



LOVE  
&  
MARRIAGE

Geoffrey Bingham

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.

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*The Profound Mystery*  
By Geoffrey Bingham

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## PART 1

**SOME IDEAS ABOUT MARRIAGE****Introduction**

This little book is intended, hopefully, to open up principles of marriage in a simple way. Because the subject is a vast one, and because no human marriage has ever been perfect, it is going to be a somewhat difficult task, but then not an impossible one. In another way it is an introduction to a more substantial book I have written called *The Profound Mystery: Marriage Love, Divine and Human*. Some people cannot tolerate a book which demands much attention in reading, so I have tried to reduce the principles of the book to the few pages of this one. This means I will not be trying to prove the points I make here, but trust they will come through clearly enough to be grasped, provide some food for thought, and perhaps help to clarify the teaching of the Bible as I see it.

**No Ideal Marriages**

Idealism for marriage, which we might also call perfectionism, is not helpful in making a warm and affectionate marriage. It means we have ‘ideas’ or ‘images’ (*eikons*) which we are calling on each other to fulfil. All human marriages have, as husbands and wives, people who are imperfect.

Such are often in states of sin and failure, and images of perfection set before them make the situation quite painful and difficult. While it is not a case of 'anything goes' it is certainly not 'everything must be ideal: no one must fail'. Marriages can be quite wonderful, but all of them need the grace of God to help in every situation.

### Marriage a 'Profound Mystery'

**Paul** the apostle called marriage a 'profound mystery'. He did not mean 'a deep puzzle'! There is, of course, something of a mystery in two people being united; being husband and wife; having children; raising them; and seeing their grandchildren develop—if that is how a particular marriage works out. Paul did not speak of this matter of marriage as a 'profound mystery' though doubtless it is. A 'mystery' in the New Testament is a 'secret' of sorts. It is something we cannot work out just by tackling it as a puzzle to be solved. God reveals what is hidden or secret, and it becomes part of our working knowledge. In fact much of our lives as Christians is lived by revealed mysteries. When Paul quoted Genesis 2:24, 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh [one being]', he really meant that the verse primarily referred to Christ and his Bride the Church. It was a type of Christ's Marriage-to-come, and a kind of prophecy regarding it. The term we give, to this idea is 'protological'. It is the opposite of 'eschatological' which is what happens at the end of the age. Of course, the New Testament takes us on to see that climax of our age will come in the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, when there will be the great Supper of that Marriage, and all God's people will share in it. This is what we call

'the Eschatological Marriage'—the Marriage at the end of this age.

What we could easily miss—especially if we were not looking for it—is that the meaning of all history lies in the Ultimate Marriage of Christ and his Church. In a way it is the key to what history is all about, and it is the goal of the same history. One theologian said that God had created the world in order to get a Bride for his Son! What a wonderful way to look at history.

### The Way Man and Woman Came Together

One of our problems in going about man–woman relationships is that we think a man and a woman are radically different, and in fact are almost two races. This is not so: a man cannot be a man without the woman, nor a woman be a woman without the man. When it was said that God made Man in his own image, it was added, 'Male and female he created them . . . and named them Man'. This surely means that *together* they are the image of God. When God took the woman from the side of the Man it was a special act of creation, but because she was 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh', she was shown to be derived from him and part of him. In the New Testament the wife is called 'the body of the man' and the man is called 'the head of the woman'. The two together make one unit, one being, although both are still persons. If there were such a thing as a woman alone, we would have a body without a head, and if a man alone, then a head without a body. The two are one, not being joined artificially but being so by creation. That relational, functional union cannot be altered.

### **The Unity Comes from the Trinity**

In a sense this is not difficult to understand if we look at the Trinity. In the Trinity there are three Persons, but they are one. Only as one do they make (constitute) the Godhead. We call this unity 'divine love'. It is that love which created the man and the woman to be one. When the woman was taken from the man, he cried, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. Of course not all men and women are married, but in the human race both genders constitute the one race, together. The ways in which they are together are many, various and not easy to describe. If a man or a woman each tries to live only within their own gender—perhaps an impossible task—they will never be fully human, although they may somehow make their way through life.

