good; Thou who art, for they are.”<sup>390</sup>

Later in *Confessions* Augustine makes a persuasive case against creation by emanation and for *creatio ex nihilo*:

For Thou [*sic*] created heaven and earth, not out of Yourself, for then they would be equal to Your Only-begotten, and thereby even to You; and in no wise would it be right that anything should be equal to You which was not of You. And anything else except You there was not whence You might create these things, O God, One Trinity, and Trine Unity; and, therefore, out of nothing You created heaven and earth.<sup>391</sup>

Augustine’s reading of Genesis reveals two moments of creation: “one in the original creation when God made all creatures before resting from all His works on the seventh day, and the other in the administration of creatures by which he works even now.”<sup>392</sup> Augustine used the image of a seed to show the relationship between original creation and continuing creation. God implanted seeds (potentialities for future development) in God’s original creation. These potentialities include all the living creatures which have emerged from water and earth “in the course of time as they have become known to us in the works which God even now produces.”<sup>393</sup> For Augustine, creation continues according to God’s longer-term plan.

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<sup>390</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110111.htm>, XI,4.

<sup>391</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII,7.

<sup>392</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, vol. 1 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 162.

<sup>393</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1, 175.

Creation for Augustine includes both God's original creation of the world and its subsequent development. Creation is dynamic and developing rather than static and complete. In creating the world, God created matter which God imbued with the potential for further development. The waters, created by God, which have the capacity "to bring forth swarms of living creatures" (Gen 1:20), typify the generative potential of the whole creation. Alister McGrath explains the implications of Augustine's interpretation of Genesis: "God is, Augustine insists, still working within the world, directing its continuing development and unfolding its potential ... God created a universe that was deliberately designed to develop and evolve."<sup>394</sup>

Original creation by God implies the goodness of creation. Continuous creation implies that God continues to act in creation. Augustine's two moments represent original creation in the beginning and a continuing process of divine guidance. Creation is thus not a completed past event.

In his work *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* (401-415), Augustine presented an interpretation of the Genesis accounts of creation which became foundational to western theology. Augustine emphasised that creation is the work of the Trinity: "it is the blessed Trinity that is represented as creating."<sup>395</sup> God works through God's Word and by a kind of brooding action of the Holy Spirit "like that of a bird that broods over its eggs, the mother somehow helping in the development of her young by the warmth of her body through an affection similar to that of love."<sup>396</sup> For Elizabeth Johnson the use of a brooding bird as an

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<sup>394</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2017), 197-98.

<sup>395</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1, 25.

<sup>396</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1, 41.



image of the continuing presence and action of God in the world provides “an apt animal metaphor for the creative work of the Spirit of God, Giver of life.”<sup>397</sup>

Augustine is clear that creation is the work of the Trinity who created everything that exists out of nothing. Created by God, all that exists is good. Evil does not originate from God but from free human choice “when we incline to those things which justice forbids and from which we are free to abstain.”<sup>398</sup>

### 5.2.2 Augustine on Marriage

Augustine’s theology of marriage relates to his reading of Genesis. In his analysis of why it was necessary that a helper be made for man (Gen 2:18), Augustine’s conclusion is that “the answer that seems most probable is that it was for the procreation of children.”<sup>399</sup> “Most probable” is illustrative of the humility and lack of dogmatism that typifies Augustine’s work. He is open to the possibility that more compelling interpretations may become available. On the creation of woman, he writes:

Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another’s presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 140.

<sup>398</sup> Augustine, *St Augustine on Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 84)*, ed. Roland J. Teske, trans. Roland J. Teske (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 146.

<sup>399</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, vol. 2 (New York: Newman Press), 73.

<sup>400</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2, 75.

Augustine's sexist attitude towards women was influenced by the culture in which he lived.<sup>401</sup> Elsewhere he demonstrates an androcentric acceptance of the inequality of male-female relationships: "For it were possible that there should exist in either sex, even without such intercourse, a certain friendly and true union of the one ruling, and the other obeying."<sup>402</sup> He demonstrates a negativity towards sexual intercourse (except for the purpose of procreation): "For intercourse of marriage for the sake of begetting has not fault; but for the satisfying of lust, but yet with husband or wife, by reason of the faith of the bed, it has venial fault: but adultery or fornication has deadly fault."<sup>403</sup> Within marriage, for Augustine, sexual intercourse (except for the purpose of procreation) is a venial sin. Children are the "one, alone ... worthy fruit of sexual intercourse."<sup>404</sup>

It is in the context of the creation of woman that Augustine deals briefly with his celebrated three goods of marriage: fidelity, offspring, and sacrament.<sup>405</sup>

*Fidelity* means that there must be no relations with any other person outside the marriage bond. *Offspring* means that children are to be lovingly received, brought up with tender care, and given a religious education. *Sacrament* means that the marriage bond is not to be broken, and that if one partner in a marriage should be abandoned by the other, neither may enter a new marriage for the sake of having children. This is what may be called the rule of marriage: by it the fertility of nature is made honorable and the disorder of concupiscence is regulated.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> However, as translator John Hammond Taylor notes that we should remember "the deep love he had for the woman who bore him a son (Conf. 6.15,25), the place of honor his mother Monica held in the community of Cassiciacum, where she took part in philosophical discussions with Aug. and his friends (as e.g. in *De beata vita*), and the courtesy and consideration he manifested towards women with whom he corresponded as a bishop." *Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2, 267.

<sup>402</sup> Augustine, *Of the Good of Marriage*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1309.htm>.

<sup>403</sup> Augustine, *Of the Good of Marriage*.

<sup>404</sup> Augustine, *Of the Good of Marriage*.

<sup>405</sup> He notes that he discusses it briefly because he treated it at length in his recently published book *The Good of Marriage*. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2, 78.

<sup>406</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2, 78.

In *Of the Good of Marriage* Augustine nuances this statement and acknowledges that marriage is good for reasons other than procreation and the reduction of concupiscence. For him, marriage is good not “merely on account of the begetting of children, but also on account of the natural society itself in a difference of sex.”<sup>407</sup> There is an element of friendship and mutual support in marriage that makes it about more than merely the procreation and raising of children.

It is a testament to Augustine’s enduring contribution to Catholic theology that his “goods of marriage” continue to define matrimony. The Council of Florence (1439) was guided by Augustine’s triple good of matrimony (faithfulness, the begetting and education of children, and indissolubility) in affirming the sacramental status of marriage.<sup>408</sup> It underpinned Pope Pius XI’s twentieth-century encyclical *Casti Connubii* (“under these three heads is contained a splendid summary of the whole doctrine of Christian marriage”)<sup>409</sup> which is cited extensively in the section on marriage and the family in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 48,49). Augustine’s “goods of marriage” inform the questions before the consent in the celebration of matrimony which relate to free consent, lifelong fidelity, and openness to life (OCM2015-Aus 60).<sup>410</sup>

The relevant secondary literature on Augustine is consistent with the analysis presented here. In Lisa Sowle Cahill’s evaluation, it is Augustine “to whom is attributed the most lasting influence both in defining Christianity’s positive doctrine of marriage, and in surrounding sex with an aura of shame and danger from which celibacy serves as an escape.”<sup>411</sup> John Mahoney

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<sup>407</sup> Augustine, *Of the Good of Marriage*.

<sup>408</sup> Dupuis and Neuner, *The Christian Faith*, 767.

<sup>409</sup> CC 10.

<sup>410</sup> Augustine frequently stresses mutual consent in the context of the marital sexual relationship.

<sup>411</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 174-75.

notes that drawing upon Augustine “is not necessarily to be uncritical nor, in particular, to be wedded to his entire theology of human sexuality and marriage.”<sup>412</sup> Contemporary reappraisals of Augustine are largely positive. Burke concludes: “The contemporary western attitude to marriage ranges from simple loss of esteem, to pessimism, or to downright contempt. A return to St. Augustine’s analysis of the ‘bona’ provides the one broad and solid basis for a re-appraisal of matrimony in all its human value and appeal”<sup>413</sup>

Four conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey of Augustine’s creation theology that indicate the significance of his contribution to the Christian tradition:

1. All that exists is created good by a good God out of nothing. Thus, there is a clear distinction between God and God’s creation. Pantheism and emanationism are rejected.
2. God transcends God’s creation, yet creation is not a completed event in the distant past. God continues to guide God’s creation.
3. God’s creation out of nothing affirms the essential goodness of creation and rejects Gnostic notions of the dualism of the spiritual and the material.
4. Marriage, understood in the context of the creation accounts of Genesis, is essentially good and is characterised by fidelity, offspring, and sacrament.

### **5.3 Contemporary Interpretation of the Genesis Creation Narratives**

Old Testament scholars speak of a “marginalization of creation” during much of the twentieth century and earlier, and a recovery of creation as a rich source for theological reflection only during the last thirty to forty years.<sup>414</sup> According to Fretheim a major driver of

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<sup>412</sup> John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>413</sup> Cormac Burke, "St. Augustine: A View on Marriage and Sexuality in Today's World," *Angelicum* 89, no. 2 (2012): 403.

<sup>414</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53, no. 2 (1996): 177-90.

this recovery is not the church nor the academy but rather a growing ecological consciousness.<sup>415</sup>

Contemporary interpretation reveals at least four aspects of the Genesis accounts of creation, including aspects emphasised by Augustine, which are particularly relevant to the links between creation and matrimony:

1. Creation by God emphasises the goodness of creation. The goodness of what God creates, first pronounced at 1:4, “And God saw that the light was good,” is repeatedly affirmed (Gen1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).
2. In the Genesis account of creation, the only thing that is not good is that the human created by God is alone: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Gen 2:18).
3. In the Genesis 1 account of creation God creates by God’s *word*: “God said ... and it was so” (Gen 1).
4. The Genesis accounts present a relational account of creation. God freely limits God’s own freedom, to create a world that allows human and other creaturely freedom and contribution to continuing creation in interrelation with each other and with God.

In what follows each of these aspects will be explored and related to the contention that matrimony derives its force and strength from creation.

### **5.3.1 The Goodness of Creation**

In Genesis 1 God brings order to pre-existing chaos: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (Gen 1:1-2). The ambiguity here (did God create everything, or did God work with pre-existing matter?) led to beliefs that the material world was not created by God and

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<sup>415</sup> Fretheim, *God and World* xi. Brueggemann observes that the recovery of creation as *the* horizon of biblical theology encourages us to contribute to the resolution of our ecological crises: “New investigations in creation faith and its complement, wisdom theology, suggest that the environment is to be understood as a delicate, fragile system of interrelated parts that is maintained and enhanced by the recognition of limits and givens and by the judicious exercise of choices.” Brueggemann, “The Loss and Recovery of Creation,” 188.

was inherently evil, which fuelled a variety of Gnostic heresies. The repeated confirmations in Genesis 1<sup>416</sup> that created matter, including corporality, is good, contrasts with the dualistic teaching of some of the forms of Gnosticism.<sup>417</sup> The understanding that everything that exists was created by God out of nothing achieved a theological consensus by the fifth century with the strong support of Augustine.<sup>418</sup> Creation *ex nihilo* was defined as the official doctrine of the Church by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).<sup>419</sup>

Creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is not revealed explicitly in the Genesis accounts of creation. The Genesis accounts, however, are not the only sources of the Christian understanding of creation. The Psalms, Wisdom literature (particularly Prov 8: 22-31 and Job 38:1 - 42:6), the Prophetic literature (particularly Isaiah chapters 40-55), the Pauline letters, and the Gospel of John, all contribute to the contemporary Christian understanding of creation, illustrating Bird's claim that the Genesis accounts need to be supplemented with aspects of the larger canonical witness.<sup>420</sup>

That God's free creative act is not constrained by anything that pre-existed is emphasised in Catholic teaching: "*Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the*

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<sup>416</sup> The designations "Genesis 1" and "Genesis 2" are used as shorthand references for the two creation accounts contained respectively in Gen 1: 1-2:4a and Gen 2:4b-25.

<sup>417</sup> Forms of Gnosticism emerged early in the history of Christianity. The early forms are best known from the work of Irenaeus of Lyons *Adversus haereses* (c.180) which forcefully opposed the dualism of the Gnostics who proposed the existence of two gods: a supreme god who created the spiritual world and an inferior god who created the material world.

<sup>418</sup> The Council of Nicea (325) affirmed that God is the maker "of all things seen and unseen." Dupuis and Neuner, *The Christian Faith*, 6.

<sup>419</sup> Dupuis and Neuner, *The Christian Faith*, 15. The first of the Nuptial Blessings calls upon God "who created all things out of nothing" (OCM2015-Aus 105), an allusion to the ancient understanding of creation *ex nihilo*.

<sup>420</sup> There is a Scriptural basis for creation *ex nihilo*: "I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being" (2 Macc 7:28). The Biblical understanding of creation *ex nihilo* developed during the period from 167 BCE that the Maccabees were suffering because of their fidelity to the God of Israel. Contemplation of an all-powerful God who created out of nothing promoted hope of resurrection from the dead. See also Rom 4:17; Heb 11:3.

*Creator*. The world began when God's word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun" (CCC 338). Creation *ex nihilo* provides the first revelation of the transcendent otherness of God and the ultimate affirmation of the goodness of all creation since all that exists is created by God out of nothing. The goodness of material creation confirms that we do not live in two different worlds but "in one graced world named good by God."<sup>421</sup> This gives rise to the principle of sacramentality: the goodness of matter may mediate the presence of God (who is goodness personified), a presence which can permeate the whole of life.<sup>422</sup>

Chapter 3 of Genesis is an etiological myth revealing the origins of sin and estrangement within God's good creation. Genesis 3:16-19 reveals how poor choices and actions impact upon human relationships and relationships with the natural world. The text reveals many theological truths including that sin has been part of human experience "from the beginning," and that sin stems from human choices and actions. As Bird highlights: "human action lies at the root of our estrangement and pain, not hapless fate or divine will."<sup>423</sup> In the shadow of sin, relationships become problematic. With the intrusion of sin, the original gender equality of marriage gives way to the inequality of patriarchy: "he shall rule over you." After sin, the blessings of procreation continue but they are marked by the pain of childbirth. Relationships with the natural world become dysfunctional: "cursed is the ground."

Faith in an all-powerful, beneficent God who creates *ex nihilo* helps us to maintain a proper perspective on our place in the universe. Neglecting to consider the full ramifications

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<sup>421</sup> Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 210.

<sup>422</sup> *Dei Verbum* affirms the revelatory potential of the created world: "God, who through the Word creates all things and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to himself in created realities" (DV 3).

<sup>423</sup> Bird, "'Bone of my Bone and Flesh of my Flesh,'" 526.

of God as Creator, and the understanding that sin derives from human choice and action, can move us towards “worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God” (LS 75). The impact of this neglect can be devastating for relationships with nature (we tend to prey upon the earth rather than to protect it) and for all relationships, including matrimonial relationships.

Genesis 1 and 2 reveal in highly symbolic ways God’s good creation of all that exists. Materiality, bodiliness, sexual difference, and marriage all owe their existence to the Creator and, therefore, are good. Male and female humans together image God, they represent God, participating in ongoing co-creation with God through procreation and through watching over God’s good creation.

### **5.3.2 “It is not good that the man should be alone.”**

Humanity is created for relationships with others: “Human beings are created in the image of one who is engaged in a relationship of mutuality and chooses to create in such a way that power is shared with those who are not God.”<sup>424</sup> The understanding that we are created for, and grow in, relationships and in sharing power, gives force and strength to matrimony.

On the feast of the Most Holy Trinity (Year A) the Church puts before us an example of God’s revelation of the nature of God in whose image humans are created. The Lord descended in the cloud and described himself to Moses as: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abiding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod. 34:6). To abide in steadfast love and faithfulness requires a relationship, a lover and the beloved, revealing a facet of the mystery of the Trinity. Humans created in the image of God are called to be “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abiding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” In the matrimonial liturgy these divine-human qualities are given the central place:

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<sup>424</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 17.



I promise to be faithful to you.  
in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health,  
to love you and honour you  
all the days of my life (OCM2015-Aus 62).

Steadfast love and faithfulness are explicit in the text of the Consent. Honour, with its connotations of admiration and respect, is synonymous with behaviours that are merciful, gracious, and slow to anger.

### 5.3.3 God Creates by God's Word

In Genesis 1 there is a recurring pattern in the use of the words "And God said 'Let ...'" Language is used as the agency of creation. God creates by God's word.<sup>425</sup> The implications of this verbal modality of creation are many and are explored helpfully in the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Firstly, a verbal modality of creation locates creation, like sacraments, in the symbolic order; that is the order of recognition.<sup>426</sup> The whole of creation is sacramental because "being is marked with the stamp of the Other."<sup>427</sup> Secondly, in this verbal modality, there is a parallel with language as the medium within which human subjects develop. For Chauvet, language is "the milieu in which the subject becomes subject."<sup>428</sup> In Genesis 1, not just humans but all of God's creation are treated as subjects; all are invited to respond to God's creative word. The flourishing of the natural world is a cooperative effort between the Creator

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<sup>425</sup> The psalmist reflects upon and proclaims the power of the creative word of God: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all of their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6).

<sup>426</sup> Chauvet's understanding of symbol derives from the Greek *symbolon*, which emphasises recognition: "The ancient *symbolon* is precisely an object cut in two, one part of which is retained by each partner in a contract. Each half evidently has no value in itself and thus could imaginatively signify anything; its symbolic power is due only to its connection with the other half. When, years or even generations later, the partners or their descendants come together again to 'symbolize' their two portions by joining them together, they recognize this act as the expression of the same contract, of the same alliance. It is thus the agreement between the two partners which establishes the symbol; it is the *expression of a social pact based on mutual recognition* and, hence, is a *mediator of identity*." Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 174-75.

<sup>427</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 549.

<sup>428</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 7.

and creation. Thirdly, this verbal modality reveals creation as offer and as gift. Like language, offer implies possibilities. The reception of creation as gift implies the return gift of working with the Creator to build our common home into a place for all in accord with the primordial divine plan.

Fretheim's exegesis of Genesis 1 notes the subtlety of creation by God's word: "this creative activity does not simply entail God's unilateral speaking the world into being."<sup>429</sup> Rather creation by God's word invites a human and other creaturely response.<sup>430</sup> God creates the waters which then have a role in bringing forth the myriad forms of aquatic life. God's creation of plants allows animals, including humans, to emerge.

Bird argues that the Genesis accounts of creation are insufficient without "the contributions of modern science." Creation by God's word which invites creaturely response aligns well with contemporary evolutionary understandings of the cosmos and of life. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who observed the wonders of creation through the dual lenses of palaeontology and Catholic theology, displayed such an alignment in his writing during the First World War:

The fact is that creation has never stopped. The creative act is one huge continual gesture, drawn out over the totality of time. It is still going on; and incessantly even if imperceptibly, the world is constantly emerging a little further from nothingness ... Through the whole breadth and depth of the cosmos, it is in truth the divine action that still moulds us, as it moulded the clay on the first day of creation.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 37.

<sup>430</sup> "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures ...'" (Gen 1:20). The divine speaking here is of such a nature that "the receptor of the word is important in shaping the created order." Fretheim, *God and World*, 38.

<sup>431</sup> Written 1916-1918 but not published until after his death in 1955. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Prayer of the Universe*, trans. René Hague (Glasgow: William Collins, 1973), 121.

God's word offers a special role to humans who are given dominion over all the other creatures. Dominion not in the sense of domination but of caring for creation: this dominion involves "nurturing and protecting all the other creatures in the universe."<sup>432</sup>

Creation by word is not rigid and determined but rather full of all kinds of possibilities of the new, the good, and the beautiful providing a firm foundation for hope.<sup>433</sup> Jürgen Moltmann notes that a world open to all kinds of possibilities is the ground of hope, only in such a world can "hope become effective in love."<sup>434</sup> In times of injustice, ecological crises, and a sacramental malaise, hope can motivate Christian ethical action. The Church's *lex orandi* expresses this notion in this way: "grant, we pray, that Christian hope may draw us onward to where our nature is united with you."<sup>435</sup>

Matrimony draws great strength from the model the Creator provides of the power of the verbal mode of creation. Aptly, matrimony begins with this verbal mode, the words of the exchange of consent. One is invited to respond to the creative words of one's spouse. Language is the medium through which the matrimonial relationship develops. The words spouses hear can help them to feel valued and loved or ignored and unloved. The fundamental importance of language for the development of the matrimonial relationship is supported by the findings

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<sup>432</sup> Joan E. Cook, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2015), 75.

<sup>433</sup> As John Haught puts it: "Creation is perpetually new every day ... nothing could be more deadening to the human spirit, or for that matter to scientific exploration, than the assumption that everything of consequence in the story of this universe has already taken place ... theology today has a surer sense than ever before that the cosmos is still being called into being." John F. Haught, *Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 130-31.

<sup>434</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 92.

<sup>435</sup> Prayer after Communion, the Ascension of the Lord, Mass during the day. *The Roman Missal*, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010), 472.

of social psychology. A verbal behaviour termed “contempt”, which includes sarcasm, direct insults, and name calling, has been identified as the best indicator of relationship dissolution.<sup>436</sup>

Like creation, matrimony is not rigid and determined but replete with all kinds of possibilities of the new, the good and the beautiful. It is potentially new every day providing a ground for hope,<sup>437</sup> a hope that invites couples even deeper into the life of the Trinity.

#### **5.3.4 God Creates a World that Allows Human Contribution to Continuing Creation**

The phrase “image of God” has been the subject of much theological discussion over the centuries. Unfortunately, much of that discussion has been preoccupied with the second-order question of the distinction between “image” and “likeness” rather than the first-order question of the meaning of God.<sup>438</sup> The point is that the emphasis should be upon the characteristics of God in whose image humans are created. Fretheim’s view is that textual proximity indicates that it is neither God’s spiritual nature nor God’s rational nature, but rather God as creator that is key here: “The content of the word God at this point in the text has fundamentally to do with God’s *creative* activity; so the human vocation to be in God’s image, at least as specified in this chapter (especially 1:28), is to be modelled on the creative words and actions of God.”<sup>439</sup> This statement locates Fretheim within, what Karl Loning and Erich

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<sup>436</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 139.

<sup>437</sup> Pope Francis writes eloquently of the place of hope in matrimony: “Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope. Hope is the leaven that, in those first years of engagement and marriage, makes it possible to look beyond arguments, conflicts and problems and to see things in a broader perspective. It harnesses our uncertainties and concerns so that growth can take place. Hope also bids us live fully in the present, giving our all to the life of the family, for the best way to prepare a solid future is to live well in the present” (AL 219).

<sup>438</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 48.

<sup>439</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 48. Emphasis original.

Zenger consider is, a contemporary “near consensus in biblical scholarship” that humans as an image of God articulates God’s plan for the relationship between human beings and creation.<sup>440</sup>

Pope Francis urges us “to forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (LS 67). Humans are placed in the garden of the earth to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). Significantly, the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, a garden that was beautiful and useful, “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:9) and there he put the human whom he had formed. God placed the human in the garden to care for what was already there: “Unlike the view of other Near Eastern creation texts, human beings were placed in Eden not to serve the gods but to serve the creation.”<sup>441</sup> Pope Francis reads this key text in this way:

“Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations (LS 67).

“Tilling” must be read in relationship with “keeping”; the former delivers the fruits of the earth; the latter ensures the earth’s continuing fruitfulness. While all humans are called to ensure this balance, married couples, having accepted the privilege of procreation, have a special responsibility to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Karl Loning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin With, God Created ... : Biblical Theologies of Creation* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 107.

<sup>441</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 47.

<sup>442</sup> This notion is reemphasised in Genesis 6:1 – 9:1 which reveals God’s re-creation after the Flood. There are many parallels between elements of the Flood story and the first creation story including the command “Be fruitful and multiply” (9:1 and 1:28), and humankind’s dominion over the animals (9:2 and 1:28). See Cook, “The Book of Genesis,” 80. God uses Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives to ensure the survival of every living thing (Gen 9:18-19).

Pope John Paul II touches upon “image of God” theology in FC writing that “the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator – that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person” (FC 28). He acknowledged that the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children. Parents are called to clarify the image of God that they transmit through the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life which they model and “hand on to their children, and through the children to the Church and to the world.” (FC 28).

Contemporary interpretations of Genesis can illuminate aspects of those fruits of moral, spiritual, and supernatural life which all couples joined in matrimony are called to hand on to their children, to the Church, and to the world. Couples joined in matrimony become more clearly the image of the Creator not only when they procreate but also when they watch over creation in which children develop. As the Church now teaches, one element of this moral fruitfulness is care for creation: matrimonial love “which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and *to be realized in the common work of watching over creation*” (CCC 1604, emphasis added).

