

MARRIAGE

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MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

- What is Marriage?
- Why do Marriages Fail?
- Can I be Divorced?

By HARRY P. REYNOLDS



MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

by

CANON H. P. REYNOLDS

Sydney, 1959

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FOREWORD

There are many good publications available which deal with special problems in marriage relationships. Some of them emphasise every aspect of married life except the true nature of marriage. Few of them deal directly with the teachings of the Church on the subject, despite the fact that the great majority of people are married in a church with the help of a Christian rite or service.

Books which deal positively with the Church's teachings on marriage are usually too difficult for the general reader. There are no pretensions to scholarship in this booklet. It represents little more than a certain amount of research and a real desire to deal with a vital matter in a way likely to prove helpful to those who read it.

The material was first presented in a series of three sermons preached to the Evensong congregation of St. Clement's, Yass, N.S.W. The fact that they seemed to be valued by those who heard them suggested that they might serve some further purpose if re-written for publication.

Traces of the sermon method of presentation still remain in the following pages, but that should not in itself be regarded as a bad thing. Innumerable people still listen to sermons, and many people read those which are published, despite impressions to the contrary fostered by popular fiction and the Press.

—H. P. R.

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WHAT IS MARRIAGE ?

“AND so they lived happily ever after.”

Popular novels, plays and films usually end where the greater part of normal adult life begins, on the threshold of marriage. A boy meets a girl; they fall in love and eventually overcome all problems and obstacles. In the last scene they are clasped in each other's arms, with only the details of the wedding to be arranged.

Criticism of this type of plot as so much romantic escapism is not entirely fair. Courtship and the marriage relationship are almost two distinct things. One may lead to the other, but in the fullness of its meaning, in its depth of experience and in its complexity the marriage state is far removed from courtship. The latter may be carried over into marriage, but even at its best it is but a small tributary stream flowing into the great river of being and experience which is marriage itself.

It is not surprising, then, that many writers prefer to deal with the apparently more exciting and yet less complicated of the two relationships. One result is that most people have basically similar and fairly simple ideas about courtship, but have a great variety of views on marriage. If twenty different people were asked to define marriage, their answers would all vary in some degree. Between them they would express almost opposite viewpoints.

Some of them would be expressing their own fond hopes and expectations, while others would be answering out of actual experience, good, bad or average. A few perhaps would know something of natural and Christian law in the matter, and, realising as well the importance of marriage as the basis of family and social life, would answer accordingly.

Let us consider some of the possible answers to the question, “What is marriage?” Before we do we must admit that many people have a very poor conception of the meaning of marriage. They have their own ideas and refuse to entertain any others. (Which is the reason why some of the clergy would like to take a stronger line than is customary on the matter of marriages in the Church.)

SOME COMMON IDEAS

First, there is the frivolous but common notion that marriage is just a beautiful church "ceremony," with bridesmaids and page-boys, the Bridal March, a crowd of people present, the sun shining and an elaborate breakfast to follow. The bride carries a horse-shoe on her arm because she hopes for luck in the future. The minister has faith, the bride has hope and the guests are expected to display their charity in a good choice of gifts. As far as the parties are concerned that is about the extent of religion in the service.

During the proceedings someone is sure to remark how lovely it all is, as it should be of course, because it is "the bride's great day." The bridegroom, apparently, is regarded as just a part of the general scene, instead of one of the two people being solemnly married to each other.

Next, there is the unreal idea that marriage is a fixed state of emotional and physical bliss. It is thought that the passionate desire which a couple feel for each other when they fall in love will never wane or vary to any great extent. Because of that they will inevitably find a simple solution to all their problems of personal relationships, as well as find it comparatively easy to face together the realities of everyday life.

Then there is the significantly contrary view that marriage is a state of armed peace or truce between two members of the opposite sex, a natural but uneasy union of convenience. The attitude is that men and women need each other and that marriage is both the sensible and conventional solution, despite the possibility of disharmony. According to this view a couple find as much agreement and mutual satisfaction as is possible in marriage, and suffer the rest.

