

# The Sacrament of Marriage<sup>1</sup>

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I want to begin with a picture I do not accept, and I will try to explain why I do not accept it and what I want to put in its place. It goes like this—'Sex is first of all a matter of fulfilment . . . it is an appetite which must be satisfied one way or another; sexual desire is something implanted in us by nature and nature's purpose is the maintenance of the race. But nature with her usual lavish hand has given us far more sexual desire than is really necessary, just as she makes far more cod's eggs than are really necessary to keep up the population of cod. Because our sexual desires are stronger and more frequent than is really necessary we are led into various kinds of competition and violence, disorder and war. In order to regulate this stimulation man has invented the institution of marriage. Marriage is rather like the institution of private property to which indeed it is closely related. Men have an appetite for possessions greater than is really necessary and to regulate this appetite we grow hedges round bits of land and say to a man "Go in there and own away to your heart's content but don't come over the hedge into my bit of land". Private property means that a man may perhaps have *less* than he would like, but what he has is *secure*'. Marriage according to this picture is a fence around the sexual appetite just as the hedge is a fence around the appetite for possessions. Marriage is a limit set on sexual activity for the sake of other people.

I do not accept this picture. There are a whole lot of things about it that seem wrong to me, I notice for example that it betrays a deep hostility to sex. In this picture sex is a dangerous animal which has to be caged by marriage, there is no positive value in it except that it is the fulfilment of an appetite, it provides a satisfaction which we are expected to feel guilty about outside marriage and not guilty about inside marriage. Our minds are not constructed to work these kinds of tricks so if we have this picture we just feel fairly guilty about sex anyway, the only difference is that outside marriage we think we have a *reason* for feeling guilty.

According to this picture marriage is something external to sex:

<sup>1</sup>This paper was originally given as one of the Dominican lectures at Cambridge in March 1961.

there is no necessary connection between them except the one supplied by the needs of society. Marriage is two things, sex plus certain limits; sex outside marriage is just the one thing.

Now will this theory stand up to critical examination? Let us just reflect for a moment on the analogy with hedges and property. According to this theory there is something called an appetite for property which is kept within limits by the hedges. When it is satisfied inside the hedges it is OK, when it is satisfied outside the hedges it is not OK. Legitimate ownership is two things, satisfying an appetite for property *plus* limits, 'property is legalized robbery'; robbery is just the one thing satisfying an appetite for property. But once you begin to examine this story it falls to pieces. Take another look at this appetite for property. How can you have an appetite for property if there is no ownership? Supposing there were no hedges, there would be no property and so you could not have an appetite for it. What would *count* as satisfying your appetite? There is in fact no such thing as a basic datum called the appetite for property which has to be regulated by ownership, on the contrary there is a basic datum called ownership and the appetite for this may outstep its proper limits and become an appetite for robbery. An owner is not a robber plus title deeds; a robber is someone pretending to be an owner although he has no title deeds. An owner is not a robber and then something more; a robber is a defective owner.

Now I think we can have the same destructive thoughts about the picture of sex that we have been given. Just as the urge to possess depends for its meaning on the institution of legitimate ownership, so the human sexual desire depends for its meaning on the institution of marriage. And just as robbery is imitation ownership and would be meaningless without ownership, so sex without marriage is just imitation marriage. It is defective marriage, something is lacking to it.

The two cases of ownership and marriage are, I think, parallel, but they are not on the same plane. For one thing you can and apparently do have societies in which there is no institution of private property and it follows not as a sociological or as a psychological fact but as a *logical* consequence that there is no robbery and no desire for robbery. On the other hand there are no human societies in which there is not the institution of marriage, though it takes different forms in different societies.

All this is really, to say that what is wrong with the picture we have been examining is that it has missed out any mention of love. In human beings sexual desire cannot be dissociated from the desire to

love and be loved. The connection is not always simple; the relevance of love may be twisted and turned in all sorts of ways; it may show itself in sadism or a desire for humiliation or in even more remote forms, but always behind it all is the need of the human being for love. Without this basic datum human sexuality is simply not intelligible, we cannot treat it as we can to a great extent treat other appetites, in isolation from a man's relation to others.

I want to claim then that sexual desire in man is a matter of sexual *love* and if we are to criticize some forms that the satisfaction of this desire takes, it is by criticizing their relevance to love. Love is not added to sex; sex without love, or sex with bogus or imitation love, is distorted in itself, one of its essential elements is missing.

