

THE THEOLOGY OF
marriage

I. defining marriage

Is marriage a social arrangement that humans invented?

Is it merely a legal concept, or only a religious tradition?

How far back in history does marriage go?

- 1 The origin of marriage is found in the beginning of humanity, arising from our divinely created, biological nature as men and women, and out of our desire to enter into a deeply exclusive relationship with another person. The creation accounts in the Book of Genesis, centering on the story of Adam and Eve, offer crucial insights into the beginnings of marriage and into its essential and unchangeable characteristics.
- 2 Marriage between a man and a woman is a legal concept because it is one of the building blocks of civilization and is the primary means for forming new members of society. The concept of marriage is at the core of several religions of the world; it is an especially important element of Christianity. Thus, it is true to say that marriage is a biological (or natural), social, legal and religious reality all at the same time.

How is the marriage of one man and one woman
a reflection of God's own nature?

- 3 The physical complementarity of men and women is a reflection of their emotional complementarity and their deep capacity to give and receive love. Marriage is not mere biological instinct. It requires an act of the will and a choice to live life in a manner that always seeks the well-being of someone else.
- 4 Christians understand that men and women, in a way different than every other creature, are made in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can reason, we can freely choose and we can love. Just like the Trinity in whose image we are made, we are made to be in relationships.
- 5 The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as co-equal divine persons, continually give and receive love in a beautiful union that produces the abundant life of all the universe. In marriage, men and women, as equals in their complementary differences, continually give and receive love from each other in an earthly reflection of the life and love of the Trinity, a reflection that becomes all the more clear when their union brings forth children.

Why is marriage only between one man and one woman?

- 6 Marriage is, by nature and as a reflection of the Trinity, a union fashioned from sexual difference. Men and women are created equal, but they are not identical. The sexual differences between men and women are at the core of a wide variety of other mutually complementing attributes; when a man and woman are joined as husband and wife, they create a true unity out of diversity because they are made for each other.
- 7 While it may be legally possible for two people of the same sex to attempt to live as a couple and adopt children, it is not naturally possible for them to do so. Two people of the same sex are not physically capable of joining their own bodies in a way that new life can result from that union. Such a union is inherently sterile because it is not rooted in sexual difference and complementarity. This biological, or natural, fact cannot be ignored because marriage grows directly from our biological reality into our emotional and spiritual reality. The biological impossibility of intercourse, or of new life emerging from such a union, demonstrates that, whatever one may call such a union, it is not marriage.
- 8 We grasp the truth of this from our study of the natural world. As Christians we are further aided by the truth of divine revelation in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church, which affirm that only one man and one woman can be married. The marital union of one man with one woman as husband and wife carries with it several layers of religious symbolism and truth that cannot be altered without seriously distorting the entire Christian language of salvation. Finally, we are aided by sociological data about the serious emotional harm done to us as persons when we engage in sexual intercourse with multiple partners. All of these sources reveal the truth that marriage is by definition a stable, monogamous, heterosexual relationship.

What is a basic definition of marriage?

- 9 Marriage is the public joining of a man and a woman as two becoming one: physically, legally, emotionally and spiritually. They enter into this loving union freely and without reservation, and they do so with the intention of maintaining this exclusive union for the rest of their lives, while always being open to the possibility of welcoming the creation of new children from their union. Their union as husband and wife is the foundation on which an entire lifetime of mutual service, sharing, commitment and responsibility rests; from it a whole new pattern of life and relationships emerge, and from it the whole social order of civilization is constructed.