There is also the theory that marriage is simply a contract or a partnership in which, to some extent, the parties jointly make their own rules and conditions. The bond can always be dissolved by either partner, although at some difficulty and expense, if the bargain turns out to be a bad one. In other words, there is always divorce as the way out.

Finally, there is the working definition which states that marriage is what happens when a man and a woman fall in love and are both free to set up a home together, have children and

rear a family. In all but the essential respect, to which I shall refer later, it is not a bad definition.

ONLY PART OF THE TRUTH

While each of these definitions reflects some degree of ignorance or an attitude of perversity in respect to marriage, in all but the first there is some truth to be grasped. The truth may be hidden or twisted, but it is there just the same. Yet if we took the best from each definition and added it all up we would still not arrive at the sum total of marriage.

It is true that men and women ought to carry over into their married lives much of the deep romantic feeling of their courtship. They need to realise, however, that the quality of their love must grow in various ways if it is to endure.

It is true, too, that agreement and mutual satisfaction are not always easily attained in married life. Yet the ultimate result need not be an unsatisfactory and an unhappy sort of compromise. Mutual affection and respect can and do develop between men and women who appear to have very little in common. These qualities may not be as exciting as marital bliss, but they can be as satisfying and perhaps more enduring.

It is also admitted that marriage is a contract or a partnership. Legally it is a clearly fixed and very binding contract, which can be ended only by the death of one of the partners or by divorce. When they enter into the marriage contract the couple assume definite obligations and responsibilities towards each other and to any children of the union. These are for the protection both of the social structure and of the couple themselves, and are not always entirely cancelled by divorce. There are, as we all know, such things as alimony and maintenance.

Apart from the legal side, marriage is a partnership of the most personal and intimate nature. Marriage, in fact, can often be endangered by the very closeness and intensity of its relationships. A married couple may easily see too little of each other, but if their relationship is ill-adjusted it is more likely that they will see too much of each other. Every clergyman knows that of the unhappily married men and women who tell him that they need more of their partner's company there are at least an equal number who claim that they would be happier with less.

The ideal of a partnership, however nobly conceived, is not sufficient for marriage. At its best a partnership is an artificially regulated thing; marriage is much more.

PART OF THE LAW OF LIFE

Where so many definitions of marriage fail is that they deal with the regulation of marriages, rather than with the fact of marriage itself.

In marriage we start off with a basic assumption, from which other things follow as a matter of course. To use a simple illustration, a man sets out to tell someone what takes place in his parish church on Sundays. He describes the services, the singing of the choir, the sermons and the people who attend. But if he fails to mention that those who attend believe that God is present and that they try to worship Him he has missed the whole point, the basic assumption.

The same applies to marriage. Various definitions of marriage are adequate if we take the basic assumption for granted. There are many couples, however, who in times of marital stress and discord, ignore it.

The basic assumption is that in the natural order, ordained by God, a man and a woman, of their own free choice and desire, are joined together in a union which is both permanent and exclusive. It is for life, unless one or the other partner dies, and so long as both live neither can marry again.

The really important word in the definition is "joined." The couple are not merely planted side by side. They are not just licensed to cohabit and to set up a home and rear children. They are joined together in a mystical, yet real and indissoluble union.

Before marriage the couple are a man and a woman. After marriage they become man-woman, a distinct social entity, the Joneses who live around the corner. For them, in the important things, it is no longer "you and me" but "us." To others it is not so much "him and her" as "them."

In all probability they will have children, whom they will recognise as their own flesh and as bone of their bone and blood

of their blood. Yet the biological fact of the parent-child relationship is no more real and enduring than the mystical and spiritual operation which unites a man and a woman forever in the sight of God.

Many people object that this is too arbitrary a view of marriage. It was, however, the clearly expressed view of our Lord Himself, and one which He never qualified in any way. "A man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (St. Mark 10 : 7-9).

When asked about relaxations allowed in the law of Moses, our Lord simply replied that they were not really lawful at all but had crept in because of the hardness of men's hearts. (St. Matthew 19 : 8).

For Christians, however strongly they may feel about individual cases, it is a matter about which there can be no argument.