Let us then draw another picture and see if we can make it an improvement on the one we have rejected. The root of the sexual desire is, as in the other picture, the biological need for the maintenance of the race, but this expresses itself in the individual not as an undifferentiated desire for sexual satisfaction but in a desire for union with another. 'It is not good for man to be alone'. As a matter of physiology and psychology this desire may suffer various vicissitudes in an individual; for one reason or another it may turn back upon the individual or it may turn to others of his or her own sex. We call these sexual desires abnormal not because they are uncommon but because they are not aligned with the general purpose for which in nature the sexual instinct exists. According then, to the picture which I am drawing, sex, love and marriage are not three separate things which we are lucky if we find combined. They form one thing and if either sex or marriage exist in a state of separation from love or from each other they are imperfect parts lacking their own fulfilment.

What then, do we mean by love? Love simply means desiring good for another person, it means shifting the centre of gravity of your desires so that it coincides with that of another person; this is why love involves union. Your desires are now focussed on the happiness of another person. Just as at any time you might be prepared to forego a lesser happiness for yourself for the sake of a greater one, so in love you are prepared to forego any lesser happiness for the sake of your greatest happiness which now coincides with the happiness, or what you think to be the happiness, of another. There are two things to notice here; first of all love means a giving of yourself to another, but secondly it does not mean a surrender of your personality to another. It does not mean that you eliminate the centre of your personality, it means that

you strive that it should coincide with that of another. Thus you *could* surrender your personality to another by placing yourself completely in his hands—say by some kind of drugs or hypnosis—then what you did would be entirely governed by him, it would really be his activity. But in love, your actions though done from the point of view of another remain absolutely your own actions. Love is self-sacrifice not suicide. Love is essentially a thing of freedom, a matter of my spontaneous action. It is a transcending of the self; to be able to transfer the centre of yourself to coincide with that of another involves a kind of picking yourself up by your own bootlaces, you are not simply being carried away, you are carrying yourself away.

It is because a carrying-away-out-of-yourself is involved that love, in the sense in which we have been talking about it, has affinities with the intoxication of the feelings that accompanies it in sexual love. In sexual passion we have the sense of being carried away by something which is ours, our sexual powers, and which is yet stronger than we are. Sexual appetites belong to the individual but not for the sake of the individual; his eating and drinking is for his own existence, his sexual powers relate him to the whole race. They belong to our solidarity in time with the race. And so in sexual passion we have the feeling of being carried away by something in us which belongs to the whole race, which is greater than ourselves. The morphology of this feeling in a sense corresponds to that of love as we have been describing it. As we have seen it, love is a matter of spontaneity, of freedom of the will; it is an act by which we carry ourselves outside our own circle of needs and preferences; and this pattern is repeated in the emotions by the passion of love. Thus we can say similar things about them, for example that sexual passion is in a sense unselfish, it is not grasping and mean as are some of our desires. Nevertheless sexual passion is only an image of love, drawn in the emotions, just as intoxication can be a picture of freedom and happiness.

When we discuss marriage we have first to discuss its 'normal' form, that is, its complete form, then we can come to consider various defects to which it may be subject. Marriage as a norm is the sexual union of two people who love each other; that is to say, their giving of themselves to each other includes the sexual union by which they give their bodies to each other, so that each can say of the other, 'This is my body'.

Sexual union exists, of course, to keep the race in being, and in this sense the purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. This is a

purpose that marriage has quite independently of what a particular individual might want of it. The purpose of sleep is to rest and refresh us, it has this purpose as a matter of biology even though we may have all sorts of reasons for wanting to go to sleep—to avoid a boring talk, to forget about our worries, or whatever. We do not decide for ourselves what marriage is for, any more than we decide for ourselves what *we* are for. Marriage is an institution which is already there in nature when we decide to go in for it. Just as there are certain things we must not do to human beings because they are human beings whatever else they may be—employees, enemy soldiers, criminals, etc.—so there are certain things we may not do to the institution of marriage just because it is this institution whatever else it may be.

In the book of Genesis, the first creation story makes man and woman 'to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth', but the second story introduces woman because 'It is not good for man to be alone'. We can say that the purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, but we can also say that its purpose is the fulfilment of man and woman in love. There has been a certain amount of discussion in the past about the relative importance of these 'two ends' of marriage. Some theologians have stressed the first and others have stressed the second. Some have said that the first is primary and the second secondary, others have retorted 'No, not secondary, *subsidiary*'. What gives the whole discussion its slight air of unreality is that we know very well that the participants are really thinking about something else. One side is simply saying 'You must not make the personal fulfilment of husband and wife serve as an excuse for abusing the procreative function of marriage'; the other side is saying 'You must not make the procreation of children an excuse for selfishness, lovelessness and neglect in marriage'. Both sides are obviously right and so the argument continues.