#### **5.4 The Inseparable Link between the Creative Words and Actions of God and Matrimony**

Chapter 1 of Genesis reveals the primordial form and holiness of matrimony: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Gen 1:28). The blessing/command “to be fruitful and multiply” is linked to the second part of God’s command: to have dominion over the earth.

Unfortunately, the text Genesis: 1:26-28, 31 in OCM2015-Aus (using the Jerusalem Bible translation) renders verse 28: “God blessed them, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and *conquer* it. Be *masters* of the fish of the sea’” (OCM2015-Aus, 179). The

NRSV translation reads “fill the earth and *subdue* it: and have *dominion* over the fish of the sea” (Gen 1:28), which better conveys current understandings of “dominion” as a task entrusted to humans in the context of their creation in the image of a loving God who cares for all God’s creation, who protects the defenceless, and who gives justice to the oppressed. The kernel of this interpretation is found in the way that *Gaudium et Spes* elucidates this Genesis text: “For man, created to God’s image received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness: a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all” (GS 34). Humans are charged to govern the world with justice and holiness, a governance which, we now understand, extends not just to other humans but to the whole of creation.<sup>443</sup>

Genesis 1:26-28, 31 (as a First Reading option in OCM2015-Aus) presents procreation as inseparable from care for creation: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over ... every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). According to this account, God links procreation and care for creation. Women and men made in the image of God are expected to care for creation as God cares for it. Scripture scholars rightfully broaden this text to apply to all humans. Thus, Diane Bergant interprets this text to mean: “Every woman and every man is made in God’s image and has been commissioned to stand as God’s representative in the management of the natural world.”<sup>444</sup> While every woman and every man are called to manage the natural world in accord with God’s plan, the privilege of procreation gives a sharper focus to this task for married couples. There is a theological link between procreation and watching over creation.

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<sup>443</sup> Genesis 2 confirms this meaning of dominion. Humans are not superior to the natural world: like the other plants and animals, with whom they share the same fragile web of life, they are formed from the “the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:7). They are charged to watch over, to till and to keep, all creation.

<sup>444</sup> Dianne Bergant, *Genesis: In the Beginning* (Collegeville: Liturgical 2013), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=4546335>. See also Cook, "The Book of Genesis."

The responsibility of all humans, especially married couples, to ensure the fruitfulness of creation for future generations is of such gravity that, according to Pope Francis, failure to care for creation may be sinful.<sup>445</sup>

### 5.4.1 God's Blessing

In Genesis 1 God blesses the land animals (1:22) and all humankind (1:28) and commands both to multiply and fill the earth. Blessing is related to fertility.<sup>446</sup> More broadly blessing relates to God's sharing creative power with creatures, "it is another dimension of the divine-power sharing activity."<sup>447</sup> In blessing both the animals and humans God charges humans with ensuring a balance. Humans are to flourish as are all living creatures. Humans are entrusted with finding that balance: habitat destruction and over-fishing in attempts to ensure human flourishing must not overwhelm the flourishing of other living creatures or of future human generations. As ecologist and theologian Calvin DeWitt writes: God's blessing "is not a blessing without limits; instead, it envisions living creatures, including people, as flourishing

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<sup>445</sup> In 2019 Pope Francis announced consideration of the addition of 'ecological sin' to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. "We must introduce – we are thinking about it – in the Catechism of the Catholic Church the sin against ecology, the ecological sin against the common home, because it is a duty. In this sense, recently, the Synod Fathers for the Pan-Amazon Region proposed to define ecological sin as action or omission against God, against one's neighbour, the community and the environment. It is a sin against future generations and is manifested in acts and habits of pollution and destruction of the harmony of the environment, in transgressions against the principles of interdependence and in the breaking of networks of solidarity between creatures." Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the World Congress of the International Association of Criminal Law (2019), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191115\\_diritto-penale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191115_diritto-penale.html).

<sup>446</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith uses this understanding as part of its argument to declare illicit blessings upon unions of persons of the same sex, noting that: "the nuptial blessing refers back to the creation account, in which God's blessing on man and woman is related to their fruitful union (cf. Gen 1:28)." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responsum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a dubium regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex* (15 March 2021), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20210222\\_articolo-responsum-dubium-unioni\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20210222_articolo-responsum-dubium-unioni_en.html). This narrow focus on fertility ignores the blessings that are obvious in the marriages of many infertile couples and those beyond childbearing age.

<sup>447</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 41.



within the bounds of God's Law for Creation – within the physical and biological boundaries God has established.”<sup>448</sup> Human procreation and human care for creation stand in tension.

The tension between human procreation and human care for creation increases as human population increase. The UN reported in 2019 that “the world’s population is expected to increase by 2 billion persons in the next 30 years, from 7.7 billion currently to 9.7 billion in 2050 ... the world’s population could reach its peak around the end of the current century, at a level of nearly 11 billion.”<sup>449</sup> Large and rapid human population growth has implications for the survival, let alone flourishing, of other living creatures. The extinction rates of plant and animal species are accelerating and around one million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss.<sup>450</sup>

Family size and its contribution to population growth are issues that married couples need to consider in terms of their responsibility to care for creation in appropriate balance with God’s call to procreate. In just one aspect of human environmental impact, a Swedish study identified four actions believed to be especially effective in reducing an individual’s greenhouse gas emissions: having one fewer child, living car-free, avoiding airplane travel, and eating a plant-based diet. According to this study, the first of these actions makes by far the most significant reduction to greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Calvin DeWitt, " Ecology and Ethics: Relation of Religious Belief to Ecological Practice in the Biblical Tradition," *Biodiversity and Conservation* 4 (1995): 844.

<sup>449</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (2019), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-2019-highlights.html>.

<sup>450</sup> United Nations, *Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’* (2019), <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>.

<sup>451</sup> See Seth Wynes and Kimberly A. Nicholas, "The Climate Mitigation Gap: Education and Government Recommendations Miss the Most Effective Individual actions," *Environmental Research Letters* 12, no. 7 (2017), <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa7541/pdf>.

This Swedish study alerts us to the fact that it is not population growth alone which is contributing to environmental degradation. Further issues are involved, particularly the consumer culture of developed nations (which generally have fewer children per couple than developing nations) and the need for better management of the earth's resources so that all people may flourish. Pope Francis writes: "To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized" (LS 50). In developed countries like Australia economic growth depends upon increasing consumption: "to keep demand flowing, we have to be made dissatisfied with what we have and desirous for what we do not yet have."<sup>452</sup> Such a consumerist culture with its stress upon creating false wants has both environmental and social impacts.<sup>453</sup>

Official Church teaching on family size is evolving. Traditional Catholic practice sees "in large families a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity" (CCC 2373). On the other hand, family size and responsible parenthood also need to consider one's environmental and demographic situation. Pope John Paul II outlined the issues involved in 1994:

What the Church calls "responsible parenthood" is not a question of unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities as well as their own situation and legitimate desires, in the light of objective moral criteria.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), 201.

<sup>453</sup> We may begin to treat persons like we treat material objects: "We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye." (AL 39)

<sup>454</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the Secretary General of the International Conference on Population and Development* (1994), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19940318\\_cairo-population-sadik.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19940318_cairo-population-sadik.pdf), article 5.

Responsible parenthood then does not involve unchecked procreation; social and demographic realities must be considered. Procreation and care for the earth are inextricably linked. However, beyond population growth alone consideration of the consumer culture of developed nations and the need for better management of the earth's resources so that all creatures may flourish are also required.

Two complex, interrelated issues are involved here. Human populations may contribute to environmental degradation and environmental degradation may impact upon human procreation. Pope Francis writes in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*: "we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration" (LS 43). In examining the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration one issue that Francis does not consider is the impact of environmental deterioration upon marriage and children. According to a report from the US National Center for Health Statistics, the provisional number of births for the United States in 2017 was 3,853,472. This is down 2% from 2016, and the lowest number of births in 30 years.<sup>455</sup> This significant decline in the birth rate has multiple causes, one of which may be fears for the future wellbeing of children in a world increasingly under stress from climate change. Support for this attitude by prominent couples may be particularly influential.<sup>456</sup> In an Australian survey completed by 6514 women in 2018, 33.4% of women under 30 said they were reconsidering having children, or more children, because of concern about an unsafe future from climate change.<sup>457</sup> These women's opinions seem to be informed by a logical

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<sup>455</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Provisional Data for 2017*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/report004.pdf>.

<sup>456</sup> See Erica Gonzales, "Prince Harry Says He and Meghan Markle Want Only Two Kids, 'Maximum'," *Harper's Bazaar*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a28551293/prince-harry-meghan-markle-two-kids/>.

<sup>457</sup> Australian Conservation Foundation, *What Do Women Think About Climate Change?* (2018), [https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/10649/attachments/original/1549598020/4pp\\_women\\_and\\_climate\\_change.pdf?1549598020](https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/10649/attachments/original/1549598020/4pp_women_and_climate_change.pdf?1549598020).

connection between procreation and care for creation: if one chooses to have children one has an obligation to ensure that they are born into a biosphere where they can flourish.

Pope Francis locates a solution to problems related to procreation, consumption, and care for the environment in marriage and the family: “In the family too, we can rethink our habits of consumption and join in caring for the environment as our common home. The family is the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it is the primary social subject which contains within it the two fundamental principles of human civilization on earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness” (AL 277). Better understanding of the fundamental matrimonial principles of communion and fruitfulness may help families to become more effective in their “common work of watching over creation” (CCC 1604).

The third blessing revealed in the Priestly account of creation provides the means by which solutions to problems related to procreation, consumption, and care for the environment may be discerned: “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Gen 2:3). The seventh day is the culmination of creation; the blessing indicates the sanctification of the whole of God’s creative work, work which God graciously chooses to share with humans. The Old Testament requires that the Jewish people observe the Sabbath as a day to be kept holy to praise and worship God. In the Jewish observance God’s work in creation is highlighted; it begins by acclaiming “Lord, God of all creation.”

Pope Francis explains some of the Christian links, links which build upon the Jewish tradition, between creation, new creation and the Sunday liturgy: “Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the first day of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality” (LS 237). Sunday as a day which heals our relationship with others and

with the world merits further development. Michael Welker makes clear the liturgical celebration of the seventh day is foundational to both our understanding of creation and our discernment of our role in God's continuing creation: "Creation is the reality that, on the basis of continually new communication of human beings with God, is ordained to be perceived by human beings and that *human beings are ordained to have a role in shaping ...* In cultic life—that is, in communication with God—this knowledge of creation is to be acquired, developed, renewed, and verified in diverse forms."<sup>458</sup> In communing with God in liturgy, humans discern that they are part of God's creation; that they are God's vice-regents; and God's intentions for their role in creation as God's agents becomes clearer.<sup>459</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Creation as Kenosis

The Genesis accounts of creation highlight a Creator who makes room for, and shares power with, the other; an understanding of creation as kenosis.<sup>460</sup> In the last decade of the twentieth century Pope John Paul II nominated kenosis as a central theme for theological endeavour.<sup>461</sup> While some feminist theologians have highlighted possible problems associated

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<sup>458</sup> Michael Welker, "Creation: Big Bang or the Work of Seven Days?," *Theology Today* 52, no. 2 (1995): 184. Emphasis added.

<sup>459</sup> Something of this understanding is expressed liturgically in Eucharistic Prayer IV:

"We give you praise, Father most holy,  
for you are great and have fashioned all your works  
in wisdom and love.

You formed man in your own image  
and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator,  
he might have dominion over all creatures." *The Roman Missal*, 692.

The particularly rich theological, scriptural, and liturgical content of Eucharistic Prayer IV in relation to creation is examined further in the next chapter.

<sup>460</sup> Kenosis (divine self-emptying) is a Christological concept deriving from Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born of human likeness" (Phil 2:5-7).

<sup>461</sup> From the vantage-point of the Trinity and the Incarnation "the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return" (FR 93).

with self-sacrifice,<sup>462</sup> the application of kenosis to God's action in creation has contributed significantly to developments in the theology of creation, particularly the closer alignment of evolutionary and theological accounts of the cosmos. It also points to some of the ways in which matrimony draws strength from creation.

The kenosis of Philippians 2 refers to the self-emptying of the Son of God's divine form to take on human form (including mortality). Yet, an act of kenosis on God's part is evident in creation as well. God's kenosis arises from love for, and to promote the growth of, the created. As Moltmann explains "it is not just self-giving that belongs to creative love; it is self-limitation too; not only affection, but respect for the unique nature of the others as well."<sup>463</sup> God's self-limitation unfolds from the beginning of creation out of love for, and to promote the growth of, all creation.

It is an article of Christian faith that God respects human freedom, that humans are free to accept or to reject the divine offer of love: "It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice" (Eccl 15:14). Freedom promotes growth and development. Every choice, freely made, constitutes the self. We have the potential for growth and development as does God's creation of which we are part.<sup>464</sup> We are called to become clearer images of the Creator who cares for all creation. *Gaudium et Spes*

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<sup>462</sup> Feminist theologians have pointed out that calls for self-sacrifice may be misused to exploit women. However, "the undeniable danger of using the appeal to 'kenotic' self-sacrifice as a means of subordinating, or even abusing, Christian women should not be confused with the attempt to reconsider the status of kenosis as a legitimate spiritual goal for both men and women." Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 208.

<sup>463</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 147.

<sup>464</sup> Fretheim puts it in a way that is consistent with what science and our own experience tell us: "The creation is a highly dynamic reality in which the future is open to a number of possibilities and creaturely activity is crucial for the becoming of the creation. Creative capacities have been given to the created ones for the task of continuing creation." Fretheim, *God and World*, 277.

teaches that “authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man” (GS 17). Humans are created in the image of God who freely chooses to limit Godself.

God limits Godself out of respect for human freedom. Eco-theologian Denis Edwards has developed an understanding of a God who also limits Godself out of respect for the processes of nature.<sup>465</sup> Kenotic creation theology attempts to recontextualise the Christian theology of God in a cultural context dominated by an evolutionary worldview.<sup>466</sup> As Moltmann notes, a theology of creation has to compete with the cosmologies of physics and the natural sciences, but it also has to be compatible with those cosmologies.<sup>467</sup> These issues of competition and compatibility become more acute with increasing levels of literacy, including scientific literacy.<sup>468</sup> In response, Edwards presents a theology of creation compatible with these cosmologies. It involves “a God who freely accepts the limits of the process of emergence, a God who creates through the losses and gains of evolutionary history. It suggests a God engaged with creation, a God who respects the process, a God who suffers with and delights in the unfolding of creation.”<sup>469</sup>

### 5.4.3 Kenotic Love

The New Testament revelation that God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and theological analyses of God’s creation out of love, have contributed to our understanding of the kenotic nature of love.

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<sup>465</sup> Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1999), 35-55.

<sup>466</sup> “The formulation of the theory of evolution is one of the most significant cultural events of the last two centuries ... We have moved from a fundamentally static conception of reality to a fundamentally dynamic conception, largely through the influence of the theory of evolution.” See Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace and Redemption* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), 27.

<sup>467</sup> Moltmann, "God's Kenosis," 137.

<sup>468</sup> As Haught puts it: “if theology fails to respond to the largest of human questions – those having to do with the meaning of the universe – it will seem increasingly irrelevant to those who appreciate the vistas of scientific discovery.” Haught, *Christianity and Science*, 47.

<sup>469</sup> Edwards, *The God of Evolution*, 44.

For Moltmann, kenotic love links creation and the incarnation. He reads the text “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8) as revealing the depth of God’s self-giving: “there was already a cross in the heart of God before the world was created and before Christ was crucified on Golgotha.”<sup>470</sup> In kenotic theology a cross in the heart of God before the world was created does not point to an angry and vengeful God for whom the price of atonement is the crucifixion of the Son. It points rather to the depth of God’s self-giving and God’s willing restriction of omniscience in the incarnation. In self-giving, which reveals the depth of God’s kenotic love, God sends the Word to dwell among us. In self-limitation, and the restriction of omnipotence and omniscience, God entrusts the fate of the Word to human freedom.<sup>471</sup> Thomas Aquinas stresses these elements of divine love and human response: “Christ’s passion was indeed a malefice on His slayers' part; but on His own it was the sacrifice of one suffering out of charity.”<sup>472</sup> The cross of Christ crucified, and the cross disclosed in creation, reveal the depth and extent of divine love. Divine love, in both creation and the incarnation, is revealed as kenosis: self-limitation which respects the unique nature of others.<sup>473</sup> Kenotic love is the kind of love which Paul urges the Christians of Corinth to demonstrate: “Love is patient, love is kind ... It does not insist on its own way ... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7).

The Christian mystery links communion, kenosis and theosis: it reveals “a mystery of *ekstasis*, love, communion and mutual indwelling among the three divine persons; a mystery

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<sup>470</sup> Moltmann, "God's Kenosis," 146-47.

<sup>471</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar analyses the main features of atonement discernible in the New Testament as a whole. While he stresses that salvation is a rich notion with multiple, interrelated components he gives a primary place to Divine love. “Whereas ... there are many references to ‘God’s anger’ the entire reconciliation process is attributed to God’s merciful love ... everything flows from the primary source: God’s gracious love.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison, 5 vols., vol. 4, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 243.

<sup>472</sup> *STh* III q.48 a.3.

<sup>473</sup> Moltmann, "God's Kenosis," 147.



of *kenosis*, the relinquishing of the form of God by Jesus in his incarnation, so as to take the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:5-11); and a mystery of *theosis*, human beings are called to participate in the life of God and to share in ‘the divine nature’ (2Pet 1:4) through Christ, in the Spirit.”<sup>474</sup> Liturgy links creation and kenosis.<sup>475</sup> It also links kenosis with its goal and complement, theosis.<sup>476</sup> Participation in liturgy mediates participation in divine life: “through ‘participation’ in the liturgy we are made ‘participators’ of the divine life. Participating in the divine life is the true, ultimate active participation.”<sup>477</sup> These terms fuse in liturgy. As David Fagerberg shows, they form the very essence of liturgy: “Liturgy is the perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification.”<sup>478</sup> Christ’s humbling of himself in the incarnation, his kenosis, leads to theosis, the invitation to humanity to be drawn into the mystery of divinity.<sup>479</sup> This invitation reveals that divine love and divine

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<sup>474</sup> International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (2011), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20111129\\_teologia-oggi\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html), article 98.

<sup>475</sup> Liturgy is a response to God’s kenosis revealed in creation and the incarnation: Christian liturgy is “a continual speaking of God’s name in gratitude and thankfulness for the self-giving of God to the world. On occasion it sings ecstatic praise for the very being of the source of all creation.” Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 118.

<sup>476</sup> In the Order of Mass at the Preparation and Presentation of the Gifts, the priest blesses God for the fruits of creation:

“Blessed are you Lord God of all creation  
for through your goodness we have received  
the bread we offer you ...”

The rubrics state that the Deacon or the Priest then pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly:

“By the mystery of this water and wine  
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ  
who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” *The Roman Missal*, 564.

<sup>477</sup> Jeremy Driscoll, “Reviewing and Recovering *Sacrosanctum concilium’s* Theological Vision,” *Ecclesia Orans* 30, no. 2 (2013): 389.

<sup>478</sup> “In other words, the Trinity’s circulation of love turns itself outward, and in humility the Son and Spirit work the Father’s good pleasure for all creation, which is to invite our ascent to participate in the very life of God: however, this cannot be forced, it must be done with our cooperation.” David W. Fagerberg, *On Liturgical Asceticism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>479</sup> This is one of many reasons why matrimony should normally be celebrated within Mass. There is no comparable moment in the Matrimonial Liturgy outside of Mass. Further analysis of the Matrimonial Liturgy is presented in Chapter Six below.

kenosis are inseparable. As David Power puts it: “The only way that the divine is manifest is as *agape* in *kenosis*.”<sup>480</sup> Both *agape* and *kenosis* reveal that divine omnipotence is not merely absolute power over others but that it includes the power to give oneself away for the benefit of others. For biblical faith there is no necessary contradiction between Divine omnipotence and Divine love. As Walter Kasper explains: “it requires omnipotence to be able to surrender oneself and give oneself away; and it requires omnipotence to be able to take oneself back in the giving and to preserve the independence and freedom of the recipient.”<sup>481</sup> Consequently, a more positive understanding of *kenosis* can be presented by emphasising divine love rather than divine self-limitation. Niels Gregersen exemplifies this emphasis: “By creating the world out of love, *God neither withdraws from the world nor gives up divine power, but actualizes divine love in the history with God’s beloved creatures.*”<sup>482</sup>

The inseparability of divine love and *kenosis* guides Christian attempts to obey the commandment to love as God loves.<sup>483</sup> Seeking to love as God loves includes the kenotic elements of self-limitation and self-restriction. Thomas Merton explains: “The beginning of this love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”<sup>484</sup> Humans are created in the image of a God who gifts all God’s creatures with

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<sup>480</sup> David N. Power, *Love Without Calculation: A Reflection on Divine Kenosis* (New York: Crossroad 2005), 148.

<sup>481</sup> Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, New ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 194.

<sup>482</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis: In, With, Under, and As: A Response to Ted Peters," *Dialog* 52, no. 3 (2013): 257, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12050>. Emphasis original.

<sup>483</sup> “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” Jn 13:34.

<sup>484</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1955, Reprint 2005), 177-78.

freedom. Humans love as God loves when they limit themselves and allow those they love to be perfectly themselves.

The aspect of love of which Merton writes is absent from many contemporary understandings of love. It is present however in Welker's pragmatic understanding of love capable of becoming fruitful in personal and family relationships. According to Welker, contemporary understandings tend to emphasise love as a one-to-one relationship, while God's kenotic love, displayed most fully in Christ, is a 360-degree love that embraces all creation.<sup>485</sup>

Welker's understanding of love is founded on the characteristics of kenotic love: it includes "a passionate interest in the otherness of the other, a passionate interest in letting the other unfold himself/herself in freedom, a passionate interest to pave ways for the unfolding of his/her life ... it is a love that is directed to the other – not just curiosity."<sup>486</sup> Kenotic love respects the otherness of the other, "it respects the depth and the mystery and the freedom of the loved one; it even keeps this depth and freedom and mystery alive and holds it open."<sup>487</sup>

While God's kenotic love respects the otherness of all creatures it continues to invite them to growth in new life in Christ. God's kenotic love seeks a new covenantal relationship: it seeks "to win the beloved one for a participation in the divine life and in the divine plans for creation. The life of Christ ... wins us over for the loving communion with God in which we have become restored to the *imago Dei* and to membership in the new creation."<sup>488</sup> In his human life, Christ restored the divine likeness which had been diminished from the first sin onward (GS 22). "For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image

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<sup>485</sup> Michael Welker, "Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 128.

<sup>486</sup> Welker, "Romantic Love," 134.

<sup>487</sup> Welker, "Romantic Love," 134.

<sup>488</sup> Welker, "Romantic Love," 134-35.

within man ... so that he can seek his creator spontaneously and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him” (GS 17).<sup>489</sup>

#### 5.4.4 Kenotic Love and Matrimony

Contemporary theologies of creation as kenosis can contribute to further understandings of the statement that the matrimonial covenant “derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1). The first letter of John reveals the incarnation as an act of love: “God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way; God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him” (I Jn 3:8-9). Creation too is an act of love. The total self-giving of Father, Son, and Spirit does not remain inwardly focussed but spills over into creation. Matrimony invites spouses to move beyond an inwardly focussed, over-emphasis upon individualism and romantic love to a love which spills over into creation. Creation is characterised by kenotic love where the Creator creates, makes room for, and shares power with, the created. Spouses are invited to develop a kenotic love which makes room for the whole of the other in the spousal relationship, for children, and for the whole of creation.<sup>490</sup>

In the matrimonial liturgy it is fitting that the couple’s promises of love and fidelity are linked to the Trinity, the summit and source of kenotic love.<sup>491</sup> At the Blessing and Giving of Rings the spouses say in turn:

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<sup>489</sup> Philosophically this is the “theistic compatibilist” position: “I am most *truly* ‘free’ when I am aligned with God’s providential and determining will for me.” Coakley, “Kenosis,” 206.

<sup>490</sup> Kenotic love paradoxically does not negate but rather enhances the abundance of matrimony. Revelation is at its most abundant in the divine self-emptying of the incarnation. Kenotically following Jesus brings the promise of “a hundredfold now in this age” (Mk 10:30) and the kenotic love evidenced in creation provides not only the basic necessities of life but also an abundance: “wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart” (Ps 104:14). Kenosis is a self-limitation that “makes possible new forms of divine glory.” Keith Ward, “Cosmos and Kenosis,” in *The Work of Love: Cosmos as Creation*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 160. New forms of abundant divine glory are palpable in in creation, in the incarnation, and in matrimony.