MORE THAN AN IDEAL

In these days of comparatively easy divorce and the frequent separation of man and wife the reality of the marriage union is not always apparent. Many people regard the sacredness of the marriage bond as an ideal instead of a fact, a relationship which you strive to keep intact but sever or loosen with regret if you believe you must.

We are bound to accept such views unless we understand how and in what manner a marriage is made. The State has a simple answer. It says that if the parties meet certain conditions and make a valid contract of marriage they become man and wife. The State also allows that marriages can be dissolved in certain circumstances.

The Church recognises both the necessity and the validity of the legal forms, but goes much further. It claims that marriage is a mystical union, comparable to that which exists between Christ and His Church. Neither is easy to define and in both cases the union sometimes seems incongruous, but the fact remains. By their sin, men often appear to break the union between Christ and some part of the visible Church, yet the "divorce" is always more ap-

parent than real. Christ's unity with the Church on earth does not depend upon the perfection of professing Christians. The bond is spiritual and cannot be broken by human imperfection and waywardness.

In marriage, both parties are human, but they are joined in one by bonds which are Divine, spiritual and mystical. They may never attain perfection in their union, and may even fall far short of a satisfactory working arrangement in their relationships. Yet the bond remains and cannot be broken except by the death of one of them.

To claim that a marriage can be broken is akin to a man professing to disown his own son. He may make the gesture and may even deprive the son of some of his privileges, but the son's flesh and blood will still declare to the world the father's name.

There is sound Christian teaching in the saying that "marriages are arranged on earth, but are made in heaven." It is not merely the expression of a pious, sentimental hope. It is the statement of a fact Divinely ordained in the natural order from the beginning of time. It should also remind us that for the making of a true marriage we need not only love, forbearance and wisdom, but the grace of Heaven working daily in our hearts and minds as well.

It is not enough just to seek God's blessing on our wedding day. We need His help and guidance all through our married lives.

WHY DO MARRIAGES FAIL ?



In the light of our Lord's plain teaching on the subject it is clear that a marriage can fail only on the purely human level. No matter what happens the essential bond of union remains unimpaired while both partners still live. We shall have more to say about that in the next chapter.

At this stage we are to consider the reasons why marriages fail of their *purpose*, many partially and some completely. Why is it that men and women debase, abuse or fail to realise fully a relationship which is essentially creative and good? Why do so many marriages fall short of what God intends that they should be and even of what the couples themselves want them to be?

The Prayer Book states clearly the purposes for which matrimony was ordained. It places first the procreation of children, who are "to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of His Holy Name." A married couple, that is, are to have children if possible and are to make a Christian unit of the family.

Secondly, marriage was instituted as a remedy against sexual license, to rule out fornication and to discourage adultery. Finally, marriage "was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity."

The order in which these purposes are set out is significant. First, we are to expect children, and if and when they come we are to do our full duty as parents. Next, we are to avoid those sins of the flesh against which marriage is a safeguard. Finally, and only then, we are to expect from marriage the companionship, mutual help and comfort which a man and a woman should have of each other in the state of matrimony.

It should also be noted that the Marriage Service does not stress the word "love." While both parties promise to love each other they also make mutual promises about a number of other very important things. There is no suggestion that if they love each other nothing else matters. Nor is it suggested that if love dies, in the one or both partners, the marriage dies with it.

This Prayer Book reticence about love may be more apparent than real, in an age when the word is emblazoned to the world on the screen and in popular fiction and crooned daily through millions of radio sets. Romantic love can be a very beautiful thing, but those who think of little else live in the unreal world of daydreams. Romance is a tender plant which can wither quickly. At its best the experience of it is intended to be merely an episode, the first step towards a deeper and richer knowledge of love.

MORE THAN LOVE NEEDED

The notion that romantic love is everything has created a false and sinful attitude to marriage. You "fall in love" and get married; you "fall out of love" and get divorced. In many cases it is as simple and as self-centred as that; when the glamour fades the marriage is denied. The purposes and duties of matrimony mean nothing to those concerned.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Marriage Service underrates the importance of true love in marriage. What it really does is take it for granted. It even assumes that if love is not the real reason for getting married, the husband and wife will learn to love each other as the result of their marriage. It often works out that way, when a couple who did not really love each other at first accept fully their obligations to their family and to each other in the sight of God.