### **The Principle of the 'Profound Mystery'**

If we take Christ and his Bride as the true pattern for marriage—and we should—then the matter of courting, of marrying and of living together should be fairly clear. Its lines should be simple. We can work out how the two would be one, and how they would be joyfully proper in their courtship, not cleaving to one another before the wedding, since it is at their wedding that the man leaves his parents in favour of his wife. The man's parents would ideally be in favour of him doing this as a mature act. He would still love his parents, but now he would be free to devote his life to his wife. Likewise the wife would be given into the man's hands at the wedding, the father releasing her to the man, and now they would be

free to pursue their 'one-flesh' union for the rest of their lives.

From then onwards, the couple would pursue their life as one, and normally would have children and so become parents. Some couples cannot have children for various reasons but that would in no way break their 'one-flesh' union. All couples, rightly speaking, have vocation. Of course, all people—married or unmarried—have vocation. It is primarily to do God's will, but within that will are what we call 'working vocations'. Any couple who simply wanted each other exclusive of human vocation, or of relationships with others, would be self-centred. Christ and his Bride work together to bring the human race to 'the Father of us all who is above all, through all, and in all'.

### **The Source of the 'Profound Mystery'**

When God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness', it meant he made Man from himself—male and female together. The unity they had as 'one flesh' was not what we call 'body chemistry' today, even if something like that does exist. It was the unity given from the Godhead—the Unity of the Persons. So a woman could be a woman, be a full, true person and yet be one with the man: and the man likewise could be the same with the woman. Both had—as all persons have—differentiations, but sharing these differentiations is what makes up the wonderful variety of life, and releases everything from mere flatness or all being 'look-alikes' and 'do-alikes'. Differentiations make up the complementarity of the 'one-flesh' union. Just as in God there is endless variety, so there is in the whole human race, which is one race. It is a man-woman

race, not two races made to be two by gender. Gender is a large factor in the enjoyment. variety and interests within the human race. The idea that physical intercourse is the utmost in pleasure is certainly not the whole story. It is the intercourse of two persons—as whole but united persons which brings genuine emotional fulfilment and pleasing relationships.

I know all this sounds ideal, and that few couples would claim to have such faultless or high relationships. There must be a reason for some of the problems and difficulties experienced in marriages and families, and of course there is a basic reason why marriages often do not work out. Not all our studies and enquiries on the horizontal level of what we call 'scientific research' have really explained our problems and eliminated them. They come from another source which science, as science, does not take into consideration.

### **The Fall of the Primal Couple**

The explanation we now seek to give will be acceptable only to certain people; nevertheless we give it. It goes something like this: 'The primal couple—the man and the woman were as one. They had not sinned. They had lived in a state of innocence. They had no guilt. They knew God. Then there arrived on the scene a creature called "the serpent:" who was described as the most subtle (crafty) of creatures. He called in question the words God had spoken to the couple, especially about not eating of "the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil". God had said that the eating of it would cause a person to die. The woman listened to the serpent and believed his word beyond God's

word, and she ate of the fruit. She also persuaded her husband to do likewise. He listened to her word and not God's word.

'The result of their disobedience to God's word was that the serpent received a degrading punishment, the woman was now to have sorrow (pain) in childbirth, and her husband was to rule over her. The land was given a curse in that the husband would have to work hard to get it to yield its produce, and weeds would grow. Prior to what we call "the Fall" it does not seem that the husband ruled the woman. Had that been the case it would have been the rule of love.'

### **Relationships and the Fall**

**Prior** to the Fall when the couple lived in innocence before God and each other, their relationship was complete. At the time of the Fall the man said it was because of the woman that he had eaten the fruit. The relationship of the couple with God was now broken, if not entirely severed. The relationship between the two now had difficulties. In the Godhead the three Persons are 'other-Person regarding' and also 'Man regarding'. The innocent primal couple were 'other-person regarding' and 'God regarding'. Those relationships changed. Man was now self-regarding in his attitude to God; the man and woman were now self-regarding in their relationships with one another. That is why we find relational difficulties whenever a man and woman come together, and especially when they relate in marriage. If the couple had lived in communion with God, they would have been in communion with each other, and life would have been enjoyable.

### **Family Relationships**

We may assume that difficulties in relationships between the man and the woman would cause problems when their children were born. This was the case with the primal couple. One son Cain became a murderer. The other son Abel was a righteous person—a prophet—and loved his brother. These problems have dogged the human race. The family could never prove to be ideal, though many families have weathered all kinds of storms, and for them the idea of ‘family’ is still a rich one. Out of what we might call ‘mixed relationships’, we have the variety of children who grow into adulthood and, in turn, become parents. The way they turn out that is, what they become—is something of a mystery.