<sup>491</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar located kenosis in the inner life of the Trinity: “In giving himself, the Father does not give something (or even everything) that he *has but* all that he *is* – for in God there is only being, not having. So the Father’s being passes over, without remainder, to the begotten Son ... This total self-giving, to which the Son and the Spirit respond by an equal self-giving, is a kind of death, a first radical kenosis as one

N., receive 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 (OCM2015-Aus 67,68).

Love is central to the matrimonial liturgy.<sup>492</sup> At the central moment of the liturgy, when the couple as ministers of the sacrament confer matrimony on each other, their promise is love and honour: “I promise ... to love you and to honour you all the days of my life” (OCM2015-Aus 62). The central place given to the love of the couple in the matrimonial liturgy leads Christopher Kiesling to conclude that “the effort to learn to love as Jesus loves is at the heart of marital spirituality.”<sup>493</sup> Both Merton and Welker have shown that Jesus’ love is kenotic love. For Merton, the beginning of this love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves. From this beginning, kenotic love continues to invite the beloved to growth in new life in Christ.

Matrimony is in a sense analogous to continuous creation. The “I take you” of the Matrimonial Consent, which underlines the spouses’ choice from many possibilities, mirrors God’s choice of, and commitment to, this particular creation. Matrimony requires sharing power with, making room for, and accepting the otherness of one’s spouse, while inviting their growth and development. Like creation, matrimony is not something that happens once for all. The spouses are called to create and sustain a fruitful matrimonial life together. After their

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might say. It is a kind of ‘super-death’ that is a component of all love and that forms the basis in creation for all instances of ‘the good death’, from self-forgetfulness in favor of the beloved right up to that highest love by which a man “gives his life for his friends.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison, 5 vols., vol. 5, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 84.

<sup>492</sup> The centrality of love is a post-conciliar development. Older rituals make little mention of love but emphasise children and the joining of families as central to marriage. The sixth century Veronese sacramentary has: “Thus your command to share the marriage bed, to increase and multiply in marriage, has linked the whole world together and established ties among the whole human race.” Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 43.

<sup>493</sup> Christopher G. Kiesling, “The Liturgy of Christian Marriage: Introduction to Marital Spirituality,” *Spirituality Today* 34 (1982): 51.

matrimonial liturgy, the goal of the couple has “to be directed to the future that, with the help of God’s grace, they are daily called to build. For this very reason, neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect. Each must set aside all illusions and *accept the other as he or she actually is*: an unfinished product, needing to grow, a work in progress” (AL 218, emphasis added).

Matrimonial love can “mature over the years, deepening and expanding as the Spirit purifies and sanctifies the couple like gold that is ‘tested by fire’ (1 Pet 1:7).”<sup>494</sup> The Spirit hovers over the life of the spouses as she hovers over creation. As she does in the whole process of continuing creation, the Spirit respects the freedom of the couple: “the spirit of God unleashes autonomy in the beloved rather than seeking to control the other by any form of power-over, even if benevolently exercised.”<sup>495</sup>

Matrimony draws strength from creation as ideally it invites a developing kenotic love.<sup>496</sup> God’s kenotic love, revealed most clearly in Christ’s love, “draws human lives into the creative love that makes them bearers of God’s presence and the incarnation of the new creation.”<sup>497</sup> Matrimony offers the possibility of growth in the gift of this love: the strength of matrimony “lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love” (AL 53).

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<sup>494</sup> 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.

<sup>495</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 178-79.

<sup>496</sup> Charles Hackney arrives at this destination via a different path. In his study of positive relationships and human flourishing he concludes that in matrimony “above all [we] need Jesus’ kenotic love” to place our spouse’s good above our own.” Charles H. Hackney, *Positive Psychology in Christian Perspective: Foundations, Concepts, and Applications* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 145.

<sup>497</sup> Welker, “Romantic Love,” 136.

## 5.5 Conclusion: Matrimony Derives its Force and Strength from Creation

The Christian profession of faith in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed begins with an acknowledgment of God as creator. Christians believe in “one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things, visible and invisible.” The creed begins with creation “for creation is the beginning and foundation of all God’s works” (CCC 198). Creation is the beginning, the foundation, and a source of strength for matrimony. Jesus, in his explicit teaching on matrimony, unequivocally directs his inquisitors back to the Creator’s original plan: “Have you not read that the one who ‘made them at the beginning made them male and female’” (Mt 19:4). As OCM2015-Aus highlights: “Christ the Lord, making a new creation and making all things new, has willed that Marriage be restored to its primordial form and holiness” (OCM2015-Aus 5).

This chapter has argued that there is an inseparable Scriptural and theological link between matrimony and care for creation. The Scriptural accounts reveal that God’s continuing creation is characterised by kenotic love and that a central purpose of matrimony is growth in kenotic love demonstrated in openness to life, including care for God’s continuing creation.

A vital question is the extent to which these links are evident in the everyday lives of Christians. According to the principle of sacramentality, the seeds of Christian living are to be found prior to, as well as during, the celebration of liturgy: “we need to appreciate and receive God’s blessings before any act of liturgy begins. In all of life, these blessings come to us through the goods of this earth, through human work on these natural symbols, through life itself lived on this good earth, and through communion with each other in love and relationships that are directed toward communal self-transcendence.”<sup>498</sup> In other words, God’s blessings are

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<sup>498</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "Evaluating *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Context, Text, Unfinished Business," *Chicago Studies* 49, no. 2 (2010): 137-38.

offered to us daily through the fruits of creation as well as in our sacramental rituals.<sup>499</sup> The seeds of Christian living which are available to us through the goods of the earth and the work of human hands may be brought to full flower and fruit in the celebration of liturgy. The realization that we are embedded in God's good creation, with a special responsibility to ensure its flourishing, enables us to be more open to the blessings that come to us through the goods of this earth, the works of human hands, and pre-eminently through the sacraments.

Matrimony provides a privileged locus to appreciate and receive God's blessings. In everyday matrimonial life, these blessings come to us primarily through our spouse who is both a good fruit of the earth and a work of human hands and thus a bearer of God's kenotic love, leading to the possibility of communion in a loving relationship directed toward self-transcendence. Such a view calls us back to the Creator's plan for women and men to flourish in matrimony and to contribute to the prospering of all creation.<sup>500</sup>

The liturgical celebration of matrimony has a significant part to play in ensuring that this link is enacted in Christian life. Irwin has long stressed the relationship between the celebration of liturgy and Christian life lived well. He emphasises that the rule of Christian living (*lex vivendi*) is an essential addition to the rule of prayer (*lex orandi*) and the rule of belief (*lex credendi*).<sup>501</sup> Irwin explains: "The ultimate aim of this *lex vivendi* is living the Christian life in conformity with Christian revelation, both as revealed by God and as that revelation makes demands upon us."<sup>502</sup> The extent to which Christian matrimonial life

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<sup>499</sup> According to the sacramental principle, God's grace is everywhere present yet often unnoticed: "These things, these things were here and but the beholder/ Wanting." See 2.3.3 above.

<sup>500</sup> The Creator's plan involves a leadership role for humans and particularly for married women and men: "The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things ... Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator" (LS 83).

<sup>501</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 92.

<sup>502</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 619.



conforms with the revelation of the Creator of the nexus between matrimony and care for creation is influenced by the rule of prayer (*lex orandi*) and the rule of belief (*lex credendi*). The next chapter evaluates the emphasis given to creation in the *lex orandi* of OCM2015-Aus.

## Chapter Six

### Creation in OCM2015-Aus

The expanded Introduction to OCM2015-Aus includes a new first paragraph: “The matrimonial covenant<sup>503</sup> by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong partnership derives its force and strength from creation, but for the Christian faithful it is also raised up to a higher dignity, since it is numbered among the sacraments of the new covenant” (OCM2015-Aus 1).<sup>504</sup> In contrast, the opening paragraph of RM1984-Aus is silent on creation and highlights that matrimony is an image of the relationship between Christ and the Church, stating: “In virtue of the sacrament of marriage, married Christians signify and share in the mystery and the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and his Church” (RM1984-Aus 1). This chapter examines how creation, including the material world, is presented in OCM2015-Aus.

#### 6.1 Creation in the Introduction to OCM2015-Aus

The statement that the matrimonial covenant derives its force and strength from creation indicates that marriage is a natural institution, yet it implies much more. The Introduction to OCM2015-Aus explicitly locates the origin of matrimony in God’s creation: “The intimate community of life and love, by which spouses are ‘no longer two, but one flesh,’ has been established by God the Creator, provided with its own proper laws, and endowed with that blessing which alone was not forfeited by punishment for original sin” (OCM2015-Aus 4).

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<sup>503</sup> Vatican II appropriately replaced “matrimonial contract” with “matrimonial covenant.” Covenant is part of the fabric of creation. Both creation and covenant refer to God’s initiative and commitment and human response. In their matrimonial covenant wife and husband image God as creator and keeper of the covenant.

<sup>504</sup> The first part of this statement, “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life,” is the definition of matrimony from CCL1983, c. 1055, 1. “Code of Canon Law,” 1983, accessed June 21, 2021, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_\\_\\_P43.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/___P43.HTM).

Paragraph 4 underscores that matrimony and the laws and blessings associated with it are not of human origin but were established by the Creator. New creation in Christ where “everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor 5:17), did not eliminate marriage but rather restored it to the state intended by the Creator. Christ willed that “Marriage be restored to its primordial form and holiness in such a way that what God has joined together, no one may put asunder” (OCM2015-Aus 5).

## **6.2 Creation and the World in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass: The Introductory Rites**

After the substantial emphasis upon creation in the Introduction one might expect that the matrimonial liturgy presented in OCM2015-Aus would be vivid in its references to creation. However, analysis of the text reveals that couples who celebrate using The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass probably hear no explicit reference to creation until the Nuptial Blessing near the end of the liturgy.

There are few explicit references to the concept of creation in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass. The only such reference in the Introductory Rites is provided in one of the optional opening prayers:

O God, who in creating the human race  
willed that man and wife should be one,  
join, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love  
these your servants who are to be united in the covenant of marriage (OCM2015-Aus 224).<sup>505</sup>

This option, with its allusion to Gen 2:24, explicitly links creation and matrimony. However, as one of seven options it is probably used infrequently during celebrations of the matrimonial liturgy.

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<sup>505</sup> Unfortunately, the sexist form, man and wife (not husband and wife), which was removed from the Questions before the Consent in OCM2015-Aus, is used here.

### **6.2.1 The Liturgy of the Word**

The Liturgy of the Word provides the possibility of explicit references to creation. The rubrics state:

The Liturgy of the Word follows in the usual manner with texts taken from those provided above in no. 56 or with others from the readings indicated below ... At least one reading that explicitly speaks of Marriage must always be chosen (OCM2015-Aus 90).

The rubric encourages, rather than requires, a reading with explicit reference to creation. The first reading at no.56 is Genesis 1:26-28, 31a, on the origin of matrimony in God's creation of male and female in the divine image, a reading designated as speaking explicitly of marriage. It recalls that God creates by God's word, and that it is because man and woman are created in God's image that they are given dominion over the earth and its creatures. It makes the foundational link between matrimony and care for creation. However, the readings from sacred scripture are wisely to be chosen "with the engaged couple" (OCM2015-Aus 29).<sup>506</sup> Of the 44 scripture texts to be used in the Rite of Marriage (OCM2015-Aus 179-222) seven speak explicitly of creation: Gen 1:26-28,31a; Gen 2:18-24; Tb 8:4-8; Ps 33 (The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord); Ps 148 (Let all praise the name of the Lord); Mt 19:3-6; Mk 10:6-9. In these Gospel pericopes Jesus refers to the restoration of marriage to the Creator's original intention.

### **6.2.2 The Celebration of Matrimony**

A possible reference to creation occurs during "The Celebration of Matrimony". In the Reception of the Consent, the person assisting has the option of saying to the bride and bridegroom:

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<sup>506</sup> This choice, based upon the couple's reflection upon the scripture readings, may help to couple to become more effective hearers and speakers of God's Word so that together they may live God's Word fruitfully.

May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,<sup>507</sup>  
the God who joined together our first parents in paradise  
strengthen and bless in Christ  
the consent you have declared before the Church,  
so that what God joins together, no one may put asunder (OCM2015-Aus 98).

As shown in 3.1.6 above, it is the God of the living who created marriage by joining Adam and Eve and it is the God of the living who is called upon to strengthen and bless in Christ the consent that this particular couple has declared before the Church.

Material objects are mentioned but not developed in the Blessing and Giving of Rings. As maintained in Chapter 3, the blessing and exchange of rings is unfortunately given inconsequential attention in the matrimonial liturgy. The blessing and giving of rings involves the exchange of a symbolic object that is both a fruit of the earth, and a work of human hands. This connection is not made in the preferred nor the optional blessings (OCM2015-Aus 100, 229, 230), thus reducing the potential theological and liturgical richness of the blessing prayer.

At the central moment of the liturgy, the Consent, there is no reference to creation nor to the world. Creation is God's good gift to humankind. At this key point of the liturgy many spouses have some subjective awareness of their spouse as God's good gift to them: a fruit of the earth and work of human hands from creation's continuing bounty. Reference to creation in the presentation and preparation of the gifts in the liturgy of the Eucharist provides the paradigmatic example of this notion, namely, that the gifts of the earth used in the liturgy are gifts from God's goodness and that they will reveal God's presence.<sup>508</sup> There is a cognate element in the sacrament of matrimony. Bride and groom have just offered the gift of

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<sup>507</sup> In the context of the matrimonial liturgy consideration might be given to adding the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel to this patriarchal formula.

<sup>508</sup> "Blessed are you Lord, God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands ..." *The Roman Missal*, 564.

themselves, and received the gift of their spouse, the pinnacles of God's creation. They too are fruits of the earth and the work of human hands.<sup>509</sup>

In conceiving of the bride and groom as "fruits of the earth" it can be helpful to understand that the discoveries of modern cosmology reveal that the Big Bang and the subsequent 13.798 billion years of galactic chemical evolution through stellar recycling have produced the elements that make up our planet and our bodies.<sup>510</sup> As theologian and biochemist Arthur Peacocke writes: "Every atom of iron in our blood would not have been there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth from which we have emerged."<sup>511</sup> Bride and groom are part of the web of life that emerged from the crust of the earth. They are fruits of the earth and have been shaped by many human hands (parents, extended family, Church community, friends, teachers, and others) to become the persons that they are. In being consciously aware of receiving the freely given gift of one's partner in matrimony one can also have a deep experience of the goodness of God's creation.

Kevin Irwin draws attention to the relationship between the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands in the Eucharist emphasising the fact that "for there to be bread and wine in the first place one must stand in awe of the goods that grow on this good earth and equally in awe of those humans whose sweat and labor produced them."<sup>512</sup> Many brides and grooms stand in awe of their partners as wonderful fruits of this good earth and the work of human

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<sup>509</sup> There is a richer opportunity to demonstrate this connection in "The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Within Mass" where "at the Preparation of the Gifts the bride and bridegroom may bring the gifts to the altar" (OCM2015-Aus 70).

<sup>510</sup> Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen, *Human Universe* (London: William Collins, 2014), 168-69.

<sup>511</sup> Arethur R Peacocke, "Theology and Science Today," in *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 32.

<sup>512</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, "Sacramentality: The Fundamental Language for Liturgy and Sacraments," *Analecta Liturgica* 28 (2010): 157.

hands. Fewer take the opportunity the rite provides to reverence the contribution human work has made to the development of their partner. OCM1990-Lat makes clear that in the rite's preferred option for the entrance procession to the altar, "the servers 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" (OCM1990-Lat 46). This option for the entrance procession provides the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution that parents and friends have made to the development of bride and groom. When this option for the entrance procession is not utilised, part of the sacramentality of the matrimonial liturgy, about fruits of the earth and work of human hands, is occluded. When it is utilised, it can help to present a balance between the gifts of creation and human stewardship of those gifts. More broadly it can contribute to an integration of the sacred and the secular and to bridging the disconnect between faith and daily life which *Gaudium et Spes* identified as "among the more serious errors of our age" (GS 43). As Irwin concludes, sacramentality in liturgy and sacraments "functions best when it fosters a coherence, not to say congruence, between the things of this earth and the things of God."<sup>513</sup>

Awareness of the goodness of God's creation can evoke a desire to express gratitude,<sup>514</sup> to sing with the Psalmist "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Ps 103:1). Blessing God is foundational to the sacramental liturgies. Augustine preached "May our soul bless the Lord, and may God bless us. When God blesses us, we grow, and when we bless the Lord, we grow; so that in either case the gain is ours."<sup>515</sup> When we bless

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<sup>513</sup> Irwin, "Sacramentality," 160.

<sup>514</sup> Positive Psychology, a field of mental health research and practice, encourages gratitude as a habit for enhancing well-being. "Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what you receive ... [gratitude] helps you to connect to something larger than your individual experience – whether to other people, nature, or a higher power." Harvard Medical School, *Positive Psychology: Harnessing the Power of Happiness, Mindfulness, and Inner Strength*, (Boston: Harvard University, 2016), 17. See Chapter Seven below.

<sup>515</sup> Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms: 51-72*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2001), 307.

God, we open ourselves further to God's blessing and the change and growth that God's blessing brings.

Expressing gratitude by blessing God is accommodated in the Order of Blessing of a Married Couple within Mass on the anniversary of Marriage. There the couple may renew their commitment with these words:

The husband [says]

Blessed are you, Lord,  
For by your goodness I took N. as my wife.

The wife [says]

Blessed are you, Lord,  
For by your goodness I took N. as my husband (OCM2015-Aus 277).

Together the couple bless God and acknowledge that it is through God's goodness that they have received the gift of each other. The words echo the prayer said at the preparation of the gifts at Mass. There the priest blesses the God of all creation for the gifts of bread and wine received "through your goodness."<sup>516</sup> Here the couple blesses God for the gift of their spouse received "by your goodness." They continue together:

Blessed are you, Lord,  
for in the good and the bad times of our life  
you have stood lovingly by our side.  
Help us, we pray,  
to remain faithful in our love for one another,  
so that we may be true witnesses  
to the covenant you have made with humankind (OCM2015-Aus 277).

This blessing prayer alludes to the sacramental principle that God's presence is potentially discoverable in all aspects of life. It illustrates well essential elements of matrimony,

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<sup>516</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 564.



(gratitude, awareness of God’s presence, fidelity in good and bad times, witness), and predisposes the couple to further blessing and growth in these areas.

The couple can give thanks on the anniversary of their marriage but not during its initial celebration. This represents a missed opportunity. However, within the current liturgy, the opportunity exists for the couple to craft their own prayer of thanks within the Universal Prayer. The first optional introduction to the Universal Prayer refers to the “special gift” of the sacrament:

Dear brothers and sisters,  
as we call to mind the special gift of grace and charity  
by which God has been pleased to crown and consecrate  
the love of our sister N. and our brother N.,  
let us commend them to the Lord (OCM2015-Aus 251).

### **6.2.3 The Nuptial Blessing**

OCM2015-Aus gives greater emphasis to creation in the Nuptial blessing. The three options for the Nuptial Blessing share a common structure. Each begins by addressing God as creator and each refers to the *imago Dei*. The beginning of each blessing locates the origin of matrimony within God’s original good creation:

God, who by your mighty power  
created all things out of nothing,  
and when you had set in place  
the beginnings of the universe, formed man and woman in your own image,  
making the woman an inseparable helpmate to the man,  
that they might no longer be two but one flesh,  
and taught that what you were pleased to make one  
must never be divided ...

This blessing alludes again to creation in its third paragraph with the evocative phrase “in the beginning,” and it repeats the traditional understanding, derived from early Christian nuptial liturgies, that matrimony is “the one blessing not forfeited by original sin nor washed

away by the flood.”<sup>517</sup> The Creator granted to matrimony a power and blessing that not even original sin could diminish.

O God, by whom woman is joined to man  
and the companionship they had in the beginning  
is endowed with the one blessing  
not forfeited by original sin  
nor washed away by the flood (OCM2015-Aus 105).

The second option echoes the biblical connection between matrimony and care for the world with its reference to husband and wife fulfilling “their calling in the world”:

Holy Father,  
who formed man in your own image,  
male and female you created them,  
so that as husband and wife, united in body and in heart  
they might fulfil their calling in the world (OCM2015-Aus 242).

Blessing three is also positive about the world praying that the couple may “bear witness to you in the world” (OCM2015-Aus 244). The blessing assumes that husband and wife, created in the image of God, will not be remote from the material world but rather will be God’s representatives in that world.

Holy Father maker of the whole world,  
who created man and woman in your own image  
and willed that their union be crowned with your blessing,  
we humbly beseech you for these your servants,  
who are joined today in the Sacrament of Matrimony (OCM2015-Aus 244).

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<sup>517</sup>A Gregorian Sacramentary, the “Hadrianum” dating from the eighth century has:

O God,  
Through you a woman is joined to her husband  
And society is chiefly ordered by that blessing  
Which was neither lost by original sin  
Nor washed away in the flood.

Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 48.

The Nuptial Blessings demonstrate a link that Jean-Marie Tillard found between ritual blessings, creation, and worldly life. In the sacraments: “the goods of creation cannot be regarded simply as signs of grace with only the supernatural life or eschatological realities in view. Creation has not been cancelled out by the resurrection. God the Father of Jesus Christ, continues to be the one who gave the earth to Adam for his happiness and that is the gift that the Ritual of blessings ‘symbolises’.”<sup>518</sup>

In the Nuptial Blessings, supernatural life and eschatological realities are important, yet the emphasis is upon living married life well as part of God’s good creation. Bride and groom, as the key symbols in the marriage liturgy, are not transformed into something else; they are graced to become the fullness of the gifts that they are already, as a united couple rather than as single individuals. As Irwin, writing of liturgical symbols generally, explains: “precisely as symbols which occasion the act of blessing God they become more truly what they are natively – bearers of God’s presence and images of God’s goodness.”<sup>519</sup>

The second formula for the Nuptial Blessing offers an example of the point Irwin is making:

Holy Father,  
who formed man in your own image,  
male and female you created them,  
so that as husband and wife, united in body and heart,  
they might fulfil their calling in the world (OCM2015-Aus 242).

This blessing draws upon the Genesis account of creation to remind the bride and groom that as a couple, male and female together, they are natively images of God’s goodness.<sup>520</sup> It

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<sup>518</sup> Tillard, "Blessing, Scaramentality and Epiclesis," 108.

<sup>519</sup> Irwin, "Sacramentality," 144.

<sup>520</sup> As Cooke notes: “this means that the imaging of God occurs precisely in the relationship between humans, above all in the interaction of men and women.” Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* Revised ed. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 81.

affirms their fundamental equality. The liturgy integrates theologies of creation and eschatology. It does not pray that they be taken out of the world but that, through their union, “in body and heart,” they might “*fulfil their calling in the world.*” Part of that calling is to work with others to build a better world.<sup>521</sup>

Only one of the optional blessings at the Conclusion of the Celebration includes a reference to the world:

May you be witnesses in the world to God’s charity,  
so that the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness  
may one day receive you thankfully  
into the eternal dwelling of God (OCM2015-Aus 248).

This option links liturgy and life. It reminds the couple, at the end of the celebration, that they are images of God, and expresses the hope that others will experience God’s charity through their actions.

While the Nuptial Blessings do emphasise creation, there is a disconnect between the strong claim of the Introduction to OCM2015-Aus that: “the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong partnership derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1), and the paucity of explicit references to creation in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass.

### **6.3 The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass**

According to OCM2015-Aus matrimony should normally be celebrated within Mass.<sup>522</sup> Nevertheless, in Australia, most of the celebrations of matrimony are outside Mass largely

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<sup>521</sup> “Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the importance of their obligation to work with all men in the building of a more human world,” GS 57.

<sup>522</sup> This was the intention of the reform of the liturgy required by SC 78.

because many of those present are not participants in the life of the Church. One consequence of the preference for matrimony outside Mass is that the participants miss the richer experience of creation and the world that is presented within Mass.

### **6.3.1 Creation and the World in the Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage**

Both the Mass in general and options within the Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage provide more explicit references to creation. One of the six optional Collects of the Ritual Mass refers to creation:

O God, who in creating the human race  
willed that man and wife should be one,  
join, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love  
these your servants who are to be united in the covenant of marriage (OCM2015-Aus  
224).

So too does one of the possible prefaces, the third preface titled “Matrimony as a sign of divine love.” This preface provides a rich development of the Christian understanding that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), a central tenet of the Christian faith. Pope Benedict XVI explains: “These words ... express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny” (DCE 1). God creates in order to share God’s love, and humans created in the image of God who is love are called to spread God’s love.