In marriage, too, when a couple who were once in love find that their love has died they can, if they want to and with God's help, start loving each other again. If they try the right way it is likely that they will learn to love each other better the second than the first time, because of their greater experience and because they have learned the value of love by losing it. The fact that they are bound to each other in the obligations, duties and privileges of marriage gives them at least a good start in the right direction.

The same kind of thing can happen in cases of couples who thought they were in love, but who found out after marriage that what they thought was the real thing was just infatuation. It is never easy to tell the difference between love and infatuation.

Often it is impossible to tell them apart. Infatuation has been described as "Love's terrible twin brother," and there are many men and women who know to their sorrow how true it is.

It is no help to point out that infatuation seldom lasts for long, while love can and often does endure forever. Those who are infatuated are always certain that what they feel is the real thing. They cannot imagine that their passion will ever die. If "love is blind" then infatuation is more; it is deaf to the voice of reason and to pleas of patience as well.

Marriages prompted by infatuation inevitably reach a crisis, but they need not be wrecked. Everything depends upon the manner in which the crisis is faced.

ACCORDING TO THE UNDERSTANDING

What it amounts to is that while love is important in marriage, it is not everything. Marriages succeed or fail to a great extent according to the understanding (or insight) and attitude of those concerned. Often the understanding comes with experience in marriage relationships.

When a marriage breaks down it is irrelevant, in a sense, to talk about adultery, incompatibility, cruelty, desertion, failure to support, and so on. Such things may be the concern of divorce courts, as evidence to *prove* the failure of a marriage. They do not show why or exactly how a marriage failed. At the most they merely indicate the point where a man or a woman lacked the right understanding of marriage or adopted the wrong attitude to it.

If it is proved that a husband committed adultery, for example, it is self-evident that he broke his vows, a fact which in a certain sense is of secondary importance. The really serious thing is that he failed to respect the sanctity of marriage, its exclusive nature. An act of adultery is not so much disloyalty to one's partner, hurtful as it may be, as proof that at a vital point there was a wrong attitude to marriage.

A term which is often used in connection with unhappy marriages is "incompatibility." It means that in certain cases a man and a woman are considered quite incapable of living

together in any kind of harmony. In some countries it is accepted as grounds for divorce or separation.

We can acknowledge that when incompatibility is proved, according to the legal requirements, a court has no alternative but to consider the marriage at an end. If a man and a woman just cannot live together because of their extreme dislike of each other the State has no interest in compelling them to do so. On the contrary, it is in the interests of the State that a divorce or separation should be granted, for the cause of harmony in the community as well as to lift the apparently intolerable burden placed upon two people.

Yet in Christian thought there is no such thing as incompatibility. Human relationships, in marriage as in every other sphere of life, have to be worked out in obedience to the law of Christian love. As marriage is the most important of all human relationships the need for obedience is so much the greater.

Only the extreme sentimentalist would suggest that this is an easy way. Often the hardest thing we have to do is to show Christian love and forbearance in our relationships. It brings religion right down to earth, often to the most mundane and even unpleasant things. Yet true Christianity belongs there, just as much as it belongs to the heights of awe and joy in worship.

Incompatibility, to put it bluntly, is simply a high-sounding term for such un-Christian things as chronic bad temper, selfishness, jealousy, angry pride and the persistent refusal of each partner to co-operate with the other in trying to correct or lessen the faults of both. In the majority of cases it also involves the refusal of both partners from the earliest stages of marriage to take each other for better or for worse. It is wrong of us to expect in our husbands or wives the perfection which we ourselves do not possess.

CHRISTIAN STANDARDS NOT ACCEPTED

The fact which applies to both partners in what is called incompatibility also applies to one or the other partner in such matters as cruelty, desertion and the failure of a husband to support his wife and children. Always and somewhere there has

been a failure to accept the Christian standards for marriage. The failure may have been in evidence before the marriage or it may have developed afterwards, but the failure has been there as the primary cause of the marriage breaking down.