### **The Teaching of the ‘Profound Mystery’**

If what Paul and others wrote in regard to the ‘profound mystery’ is true, then it means something like this: ‘The first Man Adam was protological of the Second Man Christ who is called “the last Adam”—the Bridegroom of the Bride the Church. The first Woman Eve was protological of the Church—the Bride of Christ. In fact every man points to the Second Adam Christ, the Husband, and every woman to the Bride the Church. The marriage of the primal couple was intended to be a type and a prophetic forecast of the Ultimate, Marriage—the Marriage of Christ and his Church. All of history moves to this goal, and it is the meaning of all history. The Son of God becomes a man that he might wed his human wife the Church.’

When the serpent attacked the unity of the primal man and woman he was out to discredit human marriage’s being

something of vital importance and eternal significance. He was also attacking what it means to be a woman, a wife and a mother, and also what it means to be a man, a husband and a father. By doing this he was attacking the reality and importance of the family. Primarily he was attacking the nature of God. He sought to set Man against God, and persons against one another as males and females, and as members of families. Much of history is that of broken human, familial, tribal and national relationships. Not all of it, of course.

### **The Healing and Renewing of Relationships**

The relationships of persons primarily depend upon their relationships with God. All persons have ideas or images of God, of Man, of themselves and of the world (creation) in which they live. All persons believe they know what is good and what is evil. Within these ideas or images they live their lives. If they could just know God by somehow being in communion with him, they would find it simpler to have good human relationships. For these things to happen they need to have reconciliation with God and with one another.

Without trying to cover the many thousands of years of human history, we are told the story of God loving a people called ‘Israel’, and so much so that he called them ‘my firstborn son’. He made a covenant with them so that they would be his people and he would be their God. This led, one day, to the birth of a child to Mary, a woman of Israel who was engaged to a man named Joseph. Her child was to be called ‘the Son of God’, and he was to be the Saviour not only of the nation of Israel but also of all the tribes and nations of the world. Whilst being ‘the Word of God’ and ‘the Son of God’ he was, nevertheless, truly Man. When he was crucified it

seemed that God's plan to reconcile the human race to himself had failed, but in fact it was through this death on the Cross that such a reconciliation could take place. The Resurrection of the Second or Last Adam made restoration of relationships with God—once lost through the first Eve and the first Adam—now possible.

We can say that Christ as the Bridegroom had given up his life for his Bride the Church. All the sin and guilt and shame of the past were washed away and forgiven, and she became his loving Bride. She became his Body of which he was the Head. Now, for the first time since the Fall, what is called the 'profound mystery' was revealed. Without Christ's saving of the Church—that is, of its innumerable members, men, women and children—there could be no true Marriage. What we have out of all this is a picture of true Marriage and the grace of God for us, to enable us, in Christ, to have proper marriages.

### **What We Can Now See Marriage to Be**

Marriage is the coming together of the two before the society in which they live; a man and a woman being joined so that they are 'one flesh' or 'one being', even though they each remain as distinct persons, both having what we call 'differentiations'. For the marriage to be wholly true, it means that the man and woman come together virginally. They have, not *cleaved* to one another before *leaving* their parents. In this way they can properly *leave* the parents through the wedding, then *cleave* to one another as virginal persons, thus making that intimate union, and so setting their lives for intimate communion with each other. In this sense they know what it is to be 'other-person regarding'. They are also

setting their lives towards having family and having their children grow in the unity they already have as parents, the unit and unity we call 'family'.

### **Marriages Can Be Good**

The old principle of the man ruling the woman has not been revoked, any more than have pain in childbirth and weeds in the soil! What has changed is that in Christian relationships the love of God has come to help us 'bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things'. Just as God has forgiven—and continues to forgive—us, so we can be forgiven by others, and forgive others also. Properly speaking, the husband has loved his wife; given himself for her; and instead of being critical, purifies her from all hurtful elements, and nourishes and cherishes her, seeing her as his body. He has no dominating rule over her, any more than Christ has any over his Church, but he does have leadership in their partnership, just as Christ has leadership—all for the benefit of the family. She, the human wife, has, for her part, a deep respect for her human spouse; and, as the Church is gladly subject to her Husband, so she is subject to her human husband. Of course, they are one being, 'one flesh', and they are together in the life and vocation God has set before them, just as the Church and her Husband are set in the life and vocation God has set before them. This is their life!