In the second paragraph of this preface, the word *caritas* of OCM1990-Lat is translated as charity, where charity conveys the sense of *agape* or unselfish concern for the good of another. Created out of God’s *agape*, humans are called to practise unselfish concern for the good of others. Through matrimony the couple are called to the law of charity, they are called “to become an abiding sign of [God’s] own love” (OCM2015-Aus 236).

For you willed that the human race,

created by the gift of your goodness,  
should be raised to such high dignity  
that in the union of husband and wife  
you might bestow a true image of your love.

For those you created out of charity  
You call to the law of charity without ceasing  
And grant them a share in your eternal charity  
(OCM2015-Aus 236).

One of the possible Prayers over the Offerings makes an implicit reference to creation  
in locating the origin of matrimony in the goodness of God's creation:

Receive, we pray. O Lord,  
The offering made on the occasion  
Of this sealing of the sacred bond of marriage,  
And just as your goodness is its origin,  
May your providence guide its course.<sup>523</sup>

The Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage always includes the *Gloria in excelsis*.<sup>524</sup> The Gloria makes explicit reference to the earth: “on *earth* peace to people of good will,” and two references to the world, “you take away the sins of the *world*, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the *world*, receive our prayer.” It does provide an opportunity for the couple (and the assembly) to express their gratitude by blessing God:

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 1236.

<sup>524</sup> (OCM2015-Aus 34) explains the occasions when a Mass other than the Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage is to be said.

<sup>525</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 557.

If the Mass requires the Creed, further references to creation are made.<sup>526</sup> The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed begins with the affirmation that God the Father is the “maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” Everything that exists ultimately owes its existence to a divine creator: “There is a clear sense that God’s creation does not coincide with the physical or material world but goes infinitely beyond it. Thus, the liturgy not only represents a pre-modern or a-scientific worldview but also offers food for thought.”<sup>527</sup> Amongst the food it offers for thought is rejection of dualistic notions of an evil material realm and a good spiritual realm. Both the material and spiritual realms are created good by God.

The second verse proclaims the Christian belief that “all things were made” through the Only Begotten Son, while the fourth verse acknowledges the Holy Spirit as “the giver of life.” The goodness of the material world, and particularly of the human body, is reaffirmed conclusively by the incarnation of Jesus which links creation and redemption. The shorter Apostles’ Creed has fewer references to creation however it begins with an acknowledgment of God the Father as “Creator of heaven and earth.”

As noted above, there is a richer opportunity to demonstrate bride and groom as gifts of creation in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Within Mass. At the Preparation of the Gifts “the bride and bridegroom may bring the gifts to the altar” (OCM2015-Aus 70). For Geldhof, the presentation of the gifts is key to the way in which creation is presented in the *Ordo Missae*: “The underlying understanding of creation is that the world is the space in which nature can flourish and produce crops, but also the space in which human interventions can take place. The fundamental oneness of this space is an important given ... humanity is never

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<sup>526</sup> This happens rarely in Australia. It only occurs when the Mass of the day displaces the Ritual Mass “The Celebration of Marriage.” See (OCM2015-Aus 34).

<sup>527</sup> Joris Geldhof, “Fruit of the Earth, Work of Human Hands, Bread of Life: *The Ordo Missae on Creation and the World*,” in *Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation*, ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2019), 250.

and never can be detached from nature. Human cultivation is curiously interwoven with nature.”<sup>528</sup> God created the world with potential for development. That development occurs with the fruitful combination of God’s gifts and human interventions.

The multiple meanings of the bride and groom presenting the bread and wine that will be returned to them as the consecrated Body and Blood of Christ include their acknowledgment that they too are fruit of the earth and work of human hands and the incorporation of their matrimonial covenant into Christ’s eternal covenant.

The Sanctus mentions “earth”: “heaven and earth are full of your glory.” It is all creation, the whole of heaven and earth, that is full of the glory of God providing an echo of the universalism that underlies many of the liturgical references to creation.

It is rare for living persons other than the pope and bishops to be named in the Eucharistic Prayer, yet a commemoration of the husband and wife is made with formulas specific to Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III for use in the Nuptial Mass. For example, in Eucharistic Prayer III, after the words, “whom you have summoned before you,” the following is added:

Strengthen we pray in the grace of Marriage N, and N.,  
whom you have brought happily to their wedding day,  
that under your protection  
they may always be faithful in their lives  
to the covenant they have sealed in your presence.  
In your compassion, O merciful Father,  
gather to yourself all your children  
scattered throughout the world (OCM2015-Aus 239).

The commemoration of the husband and wife may only be made in Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III implying that Eucharistic Prayer IV, is not to be used for Nuptial Masses.<sup>529</sup> As

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<sup>528</sup> Geldhof, "Fruit of the Earth," 253.

<sup>529</sup> The Missal’s rubric notes: “It is not permitted to change the Preface of this Eucharistic Prayer because of the structure of the Prayer itself, which presents a summary of the history of salvation.” *The Roman Missal*, 690.



Turner comments: Eucharistic Prayer IV “is presumed not to be used for weddings.”<sup>530</sup> This is unfortunate since the purpose of increasing the number of Eucharistic Prayers in the post-conciliar reform of the liturgy was not only to give greater variety to the Church’s prayer but also “to render the formulas more complete and richer in theological, scriptural, and liturgical content.”<sup>531</sup> Eucharistic Prayer IV is particularly rich in in theological, scriptural, and liturgical content in relation to creation.<sup>532</sup> In his study of creation and the world in the *Ordo Missae* Geldhof found that, while the third and the fourth Eucharistic Prayers reflect a more developed understanding of creation and the world, “most references to creation and the world, however, are to be found in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer.”<sup>533</sup>

Indeed, both the preface of Eucharistic Prayer IV and the prayer itself are replete with references to the goodness of God’s creation. In the preface:

[Father] you, who alone are good, the source of life,  
have made all that is,  
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings  
and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.<sup>534</sup>

And the prayer presents a very positive theology of creation linking the *imago Dei* to care for the whole world:

We give you praise, Father most holy  
for you are great  
and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and love.  
You formed man in your own image

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<sup>530</sup> Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 122.

<sup>531</sup> Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, 385.

<sup>532</sup> In his critique of the way creation is described and used in the present reformed liturgy Irwin notes that “only the preface to the fourth eucharistic prayer contains any notable reference to praise for creation.” Irwin, “The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments,” 91.

<sup>533</sup> Geldhof, “Fruit of the Earth,” 259.

<sup>534</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 690.

and entrusted the whole world to his care,  
so that in serving you alone the Creator,  
he might have dominion over all creatures.

Christ's paschal sacrifice is linked to new creation of the whole world:

And that we might live no longer for ourselves  
but for him who died and rose again for us,  
he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father,  
as the first fruits for those who believe,  
so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world,  
he might sanctify creation to the full.<sup>535</sup>

While Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III proclaim that he “took the chalice,”<sup>536</sup> Eucharistic Prayer IV accentuates the largesse of God's salvation and God's good creation: “taking the chalice filled with the fruit of the vine.” Eucharistic Prayer IV proclaims a very positive and constructive theology of creation with women and men together serving the Creator by caring for creation. As Enrico Mazza writes of Eucharistic Prayer IV in his commentary:

The logic and wisdom of love guides the creative activity of God, which therefore cannot fail to be perfect. The perfection is described concretely by speaking of human beings, who are defined as God's images. Because they are his images, dominion over the universe is entrusted to them, and they become his representatives in the world. But, human beings are not autonomous in their activity as caretakers of the universe; this activity is a service of God the creator and a form of worship of him. Consequently, when human beings rule creation, they render to God their own special obedience and service.<sup>537</sup>

The final prayer immediately before the doxology asks that all God's children may eventually enter into a heavenly inheritance with Mary and the saints where “with the whole

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<sup>535</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 692.

<sup>536</sup> Eucharistic Prayer I has “this precious chalice.”

<sup>537</sup> Enrico Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo 1986), 164-65.

of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you through Christ our Lord, through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.”<sup>538</sup> Again the prayer highlights God’s largesse, “ you bestow on the world all that is good,” and proclaims that it is not only human beings but the whole creation that will become a new heaven and a new earth after being freed from the corruption of sin and death. Again, Mazza notes the emphasis upon creation:

We find here the same theology that we saw at the beginning of this anaphora: the human person is priest for creation. Final salvation will bring the redemption of all that exists and the definitive epiphany of the kingdom; in the glory of the end-time, the aspiration of every creature will be satisfied as all together form a choir that sings for ever the praises of the Father.<sup>539</sup>

The idea of the human person as priest for creation implies a very different relationship from that of humanity as conqueror.<sup>540</sup> Maximus the Confessor (580-662) developed the understanding of humans as priests of creation. For Maximus humans are both part of creation and its pinnacle. He wrote that “the entire cosmos praises and glorifies God ‘with silent voices,’ and that praise is not heard until we give it a voice, until we praise God in and with creation.”<sup>541</sup> As part of creation, yet created in the image of God, humans can form a bridge (act as priests) between God and creation. The human person is priest for creation in the sense that she is called to care for creation as God cares for it, to transform it into something better, to share in Christ’s priestly work to bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

Eucharistic Prayer IV is the richest of the Eucharistic Prayers in its references to creation and the world; however, it is not used in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Within

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<sup>538</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 697.

<sup>539</sup> Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers*, 189.

<sup>540</sup> “God blessed them, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and *conquer* it.’” (OCM2015-Aus 179).

<sup>541</sup> Maximus cited by Radu Bordeianu, "Maximus and Ecology: The Relevance of Maximus the Confessor's Theology of Creation for the Present Ecological Crisis " *The Downside Review* 127, no. 447 (2009): 117.

Mass. The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Within Mass is richer in its references to creation than The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Without Mass because the Mass itself is richer in its references to creation than the Matrimonial liturgy. The evidence again intimates that there is a disconnect between the strong claim of The Introduction to OCM2015-Aus that “the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong partnership derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1) and the rarity of explicit references to creation in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

#### **6.4 Creation and the World in OCM2015-Aus**

The evidence reveals a paucity of explicit references to creation in any of the versions of sacramental liturgy of matrimony. This deficit is surprising since creation is a foundational faith conviction of Christianity: “Creation is the beginning and foundation of all God’s works” (CCC 198). A paucity of references to creation in sacramental celebrations is particularly problematic for at least four reasons. Firstly, as the beginning and foundation of all God’s works creation is foundational to sacramental theology. Lieven Boeve offers a plausible sacramental theology which is appropriate for the postmodern cultural context, and which acknowledges creation as a basic metaphor of Christianity and hence as an essential element of how God bestows grace in the sacraments. He writes:

Sacramental celebrations, as moments of the condensation of sacramental life and thought, are ritual gatherings where the fundamental faith convictions and insights of the Christian tradition are articulated metaphorically and expressed in symbols and symbolic actions, The basic metaphors of Christianity, which concern both *creation* and the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are actualized in a testimonial and narrative way as the interruption and claim made by God, summoning us towards conversion, openness and bearing witness.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Boeve, "Symbols of who we are Called to Become," 163.

All the fundamental faith convictions of the Christian tradition, including creation, need to be articulated adequately in the sacramental celebrations and particularly in matrimony which “derives its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1).

Secondly, creation is foundational to a sacramental worldview. According to Stephen Bevens, theologians adopt one of two basic orientations in their work: either a creation-centred or a redemption-centred perspective is adopted.<sup>543</sup> A creation-centred theology “sees the world, creation, as sacramental: the world is the place where God reveals God’s self; revelation does not happen in set apart, particularly holy places, in strange, unworldly circumstances, or in words that are spoken in a stilted voice; it comes in daily life, in ordinary words, through ordinary people.”<sup>544</sup> On the other hand a redemption-centred theology is “characterized by the conviction that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total replacement. In this perspective, grace cannot build on or perfect nature because nature is something that is corrupt.”<sup>545</sup>

Bevens’ perspective views creation, the world, as sacramental. Unsurprisingly Kevin Irwin, who has consistently championed the principle of sacramentality as foundational to liturgy and sacraments, displays a creation-centred theological perspective. For Irwin, the function of sacramental liturgy “is less to bring to the world what we have experienced in the liturgy (as important as that truly is) than it is to underscore how what we do in liturgy derives from the world and everyday life, the liturgical ritualization of which helps us order our lives and our world once more in God’s image and likeness.”<sup>546</sup> However Irwin’s perspective is not one-sided. It is “both ... and” rather than “either ... or.” “In a sacramental world all is both

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<sup>543</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21.

<sup>544</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21.

<sup>545</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21-22.

<sup>546</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 208-09. Emphasis added.

graced and in need of complete redemption.”<sup>547</sup> The God we believe in both creates and redeems: “The creator God redeems and God’s redemption extends to all creation.”<sup>548</sup> However, Fretheim underlines the principle which guides the appropriate balance: while the work of God in Christ is central, it is important to remember that “redemption is in the service of creation, not the other way around.”<sup>549</sup>

It is appropriate that the matrimonial liturgy is informed by, and expresses, a creation-centred theology for not only does matrimony derive “its force and strength from creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1), but for matrimony the everyday is sacramental. God reveals God’s self in the everyday lives of the couple: “as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity” (GS 48). OCM2015-Aus espouses a creation-centred theology in its opening paragraph; however, particularly in *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Without Mass*, minimal liturgical attention is given to creation and the world.

A predominance of redemption-centred theological perspectives over creation-centred perspectives is illustrated in Elizabeth Johnson’s 1996 claim that notions of the world as God’s good creation were largely absent from contemporary theological endeavour.<sup>550</sup> Johnson presents compelling evidence that an overemphasis upon the God of redemption (compared with the God of creation) has led people of faith and their churches to a preoccupation with other-worldly concerns. The evidence from the 1990 revision of the *Ordo celebrandi*

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<sup>547</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 204.

<sup>548</sup> Irwin, "A Sacramental World," 209.

<sup>549</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Response to Reviews of God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, no. 2 (2010): 214.

<sup>550</sup> Johnson’s argument is treated at length in 2.2.2 above.

*Matrimonium* suggests that notions of the world as God's good creation are also largely absent from contemporary liturgical theological endeavour.

Johnson suggests that a fuller trinitarian understanding of the living God in creation is essential to allow love for God and neighbour to grow and to be demonstrated in action in the real world.<sup>551</sup> Matrimonial love, blessed by God, is designed to allow love for God and neighbour to grow and to be demonstrated in action in the world and is intended to be "fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation" (CCC 1604).

Thirdly, as Irwin has long argued, the principle of sacramentality is foundational to the celebration of liturgy and sacraments. When sacramental liturgy places the proper emphasis upon the "combination of sign, symbol, words and gestures – *especially as these are perceived to be from this good earth and the work of human hands* – then the doctrine of sacramentality is preserved and articulated."<sup>552</sup> There is a scarcity of emphasis upon signs, symbols, words, and gestures related to the fruits of creation and the work of human hands in OCM2015-Aus.

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass provides richer references to creation largely because the Mass itself gives greater emphasis to creation. As shown above, and as Geldhof concluded from his study of the Mass, "creation is a crucial underlying theological reality that at significant points surfaces in undeniable allusions as well as explicit references throughout the *Ordo Missae*, including the rites constituting the preparation of the gifts, the prefaces and the Eucharistic prayers."<sup>553</sup> One might add that creation is a more emphatic theological reality in Eucharistic Prayer IV which is not used for Nuptial Masses.

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<sup>551</sup> Johnson, "Is God's Charity Broad Enough for Bears?," 292.

<sup>552</sup> Irwin, "Sacramentality," 153. Emphasis added.

<sup>553</sup> Geldhof, "Fruit of the Earth," 263.

Finally, contemporary environmental crises and Pope Francis' response to them, particularly in *Laudato Si'*, have refocused attention upon the theology of creation.<sup>554</sup> It is opportune to evaluate whether the liturgy we celebrate reflects that emphasis. Liturgical theology can contribute to the Church and to the world by ratifying that the sacramental liturgies give proper balance to the related images of God as creator and redeemer. In its rituals and its euchology OCM2015-Aus is under-weight in its emphasis upon liturgical images and likenesses of God as creator. It is also deficient in the attention it gives to the theological principle that the fruits of the earth used in the liturgy are the gifts of a generous Creator. These are significant issues since matrimony both derives "its force and strength from creation" and is intended to be "fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation" (CCC 1604).

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<sup>554</sup> One example: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely ... The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things" (LS 233).



## Chapter Seven

### Theology and Science in Dialogue

The Christian understanding of “creation” – of “all things” (Col 1:15-20) having their origin and ongoing existence in the eternal love of God – prompts Christians to look to the connection between creation and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. That a loving Creator who delights in creation desires that creatures also delight in creation is confirmed by the teaching, healing, and feeding ministry of Jesus who offers the gift of life lived “abundantly” (Jn 10:10).<sup>555</sup> Ellen Charry explains succinctly that salvation “is growing into the wisdom of divine love and enjoying oneself in the process.”<sup>556</sup> Both OCM2015-Aus and scientific research are revelatory of the wisdom of divine love which can inform flourishing lives. A faithful and credible theology of matrimony must be guided by both the tradition and the accumulated wisdom of the scientific, philosophical, and social-scientific communities.<sup>557</sup>

This chapter explores the possibility and the potential of productive dialogue between a liturgical theology of matrimony and some relevant social-scientific research into marriage; productive dialogue which may contribute to life lived abundantly.

#### 7.1 Creation, Matrimony, and Science

The Church’s foundational teaching on the importance and dignity of matrimony includes the statement that the matrimonial covenant “derives its force and strength from

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<sup>555</sup> The context (Jn 10:1-10) discloses that this abundant life is available to those who choose to follow Jesus.

<sup>556</sup> Ellen T. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), x.

<sup>557</sup> We live in a culture where worldviews are increasingly shaped by the sciences (GS 5). However, as Pope John Paul II stresses, the sciences function within the order of reason and while the results of that reasoning may in fact be true, the findings of the sciences “acquire their true meaning only if they are set within the larger horizon of faith” (FR 20).

creation” (OCM2015-Aus 1).<sup>558</sup> Scientific research also derives its force and strength from the natural world, and it has the potential to contribute abundantly to human kinship with all of creation.<sup>559</sup> As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “Basic scientific research, as well as applied research, is a significant expression of man’s dominion over creation. Science and technology are precious resources when placed at the service of man and promote his integral development for the benefit of all” (CCC 2293). Both parts of this statement warrant analysis.

Genesis 1 and 2 read together reveal that humankind’s dominion over creation refers not to dominion in the sense of domination, but of caring for creation as the Creator cares for it.<sup>560</sup> Humans and the other animals have commonalities and differences. In the Genesis myth they share creation by God from the same material, the dust of the earth. However, humans differ in that they are called to name the animals: “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature that was its name” (Gen 2:19). Naming the animals signals dominion over them and in its multiple layers of meaning may be read as involving elements of classification, nomenclature, and cataloguing – all fundamental components of science. These elements, foundational to scientific research, are only possible within an ordered creation and the Creator has gifted us with a creation that is ordered: “You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight” (Wis 11:20).<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Some of the profound implications of this teaching are explored in Chapter Five above.

<sup>559</sup> “Kinship” attempts to overcome the hierarchal connotations of “stewardship.” Kinship does not ‘measure differences on a scale of higher or lower ontological dignity but appreciates them as integral elements in the robust thriving of the whole.’ Elizabeth A Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 30.

<sup>560</sup> See Chapter Five above.

<sup>561</sup> The Church’s liturgy expresses this notion strongly: “For you laid the foundations of the world and have arranged the changing of times and seasons; you formed man in your own image and set humanity over the whole world in all its wonder, to rule in your name over all you have made.” Preface V of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, *The Roman Missal*, 614.

Human dominion involves “nurturing and protecting all the other creatures in the universe.”<sup>562</sup> Nurturing and protecting all the creatures of the universe implies observation, knowledge, and understanding of all creatures and the universe in which they live. While science is not the only way of knowing, it is a human activity which produces extensive understandings of creatures (including humans) and the universe. Applied science refers to the application of these scientific understandings to practical problems in fields as diverse as ecology, medicine, engineering, and relationship therapy. Ideally such application is designed to nurture and protect all the creatures in the universe. Science, including applied science and technology, and the social sciences, when placed at the service of humanity can promote integral development and benefit not just humans but all creation. Evaluating whether science is serving humanity, integral development, and benefitting not just humans but all creation raises questions regarding where science and theology intersect. The next sections examine how dialogue at that intersection may be productive.

## **7.2 Productive Dialogue: Magisterial Teaching and Practice**

*Gaudium et Spes* acknowledged the impact of the sciences upon culture: “intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting importance” (GS 5). The impact of the human sciences is evaluated positively: “Advances in biology, psychology, and the social sciences not only bring men hope of improved self-knowledge; in conjunction with technical methods, they are helping men exert direct influence on the life of social groups” (GS 5). For GS the family is the most fundamental of these social groups (GS 47).

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<sup>562</sup> Cook, "The Book of Genesis," 75. For more on dominion see Chapter Five above.

GS emphasises the contribution that psychology and sociology can make to pastoral care, which must be informed not only by theological principles, “but also [by] the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith” (GS 62). While identifying the relevant findings of psychology and sociology as especially important for pastors and theologians, GS requires a dialogic openness to those findings of all the faithful: “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage” (GS 44).<sup>563</sup> Once again the emphasis is upon encountering, listening to, and discerning among, the many voices of our age, including the voices of the human and the natural sciences, so that the faithful might be drawn further into the mystery of God.

In *Familiaris Consortio* Pope John Paul II related this conciliar teaching to matrimony, calling upon the Church to “apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving” (FC 4). He acknowledged that the “circumstances, the questions and the anxieties and hopes of the young people, married couples and parents of today” could guide the Church to a “more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage” (FC 4). To develop this more profound understanding, the Church “values sociological and statistical research, when it proves helpful in understanding the historical context in which pastoral action has to be developed and when it leads to a better understanding of the truth.” He adds the caveat that this research alone “is not to be considered in itself an expression of the sense of faith” but rather that the social scientific research is to be considered in dialogue with revealed truth (FC 5).

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<sup>563</sup> Rush notes that this passage was added to GS just a few days before the last working day of the council, December 7, 1965, “almost as a final reminder by the council of what it saw as one of its most important principles.” Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 16.

The treatment of cohabitation in *Amoris Laetitia* provides a case study of the way in which research in the social sciences can dialogue with revealed truth and guide the development of pastoral action.<sup>564</sup> Cohabitation before marriage is a tangible marker of how marriage is lived today. It has become the norm in Australia: “couples who lived together prior to marriage accounted for 80.8% of all marriages registered in 2016.”<sup>565</sup> Research reveals a phenomenon, termed the “cohabitation effect,” whereby premarital cohabitation is a risk factor for lower marital quality and divorce.<sup>566</sup> More nuanced research has shown that it is not cohabitation *per se* that is the risk factor but rather the intention of the cohabitators; couples who decide to marry each other and then cohabit do not seem to be exposed to this cohabitation effect.<sup>567</sup> It is helpful then to distinguish between “marital” and “non-marital” cohabitation.<sup>568</sup>

Pope Francis acknowledges that cohabitation is widespread and goes on to distinguish between “cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry” (AL 53), and cohabitation motivated by “cultural and contingent situations” (AL 294). In the provision of pastoral care to this latter group who intend to marry Pope Francis proposes no weakening of the matrimonial ideal but rather the application of the “law of gradualness” where “each human being “advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands

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<sup>564</sup> Here cohabitation refers to the situation where an unmarried man and an unmarried woman live together in a sexual relationship. This challenges Church teaching that this is “gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses” (CCC 2353).

<sup>565</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2016*.

<sup>566</sup> Galena K. Rhoades, Scott M. Stanley, and Howard J. Markman, “The Pre-Engagement Cohabitation Effect: A Replication and Extension of Previous Findings,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>567</sup> See Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman, “The Pre-Engagement Cohabitation Effect,”; Michael J. Rosenfeld and Katharina Roesler, “Cohabitation Experience and Cohabitation's Association With Marital Dissolution,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>568</sup> Stanley and colleagues argue that the cohabitation effect operates because some couples, who otherwise would not have married, eventually marry because of the inertia of cohabitation; they “slide” into marriage. These couples are different from those who “decide” to marry and then cohabit until they are able to do so. Scott M. Stanley, Galena Kline Rhoades, and Howard J. Markman, “Sliding versus Deciding: Inertia and the Premarital Cohabitation Effect,” *Family Relations* 55, no. 4 (2006): 505-06.

of God's definitive and absolute love in his or her entire personal and social life" (AL 295 citing FC 9).<sup>569</sup>

*Amoris Laetitia* demonstrates that the Church can utilise sociological research to inform pastoral action to foster the full ideal of matrimony: "from our awareness of mitigating circumstances – psychological, historical and even biological – it follows that 'without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear'" (AL 308, citing EG 44). The consensus of social science research is that couples who cohabit with the intention to marry when circumstances permit are not at any higher risk of lower marital quality and divorce than those who do not cohabit before marriage.<sup>570</sup> The distinction between the two groups should inform pastoral action. Couples who cohabit with the intention to marry have made a fundamental commitment to each other; these couples need to be "welcomed and guided patiently and discreetly" (AL 294) to the full ideal of matrimony.