It is a truism that it always takes two people to make a marriage work, which is undeniable as far as it goes. If one partner will not accept the Christian standards for marriage, if he flagrantly breaks his vows and will not repent, or if he is perverse, seriously inconsiderate and even inhumane in his attitude and actions, there is not much the other can do. On the human level the marriage fails of its full purpose or breaks down completely. The couple may go on living together or they may separate, but in either case the marriage has failed as a true working relationship.

Christians are forced to admit that in varying degrees marriages do fail on the human level. It is also admitted that in some cases the relationship becomes intolerable, for one or both parties. Even in a society much more Christian than the world has ever known some marriages would fail for the same reasons as they fail to-day. Perfection is not to be attained in this life, however high we may or should aim.

Yet none of these admissions of the fact and the possibility of failure should cause us to overlook the basic truth, that every breakdown in marriage is more than a human tragedy. It is a challenge to the Christian conscience of the community and to the consciences of those most intimately concerned. In marriage we need to be constantly on our guard against the results of ignorance, the weakness and the wilfulness which will undermine any human relationship, whether it is especially blessed by God or not.

PRIMARY CAUSE OF FAILURE

As stated in the first chapter, in Divine law marriage is the entire union of man and woman on a permanent and exclusive basis. Failure or refusal to accept that fact with all its implications, is not merely the main reason why marriages fail. It is the basic sin in the attitude of many people to marriage. Infatuation as the grounds for marriage, for example, is a sin

because the person who is infatuated refuses to see the need for anything more permanent than his or her infatuation.

The essential nature of marriage requires that the parties concerned should regulate and adjust their lives on certain definite lines. A sane man will not deliberately hurt, neglect or hate his own flesh. It may possibly irritate and hurt him, but he will still love, cherish and care for it in every way. The more serious the trouble, the more carefully he will treat it and seek a cure. So it should be in marriage, on both sides.

It often happens that a couple neglect or hurt each other, unintentionally or unknowingly. At such times it is the duty of the injured partner to take whatever steps are needed to start the healing process in the whole body of the marriage.

The same policy should be adopted when one partner deliberately neglects or hurts the other. The right steps must be taken for as long as there is any hope that the cure is possible. Even when hope dies there is still room for faith and prayer.

Such an attitude to all the problems of marriage is our duty before God, before Whom we made our vows and Who joined us to our partner, and we should always seek His help. Married couples can best seek God's help together in the sacraments and worship of the Church. Where there are children the whole family should worship as a unit as often as possible.

This is not starry-eyed idealism. It is counsel which is derived logically from the fact that marriage is a Divine institution. It is God's will that in their lifelong union married couples should enrich each other through the varied experiences, both good and ill, of their life together. We cannot expect to do God's will, or even hope to know what it is, without His help.

CAN I BE DIVORCED ?

It is a common idea, even among Anglicans, that the Church of England is vague in its teachings. This is quite wrong. The teachings of Anglicanism in matters of faith and worship are based firmly upon the Scriptures and upon ancient and proved Catholic belief and practice. We test all things by the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

People who like everything neat and cut-and-dried are misled by the fact that the Church of England has no centralised form of authority. Having accepted the Catholic Faith and ordered our worship as it is in the Prayer Book, and being ready at all times to prove our teachings from the Scriptures, we then commend what we hold to be true to the good conscience and commonsense of Anglicans themselves.

In the strict sense, admittedly, there is no *Anglican* faith, a fact which Bishop Stephen Neill has pointed out in his book on "Anglicanism" (Pelican Books, 1958). There is an Anglican attitude and an Anglican atmosphere, created within the context of Catholicity and of our reformed traditions. This attitude and atmosphere may defy analysis, as the bishop declares, but both are very real. You may or may not like Anglicanism, but if you are close to the real thing you cannot mistake it.

It is admitted, too, that having absorbed the spirit of Anglicanism we are allowed considerable latitude in matters of faith and worship. The Church of England has unique traditions of sound, unhampered scholarship and tolerance. Yet the true Anglican knows that in his cherished freedom he cannot go beyond the limits of Scriptural authority and Catholic belief and practice.