### **Marriages within the Marriage**

God is out to help all marriages. All marriages matter to him. The Christian marriage can have all the help it desires.

The Christian marriage is a marriage within a Marriage. The resources of the true Wife the Church and the true Husband Christ are available. This is not just a clever way of talking. It is a fact. Every woman is a type of the Bride the Church. Every man is a type of Christ the Bridegroom. Every couple is a type of the true Couple. So then, as a man, as a woman, and as a couple, all need to draw their resources from the Church and Christ.

How do we draw on these resources? The answer has to be a Christian one. We draw on these resources through the revelations of God and his mysteries in the Christian Scriptures. We know him by the word which shows us Christ. The Holy Spirit makes the word to show us Christ. Yet all this is not merely a mental exercise. It all happens within the Christian community called the Church. In that Church there is the life of the Family, for the Family is the Church, the Church the Family. The Church is made up of families who bring family life, and of persons of those families who bring personal life and inter-relationships to this community. Within this unity, fellowship and friendship, a good situation exists for supporting and encouraging marriages, marital relationships and familial relationships. Good marriages can grow out of such community life.

The community life is one that is couched in the worship which the fellowship has to God, and worship to God results in giving honour to one another. Worship of God—that is, expressed communion with God—feeds the life of persons and the community as a whole, and so encourages intimacy of living. All of this involves the learning process of the truth of God and the way of community living. Of course, there are no perfect churches, because they are filled with folk who are not perfect and who need the grace of God by which to live.

What we have given here is the simple way of drawing on the resources of the true Marriage and the gifts and-powers of the Bride—the Church—and the Bridegroom—Christ himself. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

## PART 2

## APPROACHING THE MATTER OF MARRIAGE

### Introduction

Any reader of this little book may be in one of the following positions: (i) young, not yet ready for marriage; (ii) old enough but not yet married; (iii) married either happily or unhappily; (iv) seeking divorce or divorced; (v) divorced but not remarried, and not intending remarriage; (vi) divorced and remarried and seeking to maintain that marriage; (vii) divorced and remarried at least twice, if not more; (viii) living in a *de facto* relationship whether previously married or not; (ix) living in a relationship within his or her gender; or (x) living in an aberrant state of human existence.

There are questions people ask who are in these situations, and there are reasons given for the states in which they find themselves. In almost all of these positions there are experiences of pain, suffering, loneliness and grief. especially grief which comes from loss of, or failure to achieve, emotional fulfilment. Sometimes there are experiences of joy, peace, satisfaction and fulfilment. There are many groups which seek to aid and support folk who need help. There are many trained helpers in the psychiatric.

psychological and psycho-therapeutic professions, and in what we sometimes call 'the secular world', and they can be quite helpful and supportive, though sometimes, too, they cannot. As Christians we must think in terms of God as Father, of the powerful gospel of Christ and of the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit, and we can do this without discounting other forms of help that present themselves.

### The Christian Approach to Marriage

**Because** this book is limited in its scope and is not a 'How To Do It' manual, we can only give a brief coverage of principles, and these are based on the 'profound mystery'—the true courtship, marriage and wedded life as shown by Christ and his Bride.

The main principle is this: 'Whatever Christ and his Bride would do in their courtship and marriage, do that'. All premarriage courtship should be pure, in love, in the consideration that arises from the 'other-person regarding' relationship. Courtship is a time of leading up to married intimacy, but it does not anticipate the full intimacy that may only be known in marriage. If one tries to get before marriage what is really only obtainable in marriage, then not only does one not achieve it before marriage, but also one prevents it beforehand from eventually happening in marriage.

The wedding day is a family one and belongs not just to the two who are engaged but to the two families and their friends also. It is the day which points to the Ultimate Marriage, and which at the same time draws from it—that is, draws from 'the Marriage Feast of the Bride and Lamb'. So it contains a great joy and delight. It sets the stage—so to speak—for the honeymoon.

The honeymoon—in whatever form it takes—is the outworking of the ‘one-flesh’ union which was granted in the wedding service. It sets the stage—so to speak—for the rest of life. Marriage is indissoluble, and spouses should see it as that and so work out their life on the basis of its permanency. Because we are as yet not perfect, marriage is never ideal, never without its difficulties, but it not only survives these problems but also can—and should—be the better for them.