### 7.3 Productive Dialogue in Postmodernity

The influence of research upon pastoral action is part of the wider question of the appropriate relationship between theology and its cultural context. The Church cannot isolate

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<sup>569</sup> Emphasis upon the law of gradualness in relation to cohabitation has prompted some theologians to call for a reappraisal of the pre-Tridentine marital tradition with its gradual or staged approach to sacramental marriage beginning with betrothal. Kari-Shane Zimmerman argues that "there is every good reason to return to the ritual of betrothal not to undercut the sanctity of marriage but rather to reinvigorate it." Kari-Shane Zimmerman, "Cohabitation: Part of the Journey toward Marriage?," ed. Jason King and Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2020), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=6177078>. See also Lawler and Salzman, "*Amoris Laetitia* a Turning Point: Cohabitation Revisited."

<sup>570</sup> As early as 2003, an Australian study of the cohabitation effect which controlled for strong predictors of divorce including the experience or otherwise of parental divorce during childhood, age at union formation, educational attainment, rating of importance attached to religion, having given birth to a child before marriage, and country of birth, found that there "appeared to be virtually no difference in the risks of separation eight years after marriage or union formation for the most recent cohort examined (those who married in the early 1990s), when the control variables were introduced." David de Vaus, Lixia Qu, and Ruth Weston, "Does Pre-Marital Cohabitation Affect the Chances of Marriage Lasting? " (Eighth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, 2003).

herself from the world: “she exists in the world, living and acting with it” (GS 40). Lieven Boeve shows that it is part of existing in the world, indeed part of the nature of Christianity, to “search for a contextually anchored self-understanding.”<sup>571</sup> The dramatic changes in context presented by postmodern culture have challenged the search for that self-understanding.

Boeve analyses the contemporary cultural context as both post-secular and post-Christian, where “post” does not literally mean after, but rather denotes that our attitude to both Christianity and secularisation has changed through processes of detraditionalization and pluralisation.<sup>572</sup> There are no longer monolithic secular and Christian cultures but rather “a dynamic, irreducible, and often conflicting plurality of religions, worldviews, and lifeworlds.”<sup>573</sup> What Boeve terms “the methodologically atheistic sciences” have contributed much to worldviews of the nature of human beings and the world in which we live.<sup>574</sup> The emergence of a plurality of worldviews, all claiming legitimacy, is linked with the demise of the metanarrative in postmodernity. Metanarratives have been replaced by radically particular and contextual individual or tribal narratives, all of which leads to an irreducible heterogeneity.

Within a culture of irreducible heterogeneity, responses to the question of the appropriate relationship between theology and its context range from correlation or continuity to anti-correlation or discontinuity. In Boeve’s analysis correlation theologians emphasise continuity between faith and the world (“modern correlation methods work from an essential or factual continuity between Christian faith and the secular context”<sup>575</sup>), while anti-

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<sup>571</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 126.

<sup>572</sup> Detraditionalization is the process by which cultural traditions are no longer self-evident. Pluralisation refers to an apparent multiplicity of life choices. Boeve, "Symbols of who we are Called to Become," 149.

<sup>573</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 34.

<sup>574</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 111.

<sup>575</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 42.

correlationists emphasise the rupture between faith and the world.<sup>576</sup> Boeve introduces the category of “interruption” to transcend the continuity/discontinuity polarity: “Interruption occurs where discontinuity and continuity encounter one another.”<sup>577</sup> While interruption does not rupture or destroy the relationship, it challenges the relationship to proceed in a new direction. The continuing faith tradition can be challenged and potentially enriched by the process of interruption.<sup>578</sup> Boeve favours the term “recontextualization” for this process, the process of engaging in inquiry and dialogue with other worldviews, which invites Christianity to “(re)discover its own position and (re)emphasise its own distinctive features.”<sup>579</sup>

The scientific worldview, with scientism (the ideology that refuses to accept the validity of ways of knowing other than those of the physical and natural sciences) as an extremist component, challenges Christianity to recontextualize. To increase the potential for productive dialogue between Christian faith and science Boeve rejects the medieval harmony model, and the conflict model of the faith science relationship.<sup>580</sup> He favours the “difference” model.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> This is a rough classification. David Tracy, perhaps the most prominent correlation theologian, calls for mutually critical correlation: “the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity.” David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 32. Tracy’s approach is not dissimilar to that proposed by Boeve. Boeve’s contribution is to highlight that in postmodernity there is no longer a monolithic secular culture with which to correlate.

<sup>577</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 103.

<sup>578</sup> AL’s treatment of cohabitation provides a contemporary example of this process.

<sup>579</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 41.

<sup>580</sup> The harmony model refers to the “metaphor of the two books,” the book of nature and the Sacred Scriptures have the same Author so there can ultimately be no conflict between them. The conflict model proposes that irreconcilable worldviews, for example Biblical literalism and the scientific method, means that conflict between faith and science is inevitable.

<sup>581</sup> Boeve uses the difference between a scientific description and a poetic description of people falling in love to clarify the difference model: “The first will analyse this phenomenon in terms of the pheromones that are released in the process. The second is concerned with giving expression to the lovers’ feelings for one another and for the world around them. The poetic description is not more true or less true than the scientific description, although its truth is clearly not of the same nature.” Together they provide a comprehensive understanding. Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 126. In its extreme form the difference model becomes the rupture model which holds that the difference between religion and science is so great that productive



Acknowledging that Christian faith and science are different, while both share the quest for a more comprehensive understanding of humanity and the cosmos, can provide the basis for productive dialogue between them.

In Boeve's analysis, productive dialogue between Christian faith and science guided by the difference model involves four steps:

1. Believers should begin by exploring the results of scientific research.
2. Believers should avoid boundary transgressions by attempting to fill any perceived gaps in the theories developed by science.
3. Believers should courageously criticise atheistic and materialistic scientific perspectives that represent scientism rather than science.<sup>582</sup>
4. The fourth and final step encourages believers to be "intrigued by the wonder and amazement to which many scientists (among others) testify in the course of their research."<sup>583</sup>

Boeve employs these four steps to explore the potential for productive dialogue between the different understandings of the natural sciences and Christian faith in relation to the creation and/or evolution question. These same steps are used below to guide dialogue between the Christian understanding of marriage, in particular the understanding that is explicit and implicit in OCM2015-Aus, and social-scientific research into marriage.

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interaction between them is impossible. Boeve rejects the rupture model: the Christian faith has "always aspired toward cohesion and thus comprehending the place of human beings, history and society in this world, in the cosmos." Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 124.

<sup>582</sup> These perspectives may be becoming less frequent. The works surveyed for this chapter revealed no scientism and in his comprehensive study of positive psychology James Gubbins notes that "positive psychologists on rare occasion lapse into naïve scientific positivism. They assert that nothing is known about human character or human flourishing unless measured by one of their instruments or that in some imagined future all empirical psychology will be unified in some grand theory." James P. Gubbins, "Positive Psychology: Friend or Foe of Religious Virtue Ethics?," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 28, no. 2 (2008): 199. Emphasis added.

<sup>583</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 130.

### 7.3.1 Exploring the Results of Scientific Research

Prominent economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have marshalled the findings of sociological research to reveal the numerous and persuasive benefits of lasting and fulfilling marriage: “Not everybody wants to be married, but for those who do, marriage brings intimacy, companionship, fulfillment, and, for many, the joys of children and grandchildren. Married people live longer, are healthier, and are more satisfied with their lives, especially married men.”<sup>584</sup> Case and Deaton emphasise the benefits of happy, fulfilling marriage. However, a dysfunctional, unfulfilling marriage may have more negative consequences than no marriage at all: “even less happy than those unmarried or divorced are those in not-very-happy marriages.”<sup>585</sup> Unhappy marriage may have a deleterious impact upon health and well-being: “Individuals who report that they were not happy in their marriage exhibited equal or worse risk of fair/poor health and mortality than those who never married, divorced or separated, and widowed.”<sup>586</sup> Those who promote marriage must be concerned with the quality of marital relationships as well as with the marriage rate. As Pope Francis astutely emphasises: “today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307).

While fulfilling marriage continues to contribute to personal and social flourishing, its decline may be contributing to human and societal dysfunction. Case and Deaton show that declining marriage rates in some low socio-economic groups, and the replacement of lasting marriage with serial cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing, has negative consequences

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<sup>584</sup> Deaton received the 2015 Nobel Prize in economics. Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 169.

<sup>585</sup> David G. Myers, "The Funds, Friends, and Faith of Happy People," *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 63.

<sup>586</sup> Elizabeth M. Lawrence et al., "Marital Happiness, Marital Status, Health, and Longevity," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 20, no. 5 (2018): 1553.

not only for the children involved but also for the adults, consequences that contribute significantly to the catastrophic mortality trend that they term “deaths of despair.”<sup>587</sup>

While Case and Deaton’s study applies specifically to the USA, demographer Bob Birrell and colleagues identified similar trends in Australia as early as 2004. Their research showed that those with low socio-economic status and those with poor job prospects were especially likely to have difficulty finding a partner to marry.<sup>588</sup> At roughly the same time a study of the aspirations of adolescent Australians found that around 80% clearly aspired to be involved in long-term relationships, to marry, and have children.<sup>589</sup> The marriage aspirations of many in low socio-economic groups are likely to be frustrated.

Australian family researcher Lixia Qu reports that by 2020 attitudes to marriage and cohabitation had changed.<sup>590</sup> The proportion of people who agreed that “marriage is a lifetime relationship” decreased from 54% in 2005 to 43% in 2015; most people (75%) supported cohabitation even if the couple had no intention of marrying, compared with 66% in 2005; and support for equal rights between same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples increased steadily from 38% in 2005 to 63% in 2015. However, support for the marital ideal remained strong. While there was a slight decline from 2005, “a large majority of people rejected the notion ‘marriage is an outdated institution’. In other words, most people endorse the concept of marriage. In 2015, two-thirds disagreed with the statement, less than one-fifth (17%) held the

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<sup>587</sup> Women in these situations are “likely to face a cycle of economic hardship, emotional instability, and lack of support from which some will find it hard to escape.” Men “may have children from a series of relationships, some or none of whom they know and some of whom are living with other men. Such fractured and fragile relationships bring little daily joy or comfort and do little to assure middle-aged men that they are living a good life.” Case and Deaton, *Deaths of Despair*, 171-72.

<sup>588</sup> Robert Birrell, Virginia Rapson, and Clare Hourigan, *Men + Women Apart: Partnering in Australia* (North Melbourne: Australian Family Association and Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, 2004), vii.

<sup>589</sup> This rate is almost identical to US research from the same period. Diana Smart, “Relationships, Marriage and Parenthood: Views of Young People and Their Parents,” *Family Matters* no. 63 (2002): 34.

<sup>590</sup> Lixia Qu, *Couple Relationships* Australian Institute of Family Studies (2020), 2, [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2007\\_aftn\\_couples.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2007_aftn_couples.pdf).

opposite view.”<sup>591</sup> Participants in this and similar studies reveal that most people across all strata of socioeconomic status still aspire to marry, aspire to marry a person they love, and aspire to remain in a lifelong, loving, committed relationship.<sup>592</sup> The Synod on the Family discerned the same aspiration: “The desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant” (AL 1).

Understanding the factors that help couples to remain in lifelong, loving, committed relationships has been a focus of social-scientific research into marriage. That research is extensive.<sup>593</sup> To make the task of exploring the results of this research manageable it is necessary to focus particularly, although not exclusively, upon the work of an acknowledged leader in the field. John Gottman is recognized as a major contributor to the accumulated wisdom of the social-scientific research into marriage. Gottman is an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Washington. His field is social psychology: “the scientific study of how individuals think, feel and behave in a social context.”<sup>594</sup> His extensive contribution to the study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in the context of marriage and the family is substantiated by his authorship of forty-two books and more than two hundred journal articles. An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy* states that Gottman is “world renowned for his work on marital stability and divorce prediction and has

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<sup>591</sup> Qu, *Couple Relationships* 11-13.

<sup>592</sup> In the USA while “marriage rates among cohabitators have declined steeply among those with no college degree ... there are no differences in marital intentions by education (or race/ethnicity) among recent cohabitators.” Janet Chen-Lan Kuo and R. Kelly Raley, “Diverging Patterns of Union Transition Among Cohabitators by Race/Ethnicity and Education: Trends and Marital Intentions in the United States,” *Demography* 53, no. 4 (2016): 921.

<sup>593</sup> An internet search of “scientific research into marriage” on 20 October 2021 revealed “about 120,000,000 results (0.51 seconds).”

<sup>594</sup> Saul M. Kassin, Steven Fein, and Hazel Rose Markus, *Social Psychology*, Ninth ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014).

conducted 46 years of breakthrough research with thousands of couples.”<sup>595</sup> Practitioners value his contribution. A large survey found Gottman to be one of the ten most influential psychotherapists of the past quarter century; with many who work in the field of marriage and relationship education and therapy believing that “most of what we know about marriage and divorce comes from his work.”<sup>596</sup> Gottman’s extensive body of work provides a practicable way to explore the results of social-scientific research into marriage.

Gottman explains that his research program is based upon the belief that “what we need is a real theory of how marriages work and fail to work, and that theory ought to emerge from a study of what real couples do to accomplish the everyday ‘tasks’ of being married.”<sup>597</sup> The general premise is that practitioners should “rely on reality and not fantasies of what a good relationship is like.”<sup>598</sup>

Examination of the way that people normally go about the process of staying happily married required Gottman to develop pioneering processes of observation, measurement, and analysis.<sup>599</sup> Technological developments contributed to the effectiveness of observing and

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<sup>595</sup> Donald Cole, "Gottman, John," ed. Jay Lebow, Anthony Chambers, and Douglas C. Breunlin, *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15877-8\\_994-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15877-8_994-1).

<sup>596</sup> Rich Simon, "The Top 10: The Most Influential Therapists of the Past Quarter-Century," *Psychotherapy Networker* 31, no. 2 (2007), <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/docview/233327909?accountid=8194&pq-origsite=primo>.

<sup>597</sup> John Mordechai Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1999), 7.

<sup>598</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 129.

<sup>599</sup> Gottman describes the typical research procedure. Couples volunteered in turn “to stay overnight in a fabricated apartment, affectionately known as the Love Lab. Their instructions were to act as naturally as possible, despite my team of scientists observing them from behind the one-way kitchen mirror, the cameras recording their every word and facial expression, and the sensors tracking bodily signs of stress or relaxation, such as how quickly their hearts pounded.” John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Harmony Books, 2015), 1-2. This quantitative data was supplemented with qualitative information: “after the marital interaction, spouses viewed a videotape of it and were asked to recall how they felt during the interaction. They used a rating dial to provide a continuous self-report of how they felt during the interaction”. J. M. Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60, no. 1 (1998): 11.

recording complex marital interactions. Innovations linking video and computer technology made it possible to “study, with time-synchronized data, the dynamic interplay between behavior, cognition, and physiology.”<sup>600</sup> In the sciences, developments in technology foster new methodologies which often lead to new findings.

In one typical Gottman study 130 newly married couples who displayed an even distribution on a measure of marital satisfaction and who were representative of the major ethnic and racial groups of the greater Seattle area were invited to participate in marital interaction laboratory sessions.<sup>601</sup> The research project sought to determine which interactional processes were dysfunctional and which were functional in the context of a longitudinal prediction study. The study involved observation and analysis of the behaviour and thinking of couples who stayed happily married compared with those who either stayed together unhappily or who divorced. Once a year over a six-year period the marital status and the marital satisfaction of the 130 couples were measured. At the end of the six-year period the measure of marital satisfaction was used to establish two groups of stable couples for comparison; the 20 most happily married and the 20 least happily married. Comparison of the two groups revealed factors that allowed accurate predictions of divorce and helpful information about what factors contribute to successful relationships.

This observational study allowed the researchers to determine behaviours which were significant from those which were thought to be so. For example, active listening, which in the 1990’s was the most common component of models of marital therapy, was hypothesised to be a significant component of the behaviour of happily married couples.<sup>602</sup> However, Gottman’s

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<sup>600</sup> John M. Gottman and Clifford I. Notarius, "Decade Review: Observing Marital Interaction," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4 (2000): 928.

<sup>601</sup> Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability," 10.

<sup>602</sup> In active listening one shows one’s spouse that they are being heard by summarising the content of their statements, and by summarising and validating their feelings; e.g., “I can understand why this would make you upset.” Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability," 17.

research found that active listening “occurred infrequently in the resolution of marital conflict and was not predictive of differential marital outcomes.”<sup>603</sup> In contrast with active listening, a gentle start to conflict interactions, de-escalating increasingly intense interactions, increased self and partner physiological soothing in such situations, and “changing the balance of power in favor of the husband’s increased acceptance of influence from his wife,” were found to be far more productive behaviours.<sup>604</sup>

This observational research not only revealed that the management of conflict is predictive of marital outcomes, but it also revealed new understandings about that process and the nature of couple conflict itself. For example, the research found that the way a conflict interaction started was highly predictive of its outcome.<sup>605</sup> It also revealed that while 31% of couple conflicts are resolvable, 69% are perpetual in the sense that they never get resolved: they “arise from consistent personality and need differences between partners.”<sup>606</sup> This finding suggests that more attention needs to be given to management of the significant differences between partners through dialogue about those differences rather than an exclusive focus upon conflict resolution strategies.<sup>607</sup>

As well as specific findings, the individual studies suggested the need for methodological refinements and further research in certain areas. The approach pioneered by

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<sup>603</sup> Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability," 17.

<sup>604</sup> Gottman et al., "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability," 20.

<sup>605</sup> “96 percent of the time you can predict the outcome of a conversation based on the *first three minutes* of the fifteen-minute interaction.” Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 32. Emphasis original.

<sup>606</sup> Gottman writes: “Bring a couple into a lab four years later, and they are talking about the same issues in very much the same ways, albeit often in different forms. When current and past videos are edited together, it looks as if no time has passed at all.” Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 136.

<sup>607</sup> This finding aligns well with AL’s advice that newly married couples “need to learn to accept their differences” (AL 235).

Gottman and his colleagues demonstrates an ability to predict divorce, stability, and eventual relationship satisfaction among newlyweds with high accuracy.<sup>608</sup>

From studies of over 700 couples as their relationships developed for up to 20 years Gottman and his colleagues differentiated couples who they termed “masters of relationships” from others termed “disasters of relationships.” Masters of relationships manage conflictual interactions differently from disasters: they “take a gentle approach to conflict. They soften the way they bring up issues. They are influenced by one another (which is easier to do if the issue is presented gently). They emphasise their common ground.”<sup>609</sup> The “masters” remained stable and relatively happy over time while the “disasters” either broke up or stayed together unhappily.

In combination the studies contributed to the development of a theory to inform practice. It is important to note that while accurate predictions lend support to the scientific theory that Gottman developed from his observations, they cannot confirm its validity.<sup>610</sup> In Gottman’s theory three essential aspects of couple relationships interact dynamically to build positive relationships. These essential aspects or systems – managing conflict respectfully, building friendship/intimacy/positive affect, and creating shared meaning – have been combined in Gottman’s “Sound Relationship House Theory” which has been widely used to

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<sup>608</sup> Based on seven separate longitudinal studies Gottman and his colleagues were able to predict which couples would divorce and which would not in six years after the wedding at 90% accuracy. This is a high degree of accuracy in comparison with that typically found in the social sciences. Gottman explains: “The chance of picking 15 out of 17 divorces out of 130 couples by chance alone, is about 1 in 2,500,000,000,000,000.” Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 131.

<sup>609</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 136.

<sup>610</sup> “Scientific prediction can be used as a test for scientific theories. However, within a fallibilistic epistemological approach, prediction cannot provide a definitive proof of the validity of theories.” *Amanda Guillán, Pragmatic Idealism and Scientific Prediction: A Philosophical System and Its Approach to Prediction in Science* (Cham: Springer 2017), 123.



guide both relationship education programs to build positive relationships and therapy for troubled relationships.<sup>611</sup>

The Sound Relationship House Theory involves seven levels from the lowest, “Build Love Maps,” to the highest, “Create Shared Meaning.” The theory is anchored in the research,<sup>612</sup> and its effectiveness has been evaluated.<sup>613</sup> Utilising the Sound Relationship House Theory and reflecting upon clinical practice with troubled relationships, Gottman observes that one of the most common distinguishing features of troubled relationships is that “those fundamental beliefs necessary for a long-term relationship are missing.”<sup>614</sup> According to Gottman the minimal fundamental beliefs necessary for long-term relationships to succeed are:

- (1) a belief that trust, loyalty, and commitment are necessary for a long-term relationship to succeed (e.g., there will be no secrets, deceptions, or betrayals);
- (2) an agreement of some form of sexual and/or romantic exclusivity ...
- (3) an agreement of fairness and care (e.g., a partner who is sick will be cared for);
- (4) an agreement to treat one another with respect and affection; and
- (5) an agreement in principle to try to meet one another’s wants and needs.<sup>615</sup>

### **7.3.2 Dialogue between Evidence-based Beliefs and Beliefs Explicit in OCM2015-Aus**

Reflecting on his research, Gottman stated that most couples desire “just two things from their marriage – love and respect.”<sup>616</sup> At the central moment of the matrimonial liturgy the couple exchange promises to love and honour (respect). The table below compares in

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<sup>611</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 132-33.

<sup>612</sup> For example, the fifth level of the sound relationship house encourages couples to manage conflict respectfully by “using a gentle approach in presenting complaints, accepting influence, physiological soothing, and compromise ...” Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 133.

<sup>613</sup> Julia C. Babcock et al., "A Component Analysis of a Brief Psycho-educational Couples' Workshop: One-year Follow-up Results," *Journal of Family Therapy* 35, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>614</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 154.

<sup>615</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 154-55.

<sup>616</sup> John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 18.

greater detail Gottman’s beliefs with the fundamental beliefs expressed at the Consent in OCM2015-Aus:

**Table 7.1. Comparison of the fundamental beliefs expressed in the matrimonial liturgy with those which guide Gottman Couple Therapy.**

Fundamental beliefs necessary for matrimony (OCM2015-Aus 62)	Evidence-based fundamental beliefs necessary for a long- term relationship to succeed <sup>617</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I take you ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An agreement of romantic and sexual exclusivity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I promise to be faithful to you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An agreement that there will be no secrets, deceptions, or betrayals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An agreement of fairness and care</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to love you and honour you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An agreement to treat one another with respect and affection and to try to meet one another’s wants and needs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all the days of my life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A belief that commitment is necessary for long term relationships to succeed</li> </ul>

Comparison of these fundamental beliefs derived from two very different sources allows at least three observations. Firstly, while the language of social psychology differs from the denser language of the liturgy, there is a high correlation or continuity between both sets of beliefs. While the findings of science are not essential to the confirmation of the Christian discourse, the continuity revealed from these two disparate sources is assuring. Secondly, in the matrimonial liturgy, the central promise is to “love and honour” all the days of one’s life. It is possible to develop reasonable suggestions about what constitutes loving and honouring; it is also possible to study how love and honour are expressed in the behaviour of couples who are happily married. Scientific research of the type that Gottman conducted can add clarity and detail to the behaviours and thinking that demonstrate effective loving and honouring, that is,

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<sup>617</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 154-55.

“to treat one another with respect and affection and to try to meet one another’s wants and needs.”<sup>618</sup> The beliefs in the right-hand column can give cognitive and behavioural detail to the concise words of the liturgy.

Thirdly, in postmodernity it is not the “facile acceptance of continuity and consensus” but rather attention to boundaries and particularities that contribute to productive dialogue.<sup>619</sup> An example of a potentially productive particularity is to be found in the second row of Table 7.1. Christian faith, since Augustine, has taken a narrow view of fidelity as primarily sexual fidelity.<sup>620</sup> For example, the *praenotanda* speaks of Christian spouses “faithful in mind and body, remaining complete strangers to adultery and divorce” (OCM2015-Aus 9). Statistically, sexual infidelity may not be a significant issue: there is evidence that the “vast majority of husbands and wives never have sex with someone other than their spouse after they marry.”<sup>621</sup> Other varieties of infidelity are likely to be more frequent and equally harmful. The research-based understanding offers a broader definition of fidelity as “no secrets, deceptions, or betrayals.” According to Gottman, nonsexual betrayals including “being emotionally distant, siding with a parent against one’s mate, disrespecting a partner, and breaking significant promises,” can destroy a relationship as comprehensively as a sexual affair.<sup>622</sup> Christian faith might well consider broadening its definition of matrimonial fidelity to “no secrets, deceptions, or betrayals.” In attempting to live this broader understanding of fidelity the matrimonial

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<sup>618</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 155.