Because of the common misconception about Anglican teachings, however, it may come as a surprise to many people to learn that in respect to the matter of divorce and re-marriage the Church of England is perhaps the strictest of all the Churches.

In 1938 the Convocation of Canterbury passed the following resolution, which is substantially identical with one passed by the Convocation of York at the same time:—

"That in order to maintain the principle of lifelong obligation which is inherent in every legally contracted marriage and is expressed in the plainest terms in the Marriage Service, the

Church should not allow the use of that Service in the case of anyone who has a former partner still living."

While it is a fact that neither body, separately or jointly, has the power to legislate for the Anglican Communion, no bishop or priest would ignore the clearly expressed views of the Convocations without thoroughly searching his conscience. Before making such a statement both bodies, each of which is an ancient and honoured assembly of the Church of England, would have tested its validity against the authority of Scripture and the teachings of the Prayer Book. All that the statement did, in fact, was to re-affirm the previously held views of the Church at a time when such action was specially needed.

"TILL DEATH DO THEM PART"

A very significant part of the resolution quoted above is expressed in the words "every legally contracted marriage." What is meant is that the Church of England recognises as valid any marriage which is legally contracted, whether in a church or registry office.

It is held that any marriage to which there is no lawful impediment, in which the intention of the parties is beyond dispute and in which the correct legal forms are observed is a true marriage in the sight of God. The couple may not have sought God's blessing on their union, or they may have sought it in some rite other than that of the Church of England, but the marriage still stands.

The Church of England, in other words, does not disregard for its own purposes marriages which did not take place in an Anglican church. In that respect it does not follow the example of the Roman Catholic Church, which, when it suits its own purposes, is able to regard some marriages as invalid.

Anglicans hold that marriage is Divinely ordained in the natural order and that it is not possible for the Church to make any laws which are at variance with the concept of marriage as a fundamental institution in human society. In holding this view the Church of England is stricter, in various ways, than the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church or any of the Free Churches.

The full Anglican doctrine of marriage has been summed-up as follows:—

“The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord’s teaching, that marriage is a union permanent in its nature and lifelong, for better or for worse, till death do them part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other both in prosperity and adversity.”

Yet in upholding the Christian view of marriage the Church passes no condemnation upon those whose consciences allow them to see things differently. Nor does it question the right of the State, as the civil power, to make its own laws for divorce. It does claim, however, that within the Church itself there can be no departure from Christian standards in the matter. It also claims that at all times the Church has the right and the duty, by all lawful means, to try to persuade the State to accept and embody in its statutes Christian principles for marriage.

It is often asserted, sometimes bitterly, that the Church’s attitude to divorce and re-marriage is too rigid. Yet it is impossible to claim, on any grounds, that the Church could adopt any other attitude.

We have our Lord’s plain teaching on the subject, that in marriage a man and a woman are joined together as one flesh and cannot be put asunder. Equally uncompromising are the marriage vows or the contract which the parties make with each other. They solemnly promise to take each other “for better, for worse: for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish, till death us do part.”

The words “till death us do part” either mean what they say or they mean nothing at all. They are in the Marriage Service because they express the very essence of our Lord’s teaching, and the Church declares that they do mean what they say and that those who use them are bound by them. If not, the solemn marriage contract made before God is a fraud or worse.

HARDSHIP IN MARRIAGE

It is true that real hardship, many injustices and often tragic suffering arise from unsatisfactory and unhappy marriages.

The Church does not pretend that all marriages fulfil, even to a reasonable degree, the Divine purposes for which matrimony was ordained. Nor is it claimed that the highest standards in marriage are ever easy to realise. All human relationships create problems and are beset with pitfalls, and the closeness and intimacy of the marriage relationship often intensifies the difficulties.

The Church, however, must always proclaim the basic standards of conduct for Christians, as well as witness to the best which men and women can hope to attain. In such a vital matter as marriage it cannot flinch from either duty because some people are forced into suffering or because of “the hardness of men’s hearts.”