Marriage is not just the fact of two people living together in sexual love, it is man and wife living together in love which involves sexual love, it is a total giving of each to the other and as such it demands a commitment. In marriage a man gives to his wife everything that is his, including his body, his whole life, that is why marriage takes the form of a promise. In marriage a man dedicates the whole of his life to another. In marriage a man and woman make the extraordinary claim that they can establish a relationship of love which will be independent of what happens to them, which will transcend all the accidents that may occur. They establish a society of love which exists unconditionally. Human sexuality is properly speaking a function of

this community of love; if it is exercised outside this communion it fails to be true human sexuality. Why is this so? Why could not true human sexuality exist in the context of say a temporary liaison? The reason is, to my mind, that sexuality is fundamentally the gift of one of the greatest things I have that I can give. I have greater things than my body but I cannot give them to another, the gifts of grace, the powers of my mind, etc. I can use these for others but I cannot put them under their control. They belong to the spiritual centre of my personality which, as we saw, can be so transferred as to coincide with that of another, but cannot be taken over by another. There is one other thing I have that is greater than my body and which can be given up and that is my life. And it is with life as it is with my body, I can give up my life in certain circumstances (in a context of course of love) and it is self-sacrifice, but if I give it up in lesser contexts it is suicide. To give my body for say three years and at the end demand a return is to degrade human sexuality by putting it on the level of lesser goods. It is selling something sacred, it is a kind of simony. If I am to give my body to another this can only be a gift in unconditional love and self-sacrifice, not a part of a transaction. It is for this reason that marriage is of its nature a permanent thing, because it is an unconditional thing.

If it is to be a personal commitment it must be accomplished by some sign of commitment. If the caveman drags the cave girl into his cave, this may be marriage if it is in fact a conventional sign with a meaning, if it involves a commitment on his and her part. But if he is simply dragging her into the cave there is clearly no marriage. Any society will have established conventional signs for committing oneself to another. There will be some symbolic gesture which counts as having promised oneself unconditionally to another. Any such sign is a contract of marriage.

So far I have been dealing with sex and marriage; I have not said a word about the sacrament of marriage. This takes us into an entirely new dimension. When the Church says that marriage is a sacrament, she does not mean that she thinks marriage is a good thing, nor does she simply bless the marriage contract, nor is it simply that she regards a good married life as an occasion for God's grace. Not at all; when she says that Christian marriage is a sacrament she means it is a new kind of reality. The Christian family is a mystery, something we can only know about by faith. We do not see the Christian family with our bodily eyes, any more than men saw the divinity of Christ or they can see the outpouring of the Spirit in Baptism. What they can see is the outward

sign, the sacrament which represents the mystery that it contains. So far we have been considering marriage as belonging to the process of the human race; it belongs to our solidarity in time with our fellow-men, it belongs to the evolution and history of mankind; but the marriage of Christians is something else: it is a part of the process of mankind towards God, and this process towards fulfilment in Christ, towards the *pleroma*, is called the Church. Marriage is the only sacrament in which these two orders coincide in this way. The outward signs of the other sacraments are ritual gestures, things which have no natural value though they have, of course, a social value. We do not take a baby to the font to wash it, we do not go to holy communion because we are hungry, but marriage is the intersection of the biological and supernatural order.

Marriage then is one of the seven signs, the symbolic rites which go to constitute the Church. In order to understand this more clearly we must know something about the meaning of a sacrament. A sacrament is a revelation of the divine plan of salvation which itself contains and furthers that salvation. The great sacrament is the humanity of Christ, the image of the unseen God, but we say too that the great events of the Old Testament were sacramental in that they were saving acts of God which showed forth the mystery of his plan. They spoke figuratively of the destiny of Israel which is Christ at the same time as they prepared the way for his coming. They symbolized what they effected. The sacraments of the New Law effect what they symbolize. Together they bring into being the Church, a new kind of reality, neither a physical thing that we can see with our eyes nor a concept that we can understand with our minds, but a mystery that we can know by faith. The sacraments affect us neither as physical causes nor on the other hand as mere symbols appealing to our understanding, they affect us at the level of the mystery.

This may become clearer if we say a little about the traditional theology of the sacraments. A sacrament involves three levels of reality:

1. The RITE which can be *seen* which symbolizes and when genuinely performed brings about
2. The SACRAMENTAL REALITY (the mystery) which is *known by faith* and which symbolizes and in a man of good dispositions brings about
3. The FINAL REALITY, union with God in love.