<sup>619</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 5.

<sup>620</sup> Cooke is an exception who takes a broader view: “The fidelity of one’s lover – not just in the critically important area of sexual fidelity but also in the broader context of not betraying love by selfishness, exploitation, pettiness, dishonesty, disinterestedness, insensitivity – makes more credible the Christian trust in God’s unfailing concern.” Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* 90.

<sup>621</sup> Christopher P. Fagundes and Lisa M. Diamond, "Intimate Relationships," in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. John DeLamater and Amanda Ward (Dordrecht: Springer 2013), 385.

<sup>622</sup> Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 26.

relationship becomes transformed by divine love and spouses may reveal an even clearer image of God's fidelity to God's people.

Catholic teaching displays one of its own particularities in the emphasis it gives to the connection between the well-being of the couple and the well-being of the world.<sup>623</sup> Catholic matrimony centres upon the well-being of the couple and their family; however, it is also focussed upon "life lived in service of God's love for the world (John 4:16)."<sup>624</sup> Ethicist Margaret Farley examines relationships (including marriage) through the lens of the principle of justice. While her conclusions on marriage align well with the emphasis of OCM2015-Aus and Gottman's evidence-based fundamental beliefs, she notes the wider remit of marriage: "Free choice, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, *and a responsibility for the wider world* can be the measures of this justice."<sup>625</sup> It is a contention of this thesis that in matrimony this responsibility for the wider world "is to be realised in the common work of watching over creation" (CCC 1604).<sup>626</sup>

The social-psychological research speaks in a general way about the importance of the couple having a shared understanding of what marriage means. According to Gottman the shared meaning system, which all couples create either intentionally or unintentionally, "facilitates stability and happiness."<sup>627</sup> Indeed, building shared meaning is the crowning or overarching principle that contributes to marital success, occupying the highest level in the

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<sup>623</sup> Marriage has a decisive bearing on "the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole" (GS 48). While this connection is not explicit in the *praenotanda* of OCM2015-Aus it is a feature of different parts of the liturgy, for example, one of the Nuptial Blessings prays; "let them bear witness to you in the world" (OCM2015-Aus 244).

<sup>624</sup> Timone Davis and Edward Foley, "Preaching at Weddings," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, 125.

<sup>625</sup> Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 265. Emphasis added.

<sup>626</sup> See Chapter Five above.

<sup>627</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 132.

Sound Relationship House Theory. Gottman is influenced here by Viktor Frankl's pioneering work on the way a strong sense of meaning and purpose can guide one's life even in the most difficult of circumstances.<sup>628</sup> One way that couples create shared meaning is through shared life goals: they create meaning in the "goals they set for their family and for themselves."<sup>629</sup>

### 7.3.3 Avoiding Boundary Transgressions

The discussion above illustrates respect for legitimate boundaries which is the second step guiding Boeve's model of productive dialogue. Gottman's research suggests that harmonious couples create and nurture a shared meaning system. He does not attempt to specify the content of that meaning system. That is, however, a legitimate task for religious faith.<sup>630</sup> It is possible that matrimony, lived in the service of God's love for the world, including watching over creation, can be foundational to matrimonial life fostering connection and positive affect.

Part of a suitable preparation for matrimony involves ensuring that the couple have a sound base upon which they can construct their shared meaning system. Pastors are to welcome engaged couples and to "foster and nourish their faith" (OCM2015-Aus 16). They should be given catechesis "not only about the Church's teaching on Marriage and the family but also about the sacrament and its rites, prayers, and readings" (OCM2015-Aus 17). Catechesis about the sacrament, particularly the Questions Before the Consent, and the Consent itself, can help to ensure that the couple have a shared foundational understanding of what matrimony means. Central to that shared understanding is the notion that, in the liturgy and in their life, the couple

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<sup>628</sup> "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's own way." Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. Ilse Lasch (London: Rider, 2008), 75.

<sup>629</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 152.

<sup>630</sup> There is evidence that religious faith may be successful in this task. A meta-analysis of 45 studies found that 42 of them (93 percent) revealed a positive relationship between religious involvement and a strong sense of meaning and purpose. Harold G. Koenig, Dana E. King, and Verna Benner Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 302.

are celebrating a sacrament that offers the grace of divine love to transform human love. The Church appropriately requires that if the couple “reject what the Church intends when the Marriage of baptised persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls is not permitted to celebrate the Sacrament” (OCM2015-Aus 21).

A similar respect for boundaries is revealed in Gottman’s response to the question: “What is our theory as to why some people behave in unfortunate ways that create relationship misery?” His answer is: “Some people prioritize parts of life other than their closest relationships.”<sup>631</sup> It is legitimate for Gottman to offer evidence-based strategies which can maintain and strengthen relationships if both members of the couple choose to give the relationship the appropriate high priority.<sup>632</sup> On the other hand what helps couples to give their matrimonial relationship that appropriate high priority should be a legitimate concern of the Church. The Catholic tradition gives the highest priority to matrimony: it “derives its force and strength from creation,” and it is numbered among the “Sacraments of the new covenant” (OCM2015-Aus 21).

The matrimonial liturgy invites, shapes, and guides; it does not guarantee. As Farley observes: matrimony “is a model that offers the possibility of intimacy and companionship as goods in themselves; it is a model that can provide the kind of affection that children need; it is a model that can nurture both sex and love in ways that lead to the highest forms of friendship; it is a model that can incorporate understandings of transcendent embodiment and a communion between spouses that partakes of and leads to communion with God.”<sup>633</sup> Matrimony offers fulsome possibilities, possibilities which are often not fully, or not at all,

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<sup>631</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 135.

<sup>632</sup> The strategies include “down-regulate negative affect during conflict,” “build positive affect during nonconflict interactions,” and “create and nurture a shared meaning system.” Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 135-51.

<sup>633</sup> Farley, *Just Love*, 264.

achieved. In Farley's terms the matrimonial liturgy is an institutional framework and such frameworks "never guarantee what they are designed for; they only shape, or can shape, the possibilities."<sup>634</sup>

Sacraments can shape possibilities powerfully.<sup>635</sup> They link scripture and ethics: a sacrament is "*the symbolic place of the on-going transition between Scripture and ethics, from the letter to the body.*"<sup>636</sup> Matrimony is not just a moment in time but a continuing sacrament. The Church's matrimonial liturgy offers a spirituality to help spouses to live matrimonial life well; to sustain the ongoing transition between scripture and ethics. Matrimonial spirituality refers to "how one views one's life from the perspective of Christian revelation and faith and *how one's life values and actual daily living are shaped by that revelation, enacted in the celebration of the liturgy.*"<sup>637</sup> The matrimonial liturgy shapes matrimonial spirituality as a way of thinking, praying, and acting. It can guide the priority that spouses give to their relationship and how that priority is enacted daily.

It is encouraging then that a large, international study (including respondents from Australia and the USA) into the relationship between religion and relationship quality found that "women and men in highly religious couples were significantly more likely to report higher quality relationships than their peers in less/mixed religious couples or shared secular couples."<sup>638</sup> While the authors are respectful of the boundaries, and acknowledge that no claim

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<sup>634</sup> Farley, *Just Love*, 264.

<sup>635</sup> For Cooke sacramental liturgies can transform the meaning of human experiences like marriage: "central to the effect caused by sacramental liturgies is the transformation of the *meaning* of people's experiences." Cooke, "Sacraments," 1119.

<sup>636</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 265. Emphasis original.

<sup>637</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 558. Emphasis added.

<sup>638</sup> Jason S. Carroll et al., "Faith, Feminism, and Marriage: Institutions, Norms, and Relationship Quality," ed. Alyse ElHage, *World Family Map 2019: Mapping Family Change and Child Well-being Outcomes* (Charlottesville, VA: Institute of Family Studies, 2019), <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/reports/worldfamilymap-2019-051819.pdf>. 22.

can be made about a causal connection between religion and relationship quality, their analysis suggests that we should take seriously the possibility that “the beliefs, behaviors, and belonging that shared religious participation provides for couples may foster more commitment, trust, respect, or generosity.”<sup>639</sup> Shared religious participation facilitates the construction of a shared meaning system, the ultimate level in Gottman’s Sound Relationship House theory. Many other studies report a positive relationship between religious participation and marital relationship quality. A comprehensive meta-analysis of published studies of the relationship between religious involvement and marital stability (marital satisfaction, marital commitment, relationship cohesion, marital sexual fidelity, less divorce/separation, absence of spousal abuse, problem-solving, forgiveness) found that sixty-eight of seventy-nine studies (86 percent) reported positive relationships.<sup>640</sup> The Church’s matrimonial liturgy emphasises norms of commitment, trust, and respect, and regular liturgical participation can contribute to their sustenance. Participation in the celebration of matrimony can renew the commitment of those who are married. Such participation has become less frequent as the number of celebrations has declined. Celebration of The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage which prays that “they may always grow in the grace of the Sacrament” (OCM2015-Aus 278), becomes even more significant.<sup>641</sup>

Psychologist Annette Mahoney and her colleagues attempt to move beyond correlational research to identify specifically what it is about religion that can make a difference to marriage and family life.<sup>642</sup> They found that sanctification, the process by which marital and parent-child relationships are perceived as having spiritual character and significance, may

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<sup>639</sup> Carroll et al., "Faith, Feminism, and Marriage," 29.

<sup>640</sup> Koenig, King, and Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 306.

<sup>641</sup> See 8.1.2 below.

<sup>642</sup> Annette Mahoney et al., "Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships," *Review of Religious Research* 44, no. 3 (2003): 220.



have desirable implications for family life. They note the possibility of a connection between sanctification and liturgy: “it is possible that certain groups (e.g., evangelical Protestant or Catholic churches; orthodox Jewish communities) do more to encourage sanctification in this arena, via rituals, language.”<sup>643</sup> Sanctification offers the possibility of bridging the divide between religion and everyday life for “religion is far more than abstract religious beliefs and ritual practices disconnected from the activities of daily life. In the religions of the world, people can find ultimate values and goals that lend meaning when searching for direction about intimate family relationships. Religion is, in fact, very much concerned with the interface between the sacred and the secular.”<sup>644</sup> The Matrimonial liturgy, celebrated well and reflected upon thoughtfully, can provide direction for intimate family relationships.<sup>645</sup>

### 7.3.4 The Wonder and Amazement to Which Many Scientists Testify

Boeve’s fourth and final step encourages believers to be “intrigued by the wonder and amazement to which many scientists (among others) testify in the course of their research.”<sup>646</sup> This sense of wonder and amazement is most frequently associated with the physical and natural sciences.<sup>647</sup> However, elements of awe are also to be found in the social sciences. Gottman testifies to that wonder and amazement: “Couples are endlessly complex. They teach

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<sup>643</sup> Mahoney et al., "Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships," 233. In the revised *Ordo* the nuptial blessing with its invocation of the Holy Spirit offers a sublime moment of sanctification.

<sup>644</sup> Mahoney et al., "Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships," 233.

<sup>645</sup> It can provide a “hermeneutic of experience” for bride and groom: “a context and point of view for interpreting the events that occur to them throughout their life together.” Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

<sup>646</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 130.

<sup>647</sup> For example, in the physical sciences awe was generated when Eddington’s measurement of the bending of light rays by the sun confirmed the prediction of Einstein’s general theory of relativity. However, awe beyond the physical and natural science is an area of interest for contemporary positive psychologists where the experience of awe has been found to be potentially transcendent: awe experiences can “shift our attention away from ourselves, make us feel like we are part of something greater than ourselves, and make us more generous toward others.” Summer Allen, *The Science of Awe*, UC Berkeley (2018), 2, [https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF\\_White\\_Paper-Awe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Awe_FINAL.pdf).

us something new every day, through both our research and clinical work. We are always learning from others like ourselves, who are fascinated by the turnings of relationships.”<sup>648</sup> This wonder and amazement is a driver of further research: “We aim to improve our ideas over time with both empirical research and clinical experience.”<sup>649</sup>

Openness to “the new” fostered by open communication and critique is part of the wonder of science. In 1995 Benjamin Karney and Thomas Bradbury reviewed 115 longitudinal studies of the marital trajectory, the core question of how marriages evolve over time including why some last and others fail.<sup>650</sup> In their critique of the extant research they noted the conventional wisdom of the 1990’s that on average marital satisfaction declines significantly over time. They called for a closer examination of the patterns of change that different couples experience which, when aggregated, yielded the finding that on average marital satisfaction declines significantly over time.<sup>651</sup> Twenty-five years later they were able to report that their critique had been vindicated. The long-standing assumption that marital satisfaction declines significantly over time was incomplete, misleading, or wrong: “for most couples satisfaction does not decline over time but in fact remains relatively stable for long periods.”<sup>652</sup> Karney and Bradbury’s review concludes that aggregation had delivered misleading results: “Just as no couple has ever had 2.5 children, only a minority of couples actually experience high initial marital satisfaction that declines steadily and significantly during the course of their marriage. Instead, most couples who start their marriage happy stay happy for long periods of time.”<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 155.

<sup>649</sup> Gottman and Gottman, "Gottman Method Couple Therapy," 155.

<sup>650</sup> Benjamin R. Karney and Thomas N. Bradbury, "The Longitudinal Course of Marital Quality and Stability: A Review of Theory, Method, and Research," *Psychological Bulletin* 118, no. 1 (1995): 28.

<sup>651</sup> Karney and Bradbury, "The Longitudinal Course of Marital Quality and Stability," 27.

<sup>652</sup> Benjamin R. Karney and Thomas N. Bradbury, "Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability in the 2010s: Challenging Conventional Wisdom," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82, no. 1 (2020): 110.

This contemporary understanding of the marital satisfaction trajectory is likely to be much more positive for marriage rates than the conventional wisdom of the 1990's which held that on average marital satisfaction declines significantly over time.<sup>654</sup> It is also an example of the way that the scientific method can be self-correcting and can identify areas for further research. If most couples who start their marriage happy stay happy for long periods of time identifying what factors contribute to that initial happiness becomes a potentially productive area for further research.

#### **7.4 Further Wonder and Amazement: Positive Psychology**

The sense of wonder, amazement, and possibility which Boeve encourages believers to ponder is evident in a foundational paper published at the dawn of the new millennium which states that: "We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities."<sup>655</sup> The prediction of the authors was prescient; in the ensuing twenty years positive psychology, a sub-field of psychology, has been particularly fruitful.

While much relationship research, including Gottman's, has focussed upon dysfunctional behaviours, positive psychology attempts to broaden the focus of psychological science beyond the problematic and the dysfunctional, even beyond satisfaction and stability, to human flourishing. In the words of its founders, positive psychology seeks to "learn how to build the qualities that help individuals and communities, not just to endure and survive, but also to flourish."<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> The average result had been distorted by the impact of the small minority of couples that start with low levels of satisfaction and decline rapidly from there. Karney and Bradbury, "Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability," 102.

<sup>654</sup> One can speculate on the extent to which this negative understanding of the trajectory of marital satisfaction contributed to the decline in marriage rates from the 1990's.

<sup>655</sup> Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 13.

Scholars and practitioners of positive psychology have identified the evidence-based qualities which lead to human flourishing. These qualities have been presented as a set of “virtues:” wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The virtues are underpinned by “strengths,” which are more readily demonstrable than the virtues. For example, the strengths which demonstrate the virtue of transcendence are appreciation of beauty, spirituality, gratitude, hope, and humour.<sup>657</sup>

The Church’s quest for a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of matrimony is likely to be aided by dialogue with positive psychology’s findings, particularly the strengths of gratitude, appreciation of beauty, and love (a strength which demonstrates the virtue humanity).<sup>658</sup>

#### 7.4.1 Gratitude

Gratitude is defined as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift.”<sup>659</sup> Gratitude may derive its powerful influence on human behaviour from the way that it can connect us to something larger than our individual experience – “whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.”<sup>660</sup> From their review of the research Peterson and Seligman identified a broad range of positive behaviours demonstrated by grateful people: they “are more likely to acknowledge a belief in the interconnectedness of all life and a commitment to and responsibility to others. Grateful individuals place less importance on material goods; they are

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<sup>656</sup> Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," 13.

<sup>657</sup> Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004).

<sup>658</sup> Only gratitude is treated here. Positive psychology’s research into the other strengths and practices like mindfulness have much to contribute to dialogue with liturgy/theology. On dialogue with the mindfulness research see McGrath, "Marriage as Sacrament and Covenant: A New Model for Pre-Marriage Education based upon the Rite of Marriage," 83-88.

<sup>659</sup> Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 554.

<sup>660</sup> Harvard Medical School, *Positive Psychology: Harnessing the Power of Happiness, Mindfulness, and Inner Strength*, 17.

less likely to judge their own and others' success in terms of possessions accumulated; they are less envious of wealthy persons; and they are more likely to share their possessions with others relative to less grateful persons."<sup>661</sup> These virtues would seem likely to contribute to positive matrimonial relationships and to watching over creation. Indeed, Peterson and Seligman hypothesized that expressions of gratitude and appreciation "are vital to successful, thriving, long-term relationships."<sup>662</sup>

This hypothesis has subsequently been tested. In a longitudinal study Kubacka and colleagues investigated gratitude in marital relationships in the four years after marriage. They found evidence that gratitude helps to build healthy relationships; specifically, they demonstrated that "gratitude emerges as a response to the detection of close partners' maintenance behavior and responsiveness. Moreover, gratitude motivates partners to engage in maintenance behavior."<sup>663</sup> Engaging in relationship maintenance behaviours often elicits the response of gratitude which motivates further relationship maintenance behaviours. Gordon and colleagues reached a similar conclusion from four multi-method US studies: "our research suggests that appreciation [gratitude] is beneficial for the health and maintenance of intimate romantic bonds."<sup>664</sup>

Sara Algoe has developed the "find-remind-and-bind" theory to increase understanding of the role of gratitude in relationships and to guide further research. The theory posits that in human relationships gratitude "*finds* new or *reminds* of a good relationship partner, and helps to *bind* recipient and benefactor closer together"<sup>665</sup> She concludes that gratitude may have

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<sup>661</sup> Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 562.

<sup>662</sup> Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 562.

<sup>663</sup> K. E. Kubacka et al., "Maintaining Close Relationships: Gratitude as a Motivator and a Detector of Maintenance Behavior," *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 10 (2011): 1373.

<sup>664</sup> Amie M. Gordon et al., "To Have and to Hold: Gratitude Promotes Relationship Maintenance in Intimate Bonds," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103, no. 2 (2012): 272.

evolved to increase the positivity of human relationships since it can drive “upward spirals of mutually-responsive behaviour between individuals, thereby placing gratitude right at the heart at the most important relationships of our daily lives.”<sup>666</sup>

The relationship between gratitude to one’s spouse and gratitude to God is of theological significance.<sup>667</sup> Social psychologists Frank Fincham and Ross May note that they could find no reports of scientific studies on “gratitude to God in romantic relationships such as marriage.”<sup>668</sup> To address this oversight they investigated whether generalized gratitude and prayers of gratitude are independently related to relationship satisfaction in 95 married couples. From their generally positive findings they legitimately conclude that “thanking God for the relationship/partner acknowledges God as the source of this good and doing so likely magnifies the positive emotion inherent to the experience of gratitude.”<sup>669</sup> They may transgress a boundary in adding that “being grateful to a Supreme Being acknowledges the good experienced (the marriage) is not accidental but occurred by design.”<sup>670</sup>

In reviewing the research on gratitude for the first handbook of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman wrote that although “gratitude has largely been ignored in academic psychology, it has a long history in moral philosophy and theology.”<sup>671</sup> While gratitude has

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<sup>665</sup> Sara B. Algoe, "Find, Remind, and Bind: The Functions of Gratitude in Everyday Relationships," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 6, no. 6 (2012): 457.

<sup>666</sup> Algoe, "Find, Remind, and Bind," 466.

<sup>667</sup> Cooke comments on the importance of this relationship: “experiencing love in our human relationships makes it possible for us to accept the reality of our lives with a positive, even grateful attitude. And this in turn makes it possible for us to see our lives as a gift from a lovingly providential God.” Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality*, 84.

<sup>668</sup> Frank D. Fincham and Ross W. May, "Generalized Gratitude and Prayers of Gratitude in Marriage," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2021): 282.

<sup>669</sup> Fincham and May, "Generalized Gratitude and Prayers of Gratitude in Marriage," 286.

<sup>670</sup> Fincham and May, "Generalized Gratitude and Prayers of Gratitude in Marriage," 286 This statement may convey a deterministic understanding of God's action.

<sup>671</sup> Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 555.

attracted increasing attention from researchers in psychology since they made that claim, Fincham and May could find no studies of the impact of “gratitude to God in romantic relationships such as marriage.”<sup>672</sup> While it was missing from psychological research literature one might expect that the theological literature would be replete with studies of this topic. In fact, gratitude within marriage is an under-researched topic theologically.<sup>673</sup>

Yet, Peterson and Seligman were correct to note that gratitude has a long history in theology. It is a central theme in Christian theology. Gratitude has been posited as a primal stance that humans might adopt before God. In the eloquent words of Karl Barth: “Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.”<sup>674</sup>

In liturgical theology gratitude is central to the Eucharist. The introductory dialogue between presider in the Eucharistic Prayer: “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and assembly: “it is right and just,” is reiterated in most Prefaces: “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.”<sup>675</sup> In Algoe’s terms the expression of gratitude reminds us of the goodness of the Creator and helps to bind us closer to the Creator. Indeed, Christian liturgy has been defined as “a continual speaking of God’s name in gratitude and thankfulness for the self-giving of God to the world. On occasion it sings ecstatic praise for the very being of the source of all creation.”<sup>676</sup> Both the matrimonial liturgy

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<sup>672</sup> Fincham and May, "Generalized Gratitude and Prayers of Gratitude in Marriage," 282.

<sup>673</sup> A search of the ATLA Religion Database on 19 November 2021 revealed that while Julie Hanlon Rubio has examined “gratuity” (giving voluntarily or beyond obligation) within marriage; [Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Practicing Gratuity: A Vision for Families and the Social Order," ed. Peter J. Casarella, *Jesus Christ: The New Face of Social Progress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2015), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/reader.action?docID=4859184&ppg=95>]; no other scholarly works on gratitude and marriage were to be found.

<sup>674</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part One*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 41.

<sup>675</sup> *The Roman Missal*, 566, 68-90.

<sup>676</sup> Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*, 118.

and the life which flows from it are occasions of grace; they evoke gratitude. Gratitude is a basic stance that one should adopt in receiving the gift of one's spouse, yet the current matrimonial liturgy represents a missed opportunity to express gratitude, to give thanks.<sup>677</sup>

Gratitude to God and to one's spouse also receive scant attention in the magisterial literature on matrimony. In the matrimonial ideal, spouses know God's love, share God's love, and reveal God's love to the world. There is much for which to be grateful. Pope John Paul II notes one key aspect of matrimonial gratitude: "Christian spouses profess their gratitude to God for the sublime gift bestowed on them of being able to live in their married and family lives the very love of God for people" (FC 56). In *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis uses the term "gratitude" five times.<sup>678</sup> Most often the term is used to acknowledge groups owed the Church's collective gratitude: all families who show that the Spirit is alive and at work (77), parents who raise children with disabilities (82), the elderly (191), and mothers who continue to pray for children who have strayed from Christ (288). The final reference bears some resemblance to the interpersonal gratitude that dominates the social science research. In a significant section underscoring that the ideal of marriage is not to be seen solely as self-sacrifice, Pope Francis explains: "We need to remember that authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one's own vulnerability and needs, and to welcome with sincere and joyful *gratitude* the physical expressions of love found in a caress, an embrace, a kiss and sexual union (AL 157, emphasis added).

Pope John Paul II called upon spouses to grow in love: "the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love" (FC 17).

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<sup>677</sup> This reinforces the teaching that matrimony "should normally be celebrated within Mass" (OCM2015-Aus 29). A consequence of the preference for matrimony without Mass is that the participants miss the richer expression of gratitude within Mass.

<sup>678</sup> AL 78,82,157,191,288.



Dialogue with positive psychology which is paying increasing attention to gratitude in interpersonal relationships has the potential to enrich the matrimonial liturgy and matrimonial life, and thus to help spouses to grow in love.