A Christian should not seek in anything an easier way than the right way. In an unhappy marriage a man or a woman may be called upon to endure hardship, injustice and suffering as a Christian might be expected to do in other circumstances. Self-discipline and self-sacrifice are often demanded of us in our personal relationships more than in any other area of our lives as practising Christians.

Even if we accepted the view that the Church could and should, without Divine sanction, relax the standards for marriage we would still have to prove that any real good would result. This viewpoint is sometimes argued on the grounds that the Church’s interpretation of our Lord’s teaching on marriage is too rigidly legalistic. It is claimed that He could not have meant His statement in St. Mark’s Gospel to be taken literally, but rather as the expression of an ideal. This viewpoint has been rejected by easily the greater part of the Christian Church.

Yet if the Christian standards for marriage were relaxed in certain circumstances would there be any real gain? The presumption is that we would be considering cases of real suffering.

Is it possible to state with absolute certainty that any marriage, however great the suffering it may be causing to one or both partners, has failed finally and irrevocably? Humanly

speaking there may be every reason to presume failure, but Christians should not set any limits to what the grace of God can do.

In their practice of medicine and surgery doctors are expected not to consider any case as hopeless, however certain they may feel about it. As a result countless lives have been saved which might have been lost if the unfavourable signs and symptoms had been accepted as final. In a wretchedly unhappy marriage we should see not only the suffering caused by the frailty and vagaries of human nature, but admit as well the possibilities of the power of faith and prayer combined with spiritual counsel and guidance.

SAFEGUARDING THE INSTITUTION

Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, that some cases are "hopeless" we have not got very far. We still have to frame laws for divorce covering only the desired cases.

It is an old legal axiom that "hard cases make bad law," which means broadly that if with the best of motives you legislate for the needs of a few people you will inevitably cause harm to others in the community. The laws made either bear hardly upon others as a matter of course or open the way for some people to use the legislation contrary to their own best interests and the general good of the community.

In this respect the Church's attitude to divorce is consistent. It says that the greater good of the community will be served if marriage as an institution is considered above and before the claims of a few individuals for special treatment. It is maintained that if the modern tendency to enlarge the grounds for divorce and to make the legal processes easier continues the institution of marriage will suffer more and more, with serious effects upon family and national life.

It is recognised, however, that in a State not fully Christian divorce laws are inevitable. Yet these laws must be restricted as much as possible, because "divorce breeds divorces." Each new law dealing with the matter immediately suggests that further legislation is necessary. Divorce as a remedy only results in further complications.

Where divorce does take place the Church teaches that those concerned should not regard themselves as free to re-marry. In many cases it can be a call to a way of life which is singularly hard and lonely, but if it is accepted as the call of God it can have its compensations and joys. It is tempting to be cynical about such an attitude, but the fact is that countless men and women have dedicated themselves to some such kind of life and as a result have rendered outstanding service to God and to others.

In conclusion, it should also be emphasised that the Church places upon the clergy a special responsibility in relation to every aspect of marriage. They are required to uphold the Christian standards for marriage, not only in their instruction of the congregation in the meaning and responsibilities of married life but in their pastoral care of engaged couples and of those whose marriages are not working out as well as they should be.

Their responsibilities do not end there. It has been stated as a principle that "*the Church, while bound to uphold without compromise the absolute standard of marriage entrusted to it by the teaching of Jesus Christ, is no less bound in the light of His compassion to seek to befriend and help those men and women, often in deep distress and need, who have contracted another union after divorce.*"

No doubt many of the clergy would be happier if the Church's teachings and their own consciences allowed an easier approach on occasions to the problem of divorce and re-marriage. Few parish priests of any experience have not at some time felt the hurt of others in the matter almost as keenly as if it was their own.

When they meet with such cases they can only do their best, by loving pastoral care, to retain the trust and confidence of those for whom they are responsible as ministers of Christ. Such love and sympathy for those in particular distress and need should be shared by all Christians.

(NOTE: In this chapter the quotations in italics were taken from a booklet, "The Church and Marriage," published in 1954 by the Church Information Board, which contains evidence laid before an English Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce by His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury I referred to the booklet often while preparing this chapter.—H.P.R.)

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