### **The Matter of Marriage Break-up**

There are two forms of these: (i) threatened break-up, and (ii) break-up. Marriage need never break up. The reader may wish, here, to stop reading this section and look down to part 3, ‘The Whole Matter of Love’.

#### **THREATENED BREAK—UP**

Marriage is often threatened by a number of things. One can be the disappointment that marriage did not bring the partners to bliss. If the emphasis has been upon sexual fulfilment, joy and bliss, then the disappointment can be great. What is called ‘sex’ can never be an end in itself, by nature of the case. Failure to achieve a reasonable satisfaction in this area may have many causes. If what we might call ‘total union’ has not been achieved at the commencement of marriage, the couple may never feel themselves to be fused or welded together. They may then think that total union and full bliss is impossible, and, sooner or later, think themselves to have been cheated, and so conclude that they have a right

to look elsewhere for what they had hoped might happen in their own marriage.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, more reasons than the one I have given for this disappointment, and in some cases the causes may lie within the physiological areas of one spouse, or both. They may lie within immature approaches to relationships, the roots of which may lie back in defective relationships with parents and families. These and other causes may be discovered by discussion with mature people who can help and advise. The more there are harsh situations in which selfishness, cruelty, violence and oppression obtain, the more there will be a threat to a marriage to the point where it will seem to be impossible to continue it. Help will be needed from others.

#### **BREAK—UP OF MARRIAGE**

Marriages break up, without a doubt, and result in either separation or divorce. This is often the case where marriages have been entered into lightly, through infatuation without genuine love, as an experiment—‘give it a go’—or without any intention of continuing it if it should prove difficult. The biblical view is, I am convinced, that marriage is permanent and intended ‘till death us do part’. The most the Bible seems to have to say on the subject is that under some circumstances separation may have to happen but not the dissolving of the marriage. It does have certain conditions which have to be observed should a marriage end in divorce, but it by

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<sup>1</sup> One cause for failure in marriage can be that the couple did not come together virginally. Without going into that complex matter we can say, simply, that recourse to the Cross brings forgiveness and liberation from the past in which case the couple are ‘as virginal’ (justified), and so total union can be achieved.

no means concedes or condones divorce. Jesus' words 'what God has joined let no man put asunder' have to be looked at in the light of his own Marriage to the Bride. His seeming concessions, 'except for adultery' or 'except for *porneia*' (that is, any form of unchastity) need a comment on their own.<sup>2</sup> The contexts in which he spoke of marriage show that divorce 'was not so from the beginning', and so is not to be contemplated. We cannot here enter into this vast subject, but simply say that as Christ would never divorce his Bride, so we should not divorce. Some Old Testament texts may seem to indicate that God as the Husband of Israel divorced her, but the contexts show that he ever regarded her as his Bride. Hosea chapters 1-3, Ezekiel chapter 16, Isaiah chapter 54 and Malachi 2:10-16 give evidence of this persistent and unchanging marital love.

### Approaching the Matter of Divorced Persons

Sometimes the question arises as to how divorced people should be regarded.<sup>3</sup> The answer is that they should be

<sup>2</sup> Christ is said to have 'radicalised' the law; that is, to have brought it back to its true form. In the Sermon on the Mount he did not introduce a new law, but showed the law as it really is—the mind and will of God. Over the years it had taken different forms. In Israel, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was not a law for divorce, but a law for how divorce was to proceed. Jesus said it had been given 'for the hardness of your heart'. It was to protect the divorced wife from being abandoned in her society. It also warned that if one couple divorced and either married again and then divorced, they could never come again—a second time to marriage (remarriage).

<sup>3</sup> As we have said, people do get divorced. Christians get divorced. Some scholars believe that Jesus—in the light of Genesis 2:24—taught that marriages should never be 'put asunder', and that, in fact, it is not possible to put asunder what God has joined, even though the civil powers allow this and make provision for it. Other Christian scholars believe the Bible makes provision for divorce.