### **7.5 Productive Dialogue: Beneficial to Matrimony and to the World**

Matrimony draws its strength from creation, the beginning and foundation of all God's works. God delights in all God's works and spouses are called to share in that delight. Matrimony is associated with joy and happiness: "By his presence Christ brought blessing and joy to the wedding at Cana" (OCM2015-Aus 6).<sup>679</sup> One of the Nuptial Blessings emphasises temporal and eschatological happiness and the witness of happy couples: "In happiness may they praise you, O Lord ... and bear witness to you in the world ... and after a happy old age ... may they come to the Kingdom of Heaven" (OCM2015-Aus 244).

The witness of happy, matrimonial couples is salient in families, for children receive their first, and some of their most influential, lessons about marriage from the behaviour of their parents.<sup>680</sup> There is some evidence that children of divorced parents often experience negative feelings about marriage which may discourage marriage and promote cohabitation as an alternative.<sup>681</sup> Conversely, the experience of happy, thriving marriages may promote positive attitudes to marriage.<sup>682</sup> Pope Francis' proactive emphasis upon "the pastoral effort to

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<sup>679</sup> Jesus' first miracle shows that the life-giving power of God can grace the quotidian tasks of matrimonial life: "the miraculous life-giving power of God is at work even (and perhaps, especially) in the intimate daily places of human lives. It is also a miracle of pure abundance and grace." Gail O'Dea, "Gospel of John," in *The Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Sharon H. Ringe Carol A. Newsom, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (London: SPCK, 2014), 757.

<sup>680</sup> Pope Francis recognises that marriage preparation begins at birth: "those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents" (AL 208).

<sup>681</sup> See Nicholas H. Wolfinger, *Understanding the Divorce Cycle: The Children of Divorce in Their Own Marriages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39.

<sup>682</sup> This claim finds some support in research which shows that people, who as children had divorced and/or unhappy parents, are more likely to report receiving messages such as "relationships are not permanent, one must approach relationships with caution, and relationships are beset by lack of trust and fidelity," and less likely to report receiving messages such as marriage is enduring, relationships need love and happiness, and

strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307), informed by dialogue with the plethora of psychological and sociological research into what helps marriage to thrive, has the potential to increase the frequency of thriving marriages, the promotion of positive attitudes toward marriage, and the marriage rate. Productive dialogue between the Church’s understanding of revealed truth and the wisdom of the human sciences can help to ensure that revealed truth about matrimony can be “set forth to greater advantage” (GS 44), and that the “faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith” (GS 6).

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relationships are partnerships. Daniel J. Weigel, "Parental Divorce and the Types of Commitment-Related Messages People Gain from Their Families of Origin," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 47, no. 1-2 (2007): 30.

## Chapter Eight

### Receiving Matrimony as God's Gift

The second edition of the Catholic Church's Order of Celebrating Matrimony has expanded on and improved the first edition in multiple ways. It has been enriched by its expanded Introduction, by the addition of five new scripture readings, and by the clear invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the bride and bridegroom in the Nuptial Blessing options. Overall, the revision brings greater clarity to the grace of the sacrament and to the duties of the spouses; it provides clearer guidance to help couples, presiders, and assemblies to celebrate well.

The primary statement in OCM2015-Aus that "the matrimonial covenant ... derives its force and strength from creation," may be developed to show there is an inseparable scriptural and theological link between matrimony and creation both in terms of the nature of the sacramental bond and the consequent responsibility inherent on the married to care for creation as an expression of that bond. The scriptural accounts reveal that God's continuing creation is characterised by kenotic love and that a central purpose of matrimony is growth in kenotic love demonstrated in openness to life, including care for God's continuing creation.

#### 8.1 Optimising the Potential of OCM2015-Aus

##### 8.1.1 The Role of the Bishop

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* entrusts to bishops the ministry of preserving marriage and advancing it in perfection: "It is for the Bishop ... to regulate the celebration and pastoral care of the Sacrament throughout the diocese by organizing assistance for the Christian faithful so that the state of marriage may be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection" (OCM2015-Aus, 13).

As the chief liturgists and the chief teachers of their dioceses,<sup>683</sup> bishops have the capacity to influence not only by what they say and write, but also by what they do, that is, by the quality of their witness.<sup>684</sup> The *Ceremonial of Bishops* points to an action which has the potential to help marriage to advance in perfection: “the bishop should make it his concern to bless occasionally the marriages of his people, and particularly those of the poor.”<sup>685</sup> Recent Bishops of Rome have demonstrated some reluctance to contribute to preserving and enriching marriage by publicly participating in the celebration of the matrimonial liturgy. In 2000 Pope John Paul II presided at the marriage of eight couples from various parts of the world as part of the jubilee for families, and prior to that, in 1994, he presided at the marriage of a group of couples as part of celebration of the International Year of the Family.<sup>686</sup> Pope Benedict XVI never publicly presided at marriage liturgies.

On 14 September 2014, three weeks before the extraordinary Synod on Marriage and the Family, Pope Francis presided at the marriage of twenty couples from parishes of the city of Rome, the first time a pope had publicly presided at marriages since 2000. The couples’ ages ranged from 25 to 56, one couple had a child, and several couples had cohabited, while others had previously been married. In presiding at this liturgy, the pope acknowledged the

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<sup>683</sup> See *Christus Dominus: Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* (1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_christus-dominus\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html). articles 2,3 and 15: see also CDWDS, *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist* (2004), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20040423\\_redemptionis-sacramentum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html)., articles 19 and 22.

<sup>684</sup> “We need to remember that all religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher’s way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by its nearness, love and witness.” Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (2013), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), article 42.

<sup>685</sup> *Ceremonial of Bishops*, (Collegeville: Liturgical 1989), 173.

<sup>686</sup> See Carol Glatz, "Pope Francis to preside over joint September wedding at Vatican," *National Catholic Reporter* (August 29, 2014), <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-francis-preside-over-joint-september-wedding-vatican>.

significance of matrimony to the church, the life situations of those who present for matrimony today, and in the diversity of the life situations of these twenty couples, he provided a powerful gesture of inclusivity.

In his homily, Pope Francis, rehearsed themes which would later appear in *Amoris Laetitia*. He employed the metaphor of matrimony as a journey together and spoke of the joy of that journey without ignoring the typical challenges of married life: “The love of Christ, which has blessed and sanctified the union of husband and wife, is able to sustain their love and to renew it when, humanly speaking, it becomes lost, wounded or worn out. The love of Christ can restore to spouses the joy of journeying together ... It is a demanding journey, at times difficult, and at times turbulent, but such is life!”<sup>687</sup>

In presiding at that matrimonial liturgy Pope Francis signalled the importance of matrimony to the Church and to the world. In his analysis of Pope Francis’s teachings on the liturgy, Irwin concludes that Francis “presumes the value of the reformed liturgy and celebrates it daily.”<sup>688</sup> Pope Francis clearly values the Vatican II liturgy asserting with “certainty and magisterial authority that the liturgical reform is irreversible.”<sup>689</sup> He is to be encouraged to bring the influence of his office and his person to more frequent celebration of the reformed matrimonial liturgy for, while he has presided at presbyterial ordinations in each of the years 2014-2019, he has presided publicly at matrimony only in 2014. Both sacraments at the service of communion are crucial to building up the people of God.

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<sup>687</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross for Holy Mass with the Rite of Marriage* (2014), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140914\\_omelia-rito-matrimonio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140914_omelia-rito-matrimonio.html).

<sup>688</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, *Pope Francis and the Liturgy: The Call to Holiness and Mission* (New York: Paulist, 2020), 101.

<sup>689</sup> Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the 68th National Liturgical Week in Italy* (2017), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/august/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170824\\_settimana-liturgica-nazionale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/august/documents/papa-francesco_20170824_settimana-liturgica-nazionale.html).

While bishops are called to “occasionally” bless marriages, if each bishop assisted with the preparation of, and celebrated with, one couple each year, they would make a positive contribution to advancing the cause of matrimony. The preference of the *Ordo* that “the same Priest who prepares the engaged couple should, during the celebration of the sacrament itself, give the Homily, receive the spouses’ consent, and celebrate the Mass” (OCM2015-AUS 23) need not be an impediment to episcopal celebrations if the bishop prepared, and celebrated with, the couple. Bishops have the duty to ensure that the state of matrimony “be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection” (OCM2015-Aus 13).

### **8.1.2 The Role of Pastors**

In local communities the task of organizing assistance for “the Christian faithful so that the state of Marriage may be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection” falls to pastors (OCM2015-Aus 13). Pastors are tasked to do this especially “by preaching, by catechesis adapted to children, young people and adults, and through means of social communication, so that the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the role of Christian spouses and parents” (OCM2015-Aus 14).

As Churches in Australia are celebrating fewer marriages, and attendance at those ceremonies is usually restricted to the friends and relatives of the bride and groom, more frequent blessings of married couples within Mass may provide a relevant context for pastors to meet their obligation to instruct the Christian faithful about the meaning of Christian marriage by preaching and catechesis, for the liturgy is “the privileged place for catechizing the People of God” (CCC 1074).

OCM2015-Aus now includes “The Order of Blessing a Married Couple Within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage,” which may provide an opportunity for pastors to effectively catechize these various groups about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the role of

Christian spouses and parents. The ritual states that: “On the main anniversaries of Marriage, as for example on the twenty-fifth, fiftieth, or sixtieth anniversary, it is fitting to hold a special remembrance of the Sacrament” (OCM 272). One might add that it is also fitting to hold a special remembrance of the sacrament on the earlier anniversaries. The first, fifth, and tenth anniversaries are major milestones for recently married couples for whom the twenty-fifth anniversary can seem beyond the horizon.

“The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass” is a thanksgiving for, and renewal of commitment to, married life. The liturgy emphasises matrimony and one’s spouse as gifts of a loving God, and loving marriage as a locus of personal and spiritual growth. The words and actions of the rite, including the witness of the celebrating couple to the joys of marriage, can provide a powerful form of implicit catechesis. The couple witnessing to the joys of marriage may also provide inspiration for other couples.

## **8.2 Equality in the Matrimonial Liturgy and in Marriage**

The Church needs to give greater attention to the issue of gender equality in both the celebration of the matrimonial liturgy and in the pastoral care it seeks to provide to those who are married. OCM2015-Aus accepts a responsibility to help those who are married “so that, faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead a holier and fuller family life” (OCM-Aus 14).

The Second Vatican Council’s definition of marriage as an intimate partnership of life and love (GS 48) has been theologically developed to present couples with the vision of the marriage ideal as “an equal communion of loving partnership in which each seeks the good of the other and both share in serving family and community”.<sup>690</sup> According to ethicist Margaret Farley, the extent to which marriage achieves its goal as an intimate partnership of life and love

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<sup>690</sup> Cahill, "Equality in Marriage: The Biblical Challenge," 68.

depends upon the extent to which the structures that frame the relationship are just. Equality is a key measure of this justice: “structures of marriage, for example, that retain inequality between husband and wife — the one the ‘head’ or leader, the other the ‘helper’; the one by stipulation the breadwinner, the other economically dependent; the one the representative of the family to society and church, the other only the ‘represented’ — these are structures that can severely limit or prohibit the full functioning of marriage and the attainment of its goals.”<sup>691</sup> Rituals which emphasise the “giving away of the bride” may serve to entrench these dysfunctional structures of marriage. There may be a link between the sense of ownership of women by men that such rituals express and domestic violence towards women, in that these rituals may reinforce notions of men’s right to control “their” women.<sup>692</sup>

One of the many reasons that inequality needs to be addressed in this context is the epidemic of domestic violence in Australian society, a tragic epidemic which the Australian Catholic Church has not addressed in a systematic manner.<sup>693</sup> Domestic violence refers to the most common and pervasive instances of violence in intimate (current or former) partner relationships typically where the perpetrator exercises power and control over another person.<sup>694</sup> Domestic violence is “founded in entrenched gender inequality.”<sup>695</sup> Overwhelmingly, albeit not exclusively, the victims of domestic violence are women: “one in

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<sup>691</sup> Farley, *Just Love*, 265-66.

<sup>692</sup> 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), <https://doi-org.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/10.2307/353683>.

<sup>693</sup> Liz Mackinlay, "Domestic Violence: Moving from Silence to Inclusion and Dialogue in the Australian Catholic Church," in *Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man Twenty Years Later*, ed. Sandie Cornish and Andrea Dean (Alexandria, NSW: ACBC, 2019), 125.

<sup>694</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia* (2018), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>.

<sup>695</sup> Mackinlay, "Domestic Violence," 125.



6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner.”<sup>696</sup> One in ten Australian men and one in eight Australian women recall that, before they were aged fifteen, they witnessed violence (physical assault) toward their mother by her partner.<sup>697</sup> The risk is that such violence can become accepted as part of everyday life; it can become normalised, and the cycle can continue.

There is an urgent need for the Church to ensure that its liturgical celebrations are not unintentionally strengthening gender inequality, and through that, contributing to domestic violence. Clare Johnson presents a compelling case that “it is in the liturgy that ecclesial inequality between males and females is most publicly on display when it comes to participation.”<sup>698</sup> This public display within the sacred, powerfully-shaping setting of the liturgy may reinforce existing inequality. There is no place for ecclesial inequality to be on display in the matrimonial liturgy where, in the Catholic understanding, the partners are equally ministers of the sacrament. There is a need to be vigilant to ensure that the rituals do not unintentionally underline gender inequality. Thus, the second edition’s apparent weakening of the first edition’s emphasis upon equality in its preferred entrance procession has rightly attracted criticism.<sup>699</sup>

The ethical principle of equality impinges upon other aspects of marriage. In the Catholic understanding, the Creator is the author of marriage and has endowed it with various benefits and purposes (GS 48). The benefits of marriage bear repetition: “not everybody wants

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<sup>696</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia*.

<sup>697</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Personal Safety, Australia, 2016* (2017), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>.

<sup>698</sup> Clare V. Johnson, "Women's Modes of Liturgical Participation " in *Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man Twenty Years Later*, ed. Sandie Cornish and Andrea Dean (Alexandria, NSW: ACBC, 2019), 65.

<sup>699</sup> See 1.1.1 and 3.1.1 above.

to be married, but for those who do, marriage brings intimacy, companionship, fulfillment, and, for many, the joys of children and grandchildren. Married people live longer, are healthier, and are more satisfied with their lives, especially married men.”<sup>700</sup> The fact that married men are more satisfied with their lives than married women may be another indicator that more needs to be done to reduce gender inequality within marriage.

All people who choose to do so are entitled seek to enjoy the fulsome benefits of marriage.<sup>701</sup> It is unjust and unacceptable that marriage has become a preferential option for the rich.<sup>702</sup> As Christians we are called to adopt a preferential option for the poor: “this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace ... *above all, those without hope of a better future.*”<sup>703</sup> Acceptance of a social and economic system where the poor are largely excluded from marriage further diminishes their hope of a better future.<sup>704</sup> We cannot continue to accept a situation where high income individuals continue to marry, to stay married, and to enjoy the benefits of marriage, while the poor are largely excluded.

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<sup>700</sup> Case and Deaton, *Deaths of Despair*, 169.

<sup>701</sup> In 2022 the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life observed that declining marriage rates may frustrate the fulfillment and happiness of many of the lay faithful: “the dwindling number of people, in general, getting married, but also and especially the short duration of marriages, even sacramental ones, as well as the problem of the validity of celebrated marriages, constitute an urgent challenge, which puts at stake the fulfillment and happiness of so many lay faithful in the world.” In response the Dicastery has proposed an extended “marriage catechumenate.” The Dicastery’s proposal has been endorsed by Pope Francis. See Cindy Wooden, “Vatican Releases Suggestions for Lengthier, Revamped Marriage Preparation,” *The Tablet*, June 16, 2022), <https://thetablet.org/vatican-releases-suggestions-for-lengthier-revamped-marriage-preparation/>.

<sup>702</sup> In the UK research 87% of mothers in the highest income group were married compared with only 24% of mothers in the lowest income groups. See Harry Benson and Stephen McKay, *The Marriage Gap: The Rich get Married (and stay together). The Poor Don’t.*, Marriage Foundation (Cambridge, 2015), 1, <https://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MF-paper-The-Marriage-Gap-Rich-and-Poor.pdf>.

<sup>703</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#The%20significance%20of%20this%20document](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#The%20significance%20of%20this%20document). Paragraph 182.

<sup>704</sup> Case and Deaton, *Deaths of Despair*, 167-83.

The implication for the Church, including those who are tasked to revise its matrimonial liturgy, is that we must not rest in our work to reduce socio-economic inequality and poverty. However, more is required: “the message to policy-makers – and to society in general – is that efforts to reduce inequality and poverty will inevitably fall short unless and until they also encourage substantially higher levels of marriage among those in lower socio-economic groups.”<sup>705</sup>

### **8.3 The Next Edition of the *Ordo*.**

OCM2015-Aus had an exceedingly long gestation period of twenty-five years (1990-2015); it was prepared during the 1980’s. The cultural and theological landscape has changed dramatically since that time. It is time for the Church to begin preparation of the third edition of the *Ordo*. Theologies of, and from, liturgy like those presented in this thesis and momentous theological developments since the preparation of the second edition can inform future revisions of the *Ordo*.

In summary, this thesis contends that OCM2015-Aus might be further enhanced by enriching its words and actions. First Corinthians 7, a text which speaks explicitly about matrimony, which emphasises the equal obligations of both spouses, which expresses the essence of Christian marriage, and which is central to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and OCM2015-Aus on Christian marriage, should be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Ordo*. The dismissal might be enriched by including words that underline the connection between the liturgy and life.<sup>706</sup> Consideration should also be given to ensuring a more appropriate balance between the related images of God as creator and redeemer in its rituals and its euchology as OCM2015-Aus is under-weight in its emphasis upon liturgical

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<sup>705</sup> Benson and McKay, *The Marriage Gap*, 5.

<sup>706</sup> See 3.1.10 above.

images and likenesses of God as creator. It is also deficient in the attention it gives to the theological principle that the fruits of the earth used in the liturgy are the gifts of a generous Creator.

The actions of the *Ordo* might be enriched by bringing greater clarity to the entrance procession, by enhancing the exchange of rings, by further underscoring the connection between baptism and matrimony by including the renewal of baptismal promises if the spouses are both baptized persons, by lighting the paschal candle, including a Litany of the Saints (as is done at Ordinations),<sup>707</sup> and by further highlighting the role of the couple as ministers of matrimony.

There are implications for any revision of the *Ordo* in paradigm shifts in the wider theological landscape; paradigm shifts such as those exemplified in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and the Pontifical Council for Culture's document on beauty, *The Via Pulchritudinis: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*. These documents both confirm the need for, and should inform the content of, any revision of the *Ordo*. The relevance of these momentous theological documents is presented below.

### **8.3.1 The Encyclical *Laudato Si'***

Chapter Two of this thesis outlined a decline in the rate of the celebration of marriage, particularly Catholic marriage, since the middle of the twentieth century. In parallel with that decline, awareness has grown of a set of interrelated ecological crises that have impacted negatively on Earth's living and non-living systems.<sup>708</sup> As the marriage crisis has deepened so

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<sup>707</sup> In 2013 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops requested "the optional inclusion of a Litany of the Saints that highlights saints and blessed who were married; this litany, when used, would begin the celebration of the marriage rite." The CDWDS did not approve this request. See Turner, *Inseparable Love*, 81-82. Perhaps this request will be successful for the third edition of the *Ordo*.

<sup>708</sup> These crises include pollution, climate change, loss of biodiversity, shortage of fresh drinking water for all, and decline in the quality of human life for many. See 5.4.1 above.

too have the ecological crises. The acceleration of both crises contributed to the preparation of both LS and AL. Indeed, LS identifies a crisis of family and social ties related to rampant individualism and a culture of instant gratification which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment (LS 162).

Care for creation is one of the hoped-for outcomes of matrimony according to Catholic teaching and is one that can provide a specific societal benefit: the mutual love of man and woman is “intended to be fruitful and realized in the common work of watching over creation” (CCC 1604). Viewed within this context, the teaching that the matrimonial covenant derives its force and strength from creation (OCM2015-Aus 1) takes on a different hue.

In response to global environmental deterioration, *Laudato Si'* is addressed to “every person living on this planet” (LS 3). This is an historic first: “It is the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic Church that a Pope has addressed an encyclical not only to all Roman Catholics or to ‘all people of good will’, but also to all ‘people living on planet Earth.’”<sup>709</sup> Every person living on this planet includes persons who are married, who are thus included in LS’s appeal “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (LS 14).

While it does not deal explicitly with matrimony, LS delivers a fruitful treatment of the principle of sacramentality. It highlights the way in which elements of nature are used in the sacramental liturgies to mediate supernatural life in a privileged way, inviting us “to embrace the world on a different plane” (LS 235). LS highlights the relationship between creation, sacramental liturgy, and care for creation, advancing an understanding of the sacramentality of creation which encourages us to embrace and care for the natural world. In matrimony, bride and groom are the elements of creation that are used in the sacramental liturgy to mediate supernatural life in a privileged way to each other, and beyond each other to all the groups of

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<sup>709</sup> Ottmar Edenhofer, Christian Flachsland, and Brigitte Knopf, "Science and Religion in Dialogue over the Global Commons," *Nature Climate Change* 5, no. 10 (2015): 907, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2798>.

which they are part. Matrimony, ideally, promotes embodiment of the principle of sacramentality. In their lives, and particularly in their relationality, spouses are gifted to become a privileged part of created reality as bearers of the Trinitarian presence. The theological implication of embracing one's spouse and one's children is an embrace of and care for the natural world.

### 8.3.2 The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*

*Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family* (March 19, 2016) is the most significant magisterial document on marriage and the family since *Familiaris Consortio* (1981). Like FC it develops Church teaching.<sup>710</sup> Just as FC contributed to the current revision of the *Ordo*, AL has a major contribution to make to any future revision.

AL represents the papal synthesis of the outcomes of a synodal process. The goal of the two-part synod was pastoral, namely, to “develop working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family.”<sup>711</sup> Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, (secretary general of the synod), indicated that a key purpose of the synod was to recontextualise *Familiaris Consortio* (Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation which synthesised the outcomes of the 1980 Synod of bishops on marriage) because: “the Church is not timeless, it lives amid the vicissitudes of history and the Gospel must be known and experienced by people today.”<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> Among these developments, Pope Francis endorses and extends the “careful discernment of situations” which Pope John Paul II called for (FC 84). He also restores the pastoral practice known as “the internal forum solution” which is confirmed in Canon Law, and which had been widely used in the history of the Church until Pope John Paul II constrained its use in relation to irregular marital situations with FC. See James McManus, “Pope Francis and the Internal Forum Solution,” *Pastoral Review* (December 29 2018). <https://www.thepastoralreview.org/issues/current-issue/1652-pope-francis-and-the-internal-forum-solution>.

<sup>711</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family*.

<sup>712</sup> Edward Pentin, “Cardinal Baldisseri's Comments in Context ” *National Catholic Register* (May 10, 2014). <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/cardinal-baldisseris-comments-in-context>.

The reception of AL has varied from appreciative acceptance to vituperative rejection.<sup>713</sup> The bases of that mixed reception are illustrated in the quizzical title of George Worgul's article "Amoris Laetitia: Joy of Love or Scandal of Heresy?"<sup>714</sup> Worgul praises the pastoral emphasis of the exhortation: "*Amoris Laetitia* is a biblically-steeped and profoundly rich theological and pastoral text, which is attentive to the present state of marriage in different global contexts."<sup>715</sup> He notes that the controversy surrounding AL, (the "Scandal of Heresy?" of his title), relates to the pastoral care of Catholics in irregular marital situations and particularly the possibility of their participation in Eucharistic communion.

Worgul contends that: "Amoris Laetitia engages the renewal of marriage and the family within the context of a postmodern culture."<sup>716</sup> Seeking to renew marriage within a postmodern culture is entirely appropriate for marriage has been impacted by postmodernity.<sup>717</sup> Worgul contends that in a postmodern culture, pastoral care requires a different approach: "Pastors must walk with couples and families where they are, listening, accompanying, discerning, and evangelizing, while always proclaiming the mercy of God."<sup>718</sup> This emphasis is illustrated in

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<sup>713</sup> James Martin summarises the range of responses: "Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation 'Amoris Laetitia' has been accepted by most Catholics as a breath of fresh air. Its warm encouragement to families to place love at the center of their lives, its clear invitation to pastors to accompany Catholics in the 'complexity' of their situations and its strong reminder that the church needs to recover an appreciation of the role of conscience have been welcomed by millions of Catholics as a sign that the church wants to meet them where they are. But not by all Catholics. In a few quarters of the church it has not been received warmly at all. In fact, it was greeted with a vituperation that seemed to approach apoplexy." James Martin, "What Some Critics of 'Amoris Laetitia' are Missing," *America* (April 13, 2016), <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/what-some-critics-amoris-laetitia-are-missing>.