Thus:



THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

	<i>Rite</i>	<i>Sacramental Reality</i>	<i>Final Reality</i>
Baptism	Plunging in water, etc.	Incorporation in the Church, the 'kingdom of priests'—Character.	Rebirth to divine life through the Spirit of love.
Eucharist	Sacred meal of Bread and wine etc.	Body of Christ given us for our food.	Unity of Mystical Body in love.
Marriage	Dedication of bodily life to another, etc.	Sacramental bond of marriage.	Personal appropriation of love uniting Christ and Church.

Let us look at these levels in turn. First of all, the contract of marriage is itself the sacrament, it is itself the outward sign. The marriage consists in the commitment by the man and woman concerned; any ceremonies or blessing that may surround it are quite accidental to the sacrament, like the ceremonies surrounding baptism or the eucharistic meal. It is the husband and wife who administer the sacrament to each other, each of them exercising the priesthood received in baptism. In comparatively recent years the Catholic Church has demanded of her own members that the contract of marriage should (apart from exceptional circumstances) be made in the presence of the parish priest and two witnesses. I said that any society will have established conventional procedures as a criterion of what is to count as a valid agreement, and this then is a requirement in this particular society. Needless to say the legislation does not apply to those not in the society. Hence non-catholic Christians can make a valid contract of marriage and thus enter into the sacrament of marriage in any way recognized by society as valid, for example in a registry office. This is why the Catholic Church recognizes as valid the marriages of non-catholics in a registry office, but not the marriages of her own children. This has nothing to do with the morals of the matter, it is a matter of the convention for what counts as a valid contract in a particular society. It is no good going around in white lace and orange blossom if the particular and proper convention of your society is to be dragged by the hair into a cave.

This contract is a symbol. How and what does it symbolize? Every sacramental sign, according to St Thomas Aquinas, takes in, in its symbolism, the whole sweep of the divine plan. Looking to the past it refers back to Christ's passion and through this to the great symbolic



deeds of the Old Testament; looking to the present it symbolizes a work of God, the realization of a Sacramental reality and through that the realization of divine love in a man; and looking to the future it refers to the consummation of all things in the Second Coming. It is not difficult to see how this applies to marriage. In the marriage contract we have a symbol which is a favourite scriptural image of the dealings of Yahweh with Israel and of the coming of the Saviour. In every marriage we see represented the love of Yahweh for the Virgin Israel which is to make her fruitful; we see the marriage of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary which bore fruit in Christ. Again each marriage looks forward to the final consummation of the marriage between Christ and his bride the Church when the Holy City comes down out of heaven adorned as a bride for her husband, as we read in the Book of Revelation.

And in the present the contract entered into between the man and woman symbolizes and brings into being a bond between them at the level of sacramental reality. This bond is stronger even than human love, stronger than the human contract which symbolizes it. It is such stuff as the Church is made on, it has the permanence and stability of the Church itself. Each marriage is a participation in the enduring bond which unites Christ to his bride. The forging of the bond of marriage is the work of Christ's love. In marriage we have what God has joined together—not merely by instituting marriage as a natural society, but by the power of a sacrament. Just as in Baptism it is a man who performs the outward rite but Christ himself who sanctifies the child, so in this sacrament it is a man and woman who make the contract but Christ who joins them in a dimension into which we cannot as yet reach, which we can know of only by faith.

The marriage bond is as durable as the Church itself, indeed it is a sharing into the stability of the Church, but it is not *more* durable than the Church. The Church belongs to the sacramental era, to the interim period in which we await Christ's coming. At that moment sacramental reality as something other than natural reality will cease as the shadow disappears in the sun. Of the new Jerusalem we read 'I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God almighty is the temple thereof, and the Lamb'. It is for this reason that 'there is no marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven'. At the end of time there will be a withering away of the Church; faith and hope and the sacraments will disappear but charity will remain. And this is what we are concerned with at the third level of the sacrament. It is thus not strictly true to say, as D. H.

Lawrence does, that the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is eternal, but the final fruits of marriage will be eternal. The attainment of the grace of divine love which is the ultimate reality in the sacraments depends as I have said on the dispositions of the people concerned. If two people have so taken personal possession of their marriage that they are united not just by contract, not just by the sacramental bond, but by a mutual personal love which is a unique and unrepeatable sharing in the divine love, this bond between them lasts for eternity. This applies too, it seems to me, to the whole family relationship, for marriage is not just a matter of two people but of a community. If the bonds which bind this community together are made personal, then the family forms a community of divine love which transcends time and will last for eternity in heaven.