In history it was in the sixteenth century that the Christian humanist-scholar Erasmus taught that under certain conditions Christians could divorce, and many of the Reformers followed his leading so that today that teaching called 'the Evangelical Consensus' is held by many. Even so, much modern scholarship—both exegetical and theological—is turning back to the pre-Erasmian view, claiming divorce should not take place, and a significant volume of books holding the view of 'no divorce' is now being published. Some who have held the Erasmian view are reversing their understanding. The fact of the

regarded as all people should be regarded; that is, as persons to be loved, comforted, cherished and helped. If people assume that the mind of the church in which they have been brought up is correct when it—the church—sees the Erasmian view of divorce as acceptable, then their divorce will be treated in that church as proper, and they will continue to worship and serve in that fellowship. That is how things are today in many churches. If divorce is wrong, then the act of allowing it by the churches is also wrong, and so much of the responsibility for a divorce lies with those who teach that it is permissible. Even so, all Christians contemplating divorce—no matter what is the mind of their local church—should not undertake divorce without deeply studying the mind of God on the matter. The same principle obtains for contemplating remarriage. Warm 'human' considerations should not concede divorce or remarriage, since all should be done 'for the kingdom of heaven's sake'. Of course, some will not see this, for, as Jesus said, 'they cannot receive it'. The decisions they will then make will be on the human level of thinking and not for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

Does this mean divorce and/or remarriage are not wrong, and that even if they are, then they are matters as light as, say, theft or lying? Some churches hold that the creation

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matter is that there is an increase in the number of Christian people who are divorcing, as there is also an increase in the number of Christian people who are remarrying.

'one-flesh' union means divorce should not happen. Jesus was not making a new law of 'no divorce', but was saying that the way God created man and woman to be united as one forever was his intention. Certainly Jesus never gave any scope for remarriage: none of his sayings can be interpreted that way. If divorce is wrong, then it simply cannot be put in the category of sins such as theft and lying. God forgives all sins where there is repentance, but nothing is forgiven if repentance is missing. If divorced and remarried people come to see the need for repentance, then they will surely be forgiven. Grace is always present to restore people when restoration is needed. Since the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb is the true pattern of marriage, then to break that pattern is something more than even theft or lying. All Israel's idolatry was called adultery and fornication because it was giving an idol the love that should have gone to God.

### **The Consequences of Broken Marriages**

Whilst here we include divorce and remarriage, we are not confining our observations to them. Many marriages are in a bad state. A family cannot be whole if the parents are divided. The consequences for the children are far from good. There is much relational suffering, lack of warm security and the comfort of love and affection. The deprivation children suffer, and the dividing of their loyalty to parents, can set up difficult situations for the future. Break-up of relations with the parents is often the behaviour unconsciously learned by the children, and then repeated in their own marriages.

### **The Matter of Good Marriages**

In looking so much at the problem marriages we might miss the fact that many marriages—and certainly not only Christian marriages—are good. By 'good' we do not mean perfect or ideal, but marriages in which the husband and wife love one another and recognise that all human beings are faulty, and realise the need to accept each other's ways. Many factors go to make a reasonable marriage. Where such marriages are achieved, the effects upon the children are generally helpful. Even so, good parentage does not guarantee that all children will turn out well, nor does deficient parentage mean children are necessarily doomed to be no good. At heart it is the will of each person—whether young or old which works to desire good or otherwise, and for all our choices we are all accountable, personally. Without accountability human beings lack dignity and are reduced to flotsam and jetsam swirled about, willy-nilly, on the tides of life. Whilst parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances are factors which can have their effect upon us, they do not determine the shape of our lives. Our own choices in regard to those things determine what we eventually become. Having said this, good marriages help to make good families, and such families help to fit persons for the adventure and battle of life.

## PART 3

**THE WHOLE MATTER OF LOVE****Introduction**

We are coming towards the close of our little book. As we have said, it is not a manual, and readers will find it incomplete. Some would like to ask certain questions about what has been said, or would wish loose ends to be tied off. The whole point of the book is this: the 'profound mystery' is that the creation of the man and the woman was such that in coming to the 'one-flesh' union they were prophetic—that is, protological—of Christ's Marriage with his Bride. In this sense every man is protological of Christ and every woman protological of the Bride, and the meaning and climax of history is the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

The victory feast of the Two is the victory feast of Jesus the Messiah. Thus every wedding feast is protological of the ultimate Wedding Feast. All this helps us to understand the importance, significance and way of our human marriages.

**Love and Marriage**

*Love and Marriage* is the title of our book. So far we have scarcely mentioned love, but the idea of it lies behind all we have written. The Old Testament book called the Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is a collection of love song

which were generally sung at weddings in Israel. It is very beautiful and shows us what love can be between men and women. Some Jews thought of it as an allegory of God and his Bride Israel, and some Christians see it as being of Christ and his Church. Of course the same principles of this love apply whether between men and women or between Christ and his Bride. What we need to see is that without love all marriages—and with them, families—will be in difficulties.