<sup>714</sup> George Worgul, "Amoris Laetitia: Joy of Love or Scandal of Heresy?," *Spiritans Horizons* 13, no. 13 (2018), <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritans-horizons/vol13/iss13/10>.

<sup>715</sup> Worgul, "Amoris Laetitia," 54.

<sup>716</sup> Worgul, "Amoris Laetitia," 56.

<sup>717</sup> Historian of marriage Stephanie Coontz writes of the contemporary revolution in marriage and family life: "Almost any separate way of organizing caregiving, childrearing, residential arrangements, sexual interactions, or interpersonal redistribution of resources has been tried by some society at some point in time. But the coexistence in one society of so many alternative ways of doing all of these different things—and the comparative legitimacy accorded to many of them—has never been seen before." Stephanie Coontz, "The World Historical Transformation of Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>718</sup> Worgul, "Amoris Laetitia," 56.

the title of AL's contentious Chapter 8: "Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness."

Listening to the lived experience of married couples revives the tradition that there are two paths to understanding the sacramental mystery of marriage: marriage *in facto esse*, that is, marriage "in fact" or marriage as it is experienced by Catholic couples, and marriage *in fieri*, "marriage in theory or principle."<sup>719</sup> The paths are complementary: both are essential to illuminate the sacramental mystery. For sacramental theologian and archbishop of Chicago Blasé Cupich, recovery of the importance of listening to the voices of the married faithful "represents an enormous change of approach, a paradigm shift holistically rooted in Scripture, tradition and human experience."<sup>720</sup> It is a paradigm shift which challenges a prevailing culture of clericalism.

It is from listening to the lived experience of married couples that AL can declare: "Many people feel that the Church's message on marriage and family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals" (AL 38). AL proclaims a demanding matrimonial ideal,<sup>721</sup> whilst demonstrating Christian compassion and care for individuals in exceptional situations. The changes in Church teaching and practice presented in AL are legitimate responses to the goal that the Gospel "be known and experienced by people

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<sup>719</sup> Lagges, "Canonical Reflections " 150.

<sup>720</sup> Blasé Cupich, "Pope Francis' Revolution of Mercy: Amoris Laetitia as a New Paradigm of Catholicity" (Von Hügel Institute Annual Lecture, Cambridge, England, 2018).

<sup>721</sup> AL 292 states clearly and comprehensively: "Christian marriage, as a reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a haven of new life for society. Some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way. The Synod Fathers stated that the Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage."



today.”<sup>722</sup> This changed teaching and practice creates risks. For a Church that proclaims the primacy of charity and mercy the risk must be taken.<sup>723</sup>

*The Final Report* of the Synod of Bishops on the family contains a section on “Ecology and the Family” which makes connections between LS and the family.<sup>724</sup> However, no such section appears in AL. The goal of the synods, and of AL, was predominantly pastoral. However, AL acknowledges that married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations (AL 181), and that the protection of creation is a pastoral witness of families (AL 290).

AL concludes with a call to rediscover the teaching of the Master that marriage is set “in the context of the ultimate and definitive dimension of our human existence” (AL 325). Here AL shows that it is open to the possibility of a creation theology of marriage. Jesus teaches that marriage relates to human existence on earth. According to *Lumen Gentium* the sacraments of the church “pertain to this present time” (LG 48). Relating to human existence on earth, and pertaining to this present time, sacraments are properly celebrated using the fruits of creation and the work of human hands. God reveals Godself through the beauty and fruitfulness of creation: “the living God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them ... has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:15-17).

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<sup>722</sup> Pentin, "Cardinal Baldisseri's Comments in Context".

<sup>723</sup> “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311).

<sup>724</sup> In a statement that has implications for any revision of the *Ordo*, The Final Report of the Synod on the Family noted that, in response to papal teaching expressed most comprehensively in LS, the Church “collaborates in the development of a new ecological culture which includes a new mentality, new policies, new educational programmes, a new manner of living and a new spirituality.” Synod of Bishops, *The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis* (October 24, 2015), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20151026\\_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly_en.html), article 16.

The beauty and the fruitfulness of creation undergird the sacramental principle. Just as humans work with the fruits of creation to produce the materials used in the sacramental celebrations, humans are called to maintain and to enhance the beauty and fruitfulness of creation which provides the medium within which the sacramental celebrations take place. Human life on earth continues through procreation and through human actions to ensure that creation will support the physical and the spiritual flourishing of our children and our children's children. Jesus' teaching endorses the Creator's plan for humans to be fruitful and to have dominion (Gen 1:28).

Genesis 1:28 links matrimony and care for creation. It places humans at the centre of God's complex, interdependent, and incomplete masterpiece of creation. The verse expresses the theo-logical link between matrimony and care for creation. The Creator's blessing/command to humans to procreate is placed beside the logical consequence that they care for God's continuing creation. Humans, and particularly married couples, are called to sustain and enhance the beauty and the fruitfulness of God's creation.

### **8.3.3 Beauty in AL and its Relationship to Creation and to Matrimony**

In AL, Pope Francis proposes that “we need to help young people discover the dignity and *beauty* of marriage” (AL, 205, emphasis added). The beauty of marriage and family life is not a theme that is explored in the documents of Vatican II;<sup>725</sup> however it is a theme which permeates AL. Pope Francis's emphasis upon beauty invites any future revision of the *Ordo* to examine both beauty in the liturgy and the beauty of the liturgy. Beauty *in* the liturgy examines the explicit and implicit treatment of the theological concept in the text of the *Ordo*. Beauty *of* the liturgy examines how beauty might be experienced by those engaged in full, conscious, active participation in the celebration of the liturgy.

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<sup>725</sup> GS's chapter “Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family” makes no mention of beauty.

In his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II called for greater attention to the beautiful as part of his quest for a new evangelization: “I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the *beautiful* to which the word of God gives access. This task becomes all the more urgent if we consider the challenges which the new millennium seems to entail.”<sup>726</sup>

Pope John Paul II may have foreseen the declining effectiveness of the true and the good as pathways to the Divine. Evidence of this decline has been illustrated by the increasing frequency of the use of the term “post-truth” in social discourse. Post-truth, defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief,” was Oxford Dictionaries’ word of the year for 2016.<sup>727</sup>

Problems with the effectiveness of the true and the good were identified by the Pontifical Council for Culture which produced the document, “The *Via Pulchritudinis*: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue.” The Council identified contemporary problems with notions of the true and the good: “Too often in recent years, the *truth* has been instrumentalised by ideologies, and the *good* horizontalised into a merely social act as though charity towards neighbour alone sufficed without being rooted in love of God.”<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>726</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (1998), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html), (hereafter FR), article 103, emphasis added.

<sup>727</sup> “Word of the Year 2016,” Oxford languages, 2016, accessed 21 November, 2020, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/#:~:text=After%20much%20discussion%2C%20debate%2C%20and,to%20emotion%20and%20personal%20belief>.

<sup>728</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue* (2006), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_cultr\\_doc\\_20060327\\_plenary-assembly\\_final-document\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20060327_plenary-assembly_final-document_en.html).

Since 2006 the instrumentalization of truth by ideologies has become even more widespread. British philosopher A.C. Grayling warns that the notion “post-truth” threatens “intellectual integrity” and potentially damages “the whole fabric of democracy.”<sup>729</sup> He attributes the decreasing influence of objective facts in shaping public opinion to a sense of grievance in response to increased income inequality following the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008, and the increasing ubiquity of social media which has allowed almost everyone the opportunity to publish their opinion.<sup>730</sup>

Grayling’s warnings of damage to the fabric of democracy have been borne out in the bitterness of the Brexit debate in the UK, the presidential elections of 2016 and 2020 in the USA, and the maelstrom over the propriety of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-2022.<sup>731</sup>

In an era of “post-truth” the *Via Pulchritudinis* proposes that the experience of beauty can facilitate people’s encounter with God: “Beauty, as much as truth and good, leads us to God, the first truth, supreme good, and beauty itself ... Beginning with the simple experience of the marvel-arousing meeting with beauty, the *via pulchritudinis* can open the pathway for the search for God.”<sup>732</sup>

However, meeting beauty does not necessarily ensure progress on the pathway of the search for God. The beauty of the created world is available to all yet many:

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<sup>729</sup> Sean Coughlan, "What Does Post-truth Mean for a Philosopher?," (12 January 2017). <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-38557838>.

<sup>730</sup> Coughlan, "What Does Post-truth Mean for a Philosopher?."

<sup>731</sup> While ‘post-truth’ has emerged as a serious social phenomenon there has also been a decline in the tendency to afford authority to institutions (such as the Church) simply by virtue of the esteem with which they had been held in the past. This is due in part to multiple misuses of their authority which has led to a lack of trust in anything they propose.

<sup>732</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis*.

only see nature and the cosmos in their visible materiality, a muted universe that has no other destiny than those commanded by the cold and invariable laws of physics, without evoking any other beauty, much less a Creator. In a culture where scientism imposes the limits of its method of observation, up to the point of making an exclusive norm of knowing, the cosmos is reduced to being nothing other than an immense reservoir from which man draws to the point of draining it to meet his growing and disproportionate needs.<sup>733</sup>

If the beauty of the created world is to evoke the beauty of its Creator, education is essential.<sup>734</sup> In relation to beauty as meeting,<sup>735</sup> education may be thought of increasing one's capacity to meet beauty.<sup>736</sup>

As part of its advocacy for greater attention to creation and its beauty in human and Christian formation, *Via Pulchritudinis* would seem to support a contention of this thesis namely, that there is an urgency to develop compelling theologies of creation that are compatible with the understandings of contemporary science: "The teaching of an authentic philosophy of nature and a beautiful theology of creation needs a new impulse in a culture where the dialogue *faith-science* is particularly crucial. It is a culture for which clerics need a minimum level of epistemological awareness and scientists can draw more from the immense undertakings of the Christian wisdom tradition."<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis*.

<sup>734</sup> On what is required to link creation and Creator, Hart writes: "None of this is to say that the soul can gain access to an immediate intuition of the divine form in the fabric of creation, unclouded by sin, untroubled by the misery of earthly life; what is at issue is a hermeneutics of creation ... Inasmuch as creation is ... purely an expression of the superabundant joy and agape of the Trinity, joy and love are its only grammar and its only ground; one therefore must learn a certain orientation, a certain charity and a certain awe, and even a certain style of delectation to see in what sense creation tells of God." David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003), 254-55.

<sup>735</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, beauty is predominantly understood as experienced in (or as the outcome of) an event or meeting. Beauty as event makes beauty potentially available to all people. See Claus Westermann, "Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carol Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 585.

<sup>736</sup> "One submits oneself to other minds (teachers) in order to increase the chance that one will be looking in the right direction when a comet makes its sweep through a certain patch of sky." Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>737</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis*.

Beauty can be revelatory: the beauty of the natural world can reflect the beauty of its Creator. Beautiful works of art reveal not only their intrinsic beauty but also a trace of the beauty of the Creator of all: “the high intensity beauty of works of art represents the presence and appeal of divine beauty in all created reality.”<sup>738</sup>

Scripture gives primacy to human beings as God’s works of art, albeit works of art in progress. Humans are created in the image of God (Gen 1:28), they are God’s masterpiece (Eph 2:10), and they are works in progress: “Just like clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:6). As God’s masterpieces, humans have the potential to be the apogee of the presence and appeal of divine beauty in created reality.

The defining characteristics of beauty have been contested through the ages; however, there is general support for three characteristics: unity, harmony, and splendour or radiance.<sup>739</sup> These three characteristics also describe the matrimonial ideal. Unity denotes “a certain integration, wholeness, completeness;” harmony is “a certain apt fitting together,” reflecting faintly the ultimate harmony of the three persons of the Trinity; splendour reveals itself as a quality that shines forth, a quality “that somehow resonates deeply within us and elicits feelings of delight, awe, wonder, respect.”<sup>740</sup> Splendour and radiance as a characteristic of the beauty of matrimony has been eloquently exemplified by philosopher and Judaic scholar, Jonathan Sacks: “In marriage at its best you see humanity at its best, and in a loving home you can almost touch the divine presence.”<sup>741</sup> In matrimony spouses commit to unity and to harmony. They

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<sup>738</sup> F. A. Murphy, "Aesthetics, Theological," ed. D. A. Fergusson I. A. McFarland, K. Kilby, & et. al., *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), [https://search-credoreference-com.ezproxy2.acu.edu.au/content/entry/cupdct/aesthetics\\_theological/0](https://search-credoreference-com.ezproxy2.acu.edu.au/content/entry/cupdct/aesthetics_theological/0).

<sup>739</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 299.

<sup>740</sup> Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 299-300.

<sup>741</sup> "Marriage is a Metaphor for our Relationship with God," 2003, accessed 14 March, 2021, <http://www.rabbisacks.org/marriage-is-a-metaphor-for-our-relationship-with-god/>.

are offered the grace of the Spirit to create a matrimonial relationship which can radiate splendour and show glimpses of the presence of God.<sup>742</sup> Human beauty, which may provide a glimpse of the beauty of the Creator, is revealed in interpersonal encounters: human beauty “is experienced in the process of meeting.”<sup>743</sup> From the first inter-human encounter in Gen 2:23 human beauty is experienced in encounter with others.

Orthodox bishop and theologian Kallistos Ware underscores that the image of God is revealed in the quality of interpersonal relationships. For Ware the emphasis in Genesis, that it is man and woman together who are created in the image of God, indicates that God is most clearly imaged in the “between” of an “I – thou” relationship. “The image of God is given, not to the man alone or to the woman alone, but to the two of them together. It comes to its fulfilment only in the ‘between’ that unites them to each other.”<sup>744</sup>

The issue of equality becomes central again since equality of spouses is a prerequisite for “I – Thou” encounters. The Hebrew Bible provides compelling examples that inequality of power in a relationship leads to “I – it” rather than “I -Thou” encounters.<sup>745</sup> These narratives reveal that societies or relationships marked by an inequality of power can result in a “perverted form of encounter in which the mighty one can use his power to take possession of beauty.”<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> Patrick Sherry shows that God’s beauty can be explained in Trinitarian terms. The Son reflects the Father’s glory, and the Spirit communicates God’s glory to the world both through creation and through inspiration. See Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2002).

<sup>743</sup> Westermann, "Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," 588. Beauty as meeting or event makes beauty potentially available to all people.

<sup>744</sup> Kallistos Ware, "The Sacrament of Love: The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage and its Breakdown," *The Downside Review* 109, no. 375 (1991): 79.

<sup>745</sup> Westermann identifies three narratives where men use their power to take possession of beautiful women: “In Genesis 6, these are ‘the sons of Elohim’; in Genesis 12, Pharaoh; in 2 Samuel 11, King David.” Westermann, "Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," 589.

<sup>746</sup> Westermann, "Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," 589.

Development of an “I – Thou” relationship requires a spousal equality that needs to be manifest in all the ritual, reading, and prayer options in any revision of the *Ordo*.

The beauty that suffuses the Genesis accounts of creation has for too long been underutilised in liturgical-theological reflections on matrimony. The beauty of the Genesis accounts is confirmed and enhanced in the incarnation where the Word, through whom God created the world, becomes enfleshed in the matter of the world. This union of the Word with the material of the world links creation and salvation and has implications for all creation. It confirms that God values the entire material world, and it affirms the duty of all humans, but particularly those who are married, to care for it. The more we fulfill our divine vocation “to create, restore, and tend to the beauty of creation,”<sup>747</sup> the more we become aware of the presence of God.

AL sagely cautions that growth to become more clearly the image of God is neither automatic nor instant: “marriage is not something that happens once for all ... neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect. Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she actually is: an unfinished product, needing to grow a work in progress” (AL 218).

Accepting one’s spouse and the matrimonial relationship as a work in progress while providing support, encouragement, and challenge to grow into persons of worth and beauty is somewhat analogous to the creation of a work of art. It is in the image of a God who creates, that humans are created. Couples are called to image God in the creative process, not only in their final products. As Sherry explains: “in exercising their productive powers in the production of things of worth, men and women may become channels of God’s creativity; and the beauty of what they create may, like natural beauty, have a sacramental significance, in that by it the material may convey the spiritual and indeed, some would say, serve as a sign of

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<sup>747</sup> Patrick T. McCormick, *God's Beauty: A Call to Justice* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2012), 124.



God's presence and activity."<sup>748</sup> The beauty of matrimony, that spouses are called to create, has a sacramental significance: it serves as a sign of God's presence and activity. The beauty of matrimony has the potential to inform fruitfully the third edition of the *Ordo*.

For most couples celebrating matrimony, a growing awareness of the beauty of their partner has contributed to bringing them to this liturgy. There they confirm their willingness to commit to giving the gift of self to another, with the unstated aim of becoming beautiful as God is beautiful, as they promise, on the foundation of their baptism, to be faithful. There is an intrinsic connection between the theology of matrimony and theological aesthetics. In their promises of fidelity in bad times as well as good, in sickness as well as in health, the couple commits to grow in kenotic love, to grow to love as God loves, which entails the imitation of God's beauty as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. As Richard Viladesau explains: "the condition for the proper love of earthly beauty as a means to divinization is the willingness to be led by it to a higher level of similitude to God."<sup>749</sup>

#### **8.3.4 The Beauty of the Matrimonial Liturgy**

AL challenges those who help engaged couples to prepare for marriage to encourage couples "to make the liturgical celebration a profound personal experience and to appreciate the meaning of each of its signs" (AL 213). As well as an appreciation of the meaning of each of its signs, attention to the potential beauty of the liturgical celebration can enhance the personal experience and the generation of meaning of the couple during the celebration.

The beauty of the liturgy contributes to fostering full, conscious, and active participation and to responding to the spiritual needs of the faithful. Guidance on the celebration of beautiful liturgies is implicit rather than explicit in SC. In SC, the primary aim

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<sup>748</sup> Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 161.

<sup>749</sup> Richard Viladesau, "Theosis and Beauty," *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (2008): 189.

of the reform of the liturgy is to ensure the full, conscious, and active participation of all the people and the beauty of liturgy is treated in relation to the contribution it can make to the achievement of that primary aim. Consequently, SC makes only two explicit references to beauty, both in Chapter VII, “Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings.” Sacred arts “by their very nature, are oriented toward the infinite *beauty* of God which they attempt in some way to portray by the work of human hands; they achieve their purpose of redounding to God’s praise and glory in proportion as they are directed the more exclusively to the single aim of turning men’s minds devoutly toward God” (SC 122). The sacred arts are valued, not for their own sake, but for the contribution they can make to turning the minds of worshippers devoutly towards God, a component of ensuring the full, conscious, and active participation of all the people. The second reference to beauty is consistent with and supportive of the first. Bishops are to encourage and support sacred art which strives “after noble *beauty* rather than mere sumptuous display. This principle is to apply also in the matter of sacred vestments and ornaments” (SC 124).

Beauty encourages active participation for it both invites participants into the mystery and draws them deeper into that mystery.<sup>750</sup> Von Balthasar writes of this transporting aspect of beauty: “along with the seen surface of the manifestation, there is perceived the non-manifested depth:<sup>751</sup> it is only this which leads to the phenomenon of the beautiful its enrapturing and overwhelming character, just as it is only this that assures the truth and goodness of the existent.”<sup>752</sup> Attention to the seen surface of the beauty the of the matrimonial liturgy invites

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<sup>750</sup> See Clare V. Johnson, “Portals to Transcendence,” in *At the Heart of the Liturgy: Conversations with Nathan D. Mitchell’s ‘Amen Corners’ 1991-2012*, eds. Maxwell E. Johnson, Timothy O’Malley, and Demetrio S. Yokum (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2014), 87-98.

<sup>751</sup> In this context “non-manifested” means real but not visible.

<sup>752</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 1, Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 442.

participants into its non-manifested (that is, real but not visible) depth. The seen surface which is revealed in the synergy of liturgical actions, symbols, words, and music can “touch the heart and the spirit and raise marvel and the desire to meet the resurrected Lord, He who is the *Door of Beauty*.”<sup>753</sup>

Beauty is a component of the context that shapes worshippers’ experience of the transcendent and immanent God during their active participation in the celebration of liturgy. God’s self-communication in liturgy is accomplished in ways that are appropriate for humanity including through “aesthetically pleasing and beautiful liturgical arts.”<sup>754</sup> In ranking the beautiful liturgical arts Irwin gives pride of place not to art and architecture, nor to music, but to our bodies “especially the self-expression and leadership of the ministers of the liturgy.”<sup>755</sup> In the Latin *Ordo* bride and groom have important (though not presiding) roles as ministers of matrimony to each other so their self-expression and leadership require special consideration in planning how they will engage their bodies in enacting their key parts of the liturgy.

The three arts of which Irwin writes, engagement of bodies, music, and art and architecture, provide sensory stimuli through which the gathered assembly may engage with sacramentality.<sup>756</sup> Central to Irwin’s liturgical theology is the linkage between the notions that these arts are intrinsic to liturgy and that they are the result of human manufacture: “that the arts are the result of the work of human hands indicates how a theology of work and human

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<sup>753</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis*. # III, 3 C.

<sup>754</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 411.

<sup>755</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 406. See also Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll: Orbis 2006), 149-88.

<sup>756</sup> According to the principle of sacramentality all creation is potentially the bearer of God’s presence while sacraments enhance that potentiality into the possibility of personal contact with God. See Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 45.

labor are intrinsic to the very doing of liturgy.”<sup>757</sup> Heaven and earth can meet in the fruits of creation and the work of human hands.

In the matrimonial liturgy it is particularly the liturgical actions which can “touch the heart and the spirit.”<sup>758</sup> The Entrance Procession, Exchange of Consent, Exchange of Rings, and the Nuptial Blessing can be emotionally powerful rituals. Irwin’s maxim, “effective worship is only possible through what is affective,”<sup>759</sup> points to the significance of these rituals in the matrimonial liturgy. The rituals of the liturgy shape and form us, as through them we encounter “the unique, mediated experience of God.”<sup>760</sup> Matrimonial rituals have significance not only to the bride and groom, but also to the celebrating Christian community because no sacrament is ever just for the individuals alone, but always for the entire assembly as well as for the benefit of the whole body of Christ (SC 26).

Consideration of how aesthetically pleasing and beautiful liturgical arts shape worshippers’ experience of the transcendent and immanent God, together with the relevant teachings of *Laudato Si’* and *Amoris Laetitia* can productively guide the work of those who prepare the next revision of the *Ordo*.

#### **8.4 Thesis Conclusion: The Matrimonial Liturgy - God’s Gift for the Life of the World**

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza writes that it is possible to look at statistics which show a significant decline in sacramental marriage (like those presented in Chapter Two) as indicators of a gloomy future for marriage; a gloomy future which might cause one to wonder whether people in the third millennium will have any use for a theology of marriage as a sacrament or

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<sup>757</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 410.

<sup>758</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis*.

<sup>759</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 413.

<sup>760</sup> However, "as a central, privileged experience, ritual is not to eclipse other acts of prayer." Irwin, *Context and Text*, 417.

any sense of the religious significance of marriage.<sup>761</sup> The response of this thesis is that the potential of marriage, which begins with the matrimonial liturgy, to promote spiritual and personal growth, and the good of communities and the world, is so great that strong theologies of marriage are needed more than ever.

The matrimonial liturgy is more than just a moment, it is the invitation to a lifelong liturgy. Irwin notes that as we engage in liturgy we should always “be grateful for what God has done and continues to do among us.”<sup>762</sup> For positive psychology, gratitude is defined as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift” and its powerful influence on human behaviour is attributed to the way that it can connect us to something larger than our individual experience.<sup>763</sup> In the matrimonial liturgy we are offered a gift within a gift: the gift of divine life comes enfolded within the gift of a loving spouse. Matrimony invites a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving that dual gift. In the lifelong matrimonial liturgy spouses are everyday gifted the opportunity to be grateful for what God has done and continues to do among us; to say:

Blessed are you, Lord,  
For by your goodness I took N. as my wife/husband (OCM2015-Aus 277).

We must continue to use all of the resources available to us – scripture, tradition, reason, experience (including experience illuminated by social-scientific research), and liturgy – to seek to find better ways to receive the gift of one’s spouse, and to give the gift of oneself, for that can open us to new and better ways of receiving the gift of divine life and sharing that life with the world.

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<sup>761</sup> Fiorenza, "Marriage," 585.

<sup>762</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 624.

<sup>763</sup> Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 554. See 7.4.1 above.

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