It must be remembered that what we are speaking of is love in the sense of a self-transcendence, an attitude of the will by which you carry yourself out of yourself to union with another person. We are not directly speaking of the emotional state which mirrors that love, but which also may be present without it. Being in love in this emotional sense is a normal emotional accompaniment of genuine other-directed sexual desire, and for this reason it is usually possible for most people to fall in love with almost anybody who is not actively repulsive. Children have this love for their parents and vice versa; another variation of it occurs in adolescent homosexuality; and yet another when the boy meets the girl. At every stage of being in love, the problem is always to convert the emotional into the reality which it mirrors. Being in love with someone is a good way to begin loving them, it gives you a useful start, but it demands development or it will remain infantile and self-centred. These are platitudes for anyone concerned with education. Education has to be first of all a matter of opening a person to the possibility of love. It is not so clearly recognized that this is also true of marriage. The enormous propaganda pressure, to which we are subjected, designed to make us think of marriage as the end of a story (a propaganda kept up by people who make money out of others being infantile), can blind us to the human fact that marriage is usually the beginning of a more important story. It is the beginning of an era in which two people slowly and painfully learn to love each other, in which they discover in experience that sexuality in marriage is by no means a repetition of sexual experiments outside marriage, that sex divorced from married love was just a bogus imitation marriage, a defective sexuality. Now in Christian marriage this process of

growing in human love continuously reflects and realizes a growth in divine love. In Christian marriage man and woman become in a yet deeper sense images of God. In their natural human lives they image God in that they are more like God than other creatures are, but now they imitate God by possessing and exercising a divine life.

The divine life comes to Christ's fellow men through his resurrection and such is the human condition that the resurrection demands the cross. Love is a total giving, it is a sacrifice, and in a world still twisted by the Fall sacrifice involves some form of immolation. If we find the glory of the risen Christ in Christian marriage we also find the cross. In theory there is no reason why a marriage should not be a matter of human happiness and satisfaction reflecting and realizing a growing bond of divine love; but in actual fact the divine love grows usually only at the expense of much human happiness. There are few marriages of which it could be said that there has not been a time when human love has been reduced to its stark fundamentals, a cold and comfortless choice between loyalty and betrayal. Here in the darkness of faith are the moments of real growth in the divine love which is to bind husband and wife together for eternity. But it does not feel like that. In these moments of crisis we can only triumph by the power of Christ's cross.

Finally a word about non-sacramental marriages. I have said that a contract of marriage between baptized Christians is the sacrament of marriage. What of those who are not baptized? Is there the possibility of an enduring bond of divine love between, say, pagans who marry?

Here, I think, we can apply the same principles that we do to Baptism when we speak of baptism of desire. If a man who wishes to be baptized is for some reason prevented from doing so, the second level reality is not realized in him, he does not become a member of the cultic community, the church. He cannot, for example, actually offer the eucharistic sacrifice in the way that the baptized can. He does not share in the priesthood of the church. Nevertheless it is the constant tradition of the church that, in virtue of his desire for baptism, the third and ultimate level of reality, the grace of communion in the Holy Spirit, is realized in him. This is called baptism of desire: not a special sort of baptism, but a desire for an ordinary sort of baptism. It is also traditionally recognized that desire for baptism may take very mysterious forms, it does not have to be an explicit formulated desire. It is increasingly recognized that, for all we know, something which amounts to a desire for baptism may be present in someone who has never heard of baptism. It is an important point however that we do

not in such cases *know*. The pagans may not be in the outer darkness but we are in the dark about whether they are or not. To be invisibly united to the Church is to be *invisibly* united to her. Now it seems to me that we can say the same of a pagan marriage. In such a case again the second level reality would be missing, the sacramental bond. This is the reason why it is possible in certain extraordinary circumstances for such a marriage to be dissolved.

But once more by-passing the second level it seems to me that by an implicit desire for the sacrament a pagan husband and wife might receive the reality at the fundamental level, the reality of participation in the divine love which unites Christ to his bride, the Church. It must be emphasized, however, that the final reality at the third level is something we cannot detect with any certainty. The Christian cannot even be certain that he himself is in a state of grace, still less can he know about the secret workings of divine love in the soul of a man who shows none of the sacramental signs of that love.

## Odious Corollaries in D. H. Lawrence

FERGUS KERR, O.P.

The most serious and perceptive assault on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in the recent flurry of controversy, issued from Dr Leavis in his review of the Pelican Special which told the story of the trial.<sup>1</sup> Apart from his judgment that it is a bad novel, and the persuasive rationale that he offers there to support this decision, which, though much sharpened and more circumstantial, is essentially the one he reached in his book on Lawrence in 1955, Dr Leavis makes an interesting sociological comment on the significance of the Defence's success. The Prosecution, he observes, was defeated, 'not by the presentment of any sound or compelling case, but by its realization that it was confronted by a new

<sup>1</sup>*The Spectator*, February 17, 1961.