In many cultures the idea of love is present. In countries with a Christian background and teaching, love is generally regarded as good. Many popular songs look to love to be a rapturous thing, to lead to a good marriage, and generally to help one live pleasurably enough in society. Some of this kind of singing and talking is unrealistic and optimistic; and as a result some couples are disappointed, and one thing leads to another, even violence and divorce.

What we need to see is that there is a love which can help us to 'bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things', and so have a reasonable marriage which will result, too, in a reasonable family life. That love is God's love. In fact it is God himself working in our lives in love. We call this love agape. There is also a love which takes the form, sometimes, of infatuation. Often it is thought of in terms of sexual relationships and sexual experience. All people desire the kind of love that gives them emotional fulfilment and, so, satisfaction. Today we often use the word **eros** to cover the second form of love.<sup>1</sup> When people are sexually obsessed we have **eros** in its bad form, but where they

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<sup>1</sup> I am sure that eros was never meant to be wrong, any more than it was meant to be sexually obsessive. The Greek idea of eros was of a high form of human love. 'Sexual love', as we call it, is certainly contained within agape, for God created us for this experience and intended that we should enjoy it. Eros in its pure form must be the same as agape.

are genuinely affectionate and have good relationships *eros* seems virtually to be *agape*.

It seems that *agape* is a love which puts others before itself, and *eros* is a love which puts itself before others, though it gives the appearance of being selfless. *Eros* can be the kind of love which gives generously, but it is, nevertheless, looking for its 'returns'. It gives in order to get and, if it does not get, then it can be very resentful, bitter and angry, feeling it has been cheated of its rightful returns. All human beings are sinful and all seem naturally to operate by *eros* and not *agape*. Even so, some of us seem to alternate between the two. Because Man is created in the image of God, the drive of *agape* is never wholly absent. Many marriages of non-Christians seem to be reasonably rich and appropriate. They are not 'erotic' in the worst sense of that word, but the *eros* which families know outside of Christ comes close to *agape*. How much richer they would be with God's *agape* brought to them through the redeeming work of the Cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### Love Is of God: God Is Love

Marriages might not always 'succeed'—that is, come up to our expectations or even be 'comfortable'—but they can endure. If they spring from God's love, then they can grow into something worthwhile, and the families can benefit. One human problem is that we really think we know what love is, so when someone says 'God is love', then we are sure we know what that means. Not necessarily: if we start from our experience of love—human love—and then see God as that kind of love, we will be making a great mistake. John the apostle said, 'Love is of God', meaning love never

develops from us, as humans. God alone is the source of all true love: human love is not of the quality of God's love, and that is why it so often fails. When John said, 'God is love', he meant that God *himself is* love. In that sense the only love of God we can know is when God comes to live in us. Love is not a commodity or a thing God gives to us. God himself *is agape*.

The way we *see* this love is in his sending his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (propitiation). That act of the Cross means that all our guilt is erased, our pollution is purified, and the dread of judgment and of death is finished. So John says, 'Perfect love casts out fear'. He does not mean we work up 'perfect love' and so lose fear—that is, that our love casts out fear—but that God's love at the Cross finishes that fear. John concludes, 'We love because he first loved us', and he means we love God and one another—indeed everyone—because now God is in our hearts and we are in him, and his love works through us. It is as simple as that.

### Love and Marriage

Paul the apostle once said, 'Let love be genuine'. He meant 'Let us have no imitation love'. He also pointed out that we could do many great things, but if they did not spring from love, they were really nothing, and that we, too, would then prove to be nothing. When Paul told husbands, 'Love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her', he was speaking of that self-giving *agape*. Paul told the older women to teach the younger women to love their husbands. As God takes the initiative in love so should husbands. The tensions of marriage which come from *eros* can be relieved by genuine *agape*.

We cannot rustle up *agape*. How then do we live in *agape* which 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things'? The order is simple: we have already seen it. It is: (i) God loves us and sends his Son to release us from the penalty, pollution and power of sin; (ii) wonderfully relieved, we see God as love and love him; (iii) living in God and his love we then love others, indeed we love all.

All of this sounds so simple, but then it is simple. The point is that we have to go on living in God with God living in us. This love will make life rich, and so wholesome relationships can gradually develop and become substantial.

