

God's gift of life includes a grand love story filled with surprises and one great challenge: To love each other as Christ Jesus has and continues to love us. And this can even happen (in fact, it does!) in Christian marriage.

ENDNOTES

1. For a summary of this, see Peter Jeffery, *The Mystery of Christian Marriage* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006) 194–226.
2. Eph 5:31–32.
3. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (New York: Longmans, 1942) and Herbert Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939).
4. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), section 48.
5. For a compelling comprehensive description of this history, see Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the*

Primordial Flaring Forth to the Eozoic Era—a Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

6. To learn more about this, see Adam Frank, “The First Billion Years,” *Astronomy*, 34:6, June, 2006, 30–35.
7. Matthew 22:9–10.
8. For a most interesting interpretation of this parable, see John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers: On Earth as It is in Heaven, Year A* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004) 297–301.
9. For a richly detailed historical account of this separation of heaven from earth, see Bernard J. Cooke, *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
10. See the brilliant account of this aspect of sacramental life in E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

NEW!!

Application to the church



In this issue of the journal, we begin a new feature titled “Application to the church,” wherein pastors and practitioners respond to the preceding academic article. We have asked these authors to synthesize the highpoints as a way to help busy church leaders quickly grasp the article’s potential application to their ministries.

Christ with us. The presence and power of God, actively loving humanity. A grand love story of a Creator who wants to be present with that which has been created, and to be so in everyday life!

To be honest, that isn’t what most newly-weds and newlyweds are thinking about in the days before their weddings. Neither are most of their family and friends. They’re tasting cake samples, drawing up contracts with photographers or finalizing honeymoon plans.

Which is why David Thomas has made a helpful contribution with his recent book, *Christian Marriage: The New Challenge*. Thomas calls upon Christians to review their notions about the power of marriage. His emphasis on the Catholic view of mar-

riage as one of the church’s seven sacraments is central to his writing. Early on, he mentions that marriage vastly precedes even the coming of Christ in time. Marriage is to be not only a sacred bond, but he suggests it was intended by God as a way for partners to achieve closeness with God.

As a reader, I was curious to see if Thomas specifically differentiated between “wedding” and “marriage.” I also wondered if I understood his faith perspective well enough to interpret his work. So, I called on a Catholic friend. Bonnie is a wise reader of people and relationships.

“Everything else stems from the sacrament of marriage,” she said. “I think we’ve put far too much emphasis on the wedding ritual, beautiful as it is. I’m more interested

in my kids learning about the importance of the marriage,” she said. “A Catholic wedding is the actual sacramental ceremony that creates the marriage, so many Catholics may view marriage and wedding as being one and the same.”

In the excerpt provided, the reader should hear Thomas making that distinction. While he affirms the sacramental ceremony, he couches his discussion clearly in terms of what a healthy marriage may allow God to do within humanity. He traces the Catholic view of marriage through extensive history, which I found helpful.

From this perspective, his thesis can be understood in two primary points:

1) That marriage connects with “patterns in creation itself.” This view of connection with creation is a way of knowing God, which leads to

2) helping one to understand marriage as a relationship intended to further God’s highest hope for those created.

What can you gain from this excerpt? We cannot look to Thomas’s work for a how-to of marriage; it is rather a journey in thought and discovery, traced first through history and then science, a discipline in which Thomas refers to himself as “an informed amateur.” Here are some of his conclusions:

- The “pattern” found in stories of God’s creation demonstrate a bringing together of parts to make something “greater, more complex and more wondrous” than what was there before. A healthy marriage “changes those who unite, perfects them in ways well beyond their individual capacities.”

- We are created by God for social relationship. Marriage is one of the greatest extensions of that existence. Sometimes, out of this ultimate union, new life is created and developed.

- With the coming of Jesus, Thomas sees all existence as “changed.” This includes marriage. Since all of life and love are now central to existence, relationships reflect our love of God. Thomas believes that all the “great sacramental events connect life with love.”

- For Thomas, when God loves, life happens! So, too, when humans express healthy love, through both body and spirit, they make manifest God’s love. All of marital life can be sacramental. Mutual care, assistance, partnership, and support all help to grow God’s holiest intent for humankind.

Thomas’s work is beneficial to those in the larger church in two primary ways:

1) His case for healthy marriage as “sacramental” works to strengthen the concept of “missional marriage.” That is, a specific application of the Missional Church movement that views married partners as accepting a “call” to be the presence of Christ for each other.

2) When we take his view of sacrament and life-giving seriously, we may be led to transform how we approach the wedding ceremony itself. As we worship, commit and celebrate, what are we also teaching by affirmation? What statement will the couple make to God and witness about their intent? Within the bounds of our traditions, how will the design reflect the brand of partnership that reflects God?

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Reflect Peace

Etty Hillesum

Ultimately we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. The more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in our troubled world.

Source: An Interrupted Life