### **'Between a Rock and a Hard Place'**

When we come to the practical facts of life we find ourselves in a world in which a lot of people are mixed up. Some are in mangled, tangled relationships. There are divided marriages, complicated family situations, and persons who are confused, angry and bitter. Some children seem to have little vision for the future. Some relationships have turned ugly. Divorces happen and often result in remarriages, and remarriages often result in divorce. In all this there seems little hope of reconciliation and renewed relationships. There are unmarried folk who long for marriage, but it does not seem to happen. There are folk with sexual aberrations, or with hang-ups about gender and what they call 'sex'.

Is it, then, too simplistic to say that *agape* can help to change all of this? No: love can go a long way in changing human situations. Marriages can be restored and made good. Families can know relief from bad relationships and learn new ways of living. Bitter divisions can be healed, and

aberrations can be changed. The essential power for all of this is God's love. In some cases it will take time for folk to come to that love and for that love to work. Love is patient; that is, God is patient, and so he keeps working. In his love we keep working. Not all situations will be wholly healed or renewed since 'it takes two to tango'. One partner may not cooperate, making matters more difficult: even so, we must not give up in despair or frustration. If what we have in mind is quick transformation, and so sudden relief and success, we may be disappointed. To repeat the nature of *agape*: it 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things'. This often requires a long process, and even if we do not see all the results in this life, they will count for the life beyond.

### **How Do We Set About Healing, Renewing and**

#### **BETTERING OUR MARRIAGES?**

As I have said, this is not a manual on love and marriage, and it is not advisory in regard to healing, renewing and bettering marriages. If it is a marriage that has not known divorce and is not a remarriage, but one in which there are weaknesses and even deep problems in the husband-wife and parents-children relationships, then the Scriptural principles we have shared in this paper should come into action. If it is a marriage which is a broken one, and one where there is a separation, we should try to heal it: never abandoning it. If it is a marriage that is a remarriage, then repentance for previous failure and remarriage will set it on the best path possible. The principles for all these situations are the same.

Ideally the husband should initiate love in the relationship: he should love out of God's *agape*. When this is not

the case the other spouse has to set out to love with that love that has come through the Cross–Calvary love. As we have said, this is the love which ‘bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things’, and it must persist, even in the face of non-acceptance and opposition. At the very least it will be a witness: at most it will win the other spouse. It will warm the family life. If we think a happy marriage is our ‘right’ and are disturbed and even angry when it does not turn out that way, then nothing will change in our relationships. Humility before God and others is essential for proceeding with the healing, renewing and bettering process. The point is *the other spouse and the others in the family can change!* We must live in the Divine–human Marriage of Christ and his Bride, and always take our cue–so to speak–from the Woman the Church, and the Man the Bridegroom. We must believe that God is working all the time, Christ is interceding, and so is the Holy Spirit. As we have suggested, no matter what the difficulties are we must persist.

One last word: some marriages have persisted even though they have lacked much. Spouses live peaceably with each other, but romance has departed, adoration of each other has virtually ceased. Such a marriage is a reasonable working arrangement, but the joy and satisfaction of the kind we find in the Song of Solomon is absent. The fire of romance is now only cold ashes, though perhaps a useful spark remains! Such marriages need *reviving* and they can be *revived*. *Agape* must have become a formal thing: it can become a fountain and even a torrent. It can become a glowing fire. We must see the beauty of the spouse God has given us as a gift, and be grateful for the good qualities, strengths and gifts of each other, and, too, of our children. We must not look for faults, be critical, be withdrawn; but come afresh to

the adventure of man–woman love and parent–children love. Yes, we must work at it. but then what great rewards will come. We repeat: we must live within the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. It is there we are warmed by enriching and reviving agape love.

## PART 4

**CONCLUSION**

In this small volume we have covered many things. We trust they may provide food for thought and be helpful in our various life situations. What we must keep in mind is that all history is moving towards its climax ('the Marriage Feast of the Bride and the Lamb'); that we are all members of the Body of the Bridegroom; and that the Church is that Body. We look forward to union with him forever.

Meanwhile we live in the marital relationship of the Bride and Christ. We draw richly from the Woman in order to be women, from the Man in order to be men, and from the Couple in order to be couples. We are all of the Family of the Father and we draw power, life and comfort from him for our families, over which, he too, is Father. Let those of us who regret we are celibate, unmarried, divorced and living with- out a spouse, now see that we are indeed already married to Christ and will be so eternally; and let us draw great joy from that reality and relationship, and share it with a world which needs our love and help.