

# *Unit Nine: Rites of Commitment*

## *(Marriage, Sacraments of Order)*

### **Context:**

#### 1. Ritual as Action:

- *a group celebrates its story, values, identity;*
- *hands on those values and treasures to a new generation*

#### 2. Ritual as integral to wholeness of vision of Vatican II

*i.e. the life of worship and mission as intimately linked*

In these 'rites of increase', persons within the Body of Christ are recognised as having

- specific role/function

- specific relationship → to each other ↗ Marriage  
↘ to the group as a whole → order

*(N.B. this is not in opposition to the universal call to holiness, implying a sub-group of 'super-Christians.')*

## **MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

- Marriage is a natural right (and rite) long predating the Church
- for first centuries of the Church, people married without a Christian rite

### **1. Theology of Christian Marriage**

#### a) Covenant

*Communion of life and love*

*symbol of relationship between Christ and the Church*

#### b) The couple as ministers of the sacrament

*Church (assembly and its minister) as witness*

#### c) Marriage as existential

- *There is a ritual moment of consecration (viz. exchange of consent);*  
*but:*
- *marriage as-a lived reality is a relationship into which people grow*

*People are growing into a relationship which changes them:*

*relationship with each other/within the group*

*relationship to families, to friends*

### **2. Preparation**

- People on the journey towards marriage need to be supported
- Remote preparation does not have a 'beginning' but is a lifetime absorption of values and behaviour from the community

A 'Holistic' approach to preparation

- *based on principle of total formation expressed in RCIA: ( evangelisation)*  
*catechesis*  
*prayer*  
*word of God*  
*ministry of others*  
*worship*

*living of values*

Ritual possibilities in preparation:

*(cf role of ritual in other existential journeys: pastoral care of sick, etc)*

- At or before time of engagement (*simple service in home or church*)
- during period of engagement (*prayer in home; preparation groups; blessings*)

### **3. The Wedding**

a) Structure of the rite

- *sacrament of faith built on the Word*

b) Study of texts

- *preliminary questions*
- *exchange of consents*

c) Illustrative rites

- *(cf baptism, order); rings, candle, gift*

d) Pastoral issues

- *eucharist or not*
- *liturgy v. 'folklore'*
- *preparation of the rite;*

*environment*

*movement*

*music as integral structural requirement*

### **4. Married life**

a) Ministry of married people to the community

*care of children/each other/clergy*

b) Ritual moments

*Blessing of new house*

*Celebrating anniversaries*

*Renewal of vows*

c) Continuing Support,

*Reconciliation*

*Interchurch, Interfaith, 'malcroyants'*

*Separation, divorce and the sacraments*

## **SACRAMENTS OF ORDER**

### **[1. (optional): THE ASSEMBLY AND ITS PRIESTHOOD**

The Notion of Priesthood (cf Unit I)

(key texts: I Cor 12:4-13; Eph 4:3-13; I Pet 4:10-11;

Vatican II: LG 1-4, PO, CD)

*1 priesthood of Christ the High Priest*

*2 priesthood of all believers by virtue of baptism & confirmation*

*3 priesthood of ordained ministers*

- *treatment of relationship/distinction between ordained and commissioned ministries; future ministries]*

### **2 THE RITES OF ORDINATION**

The revision of 1968 —

'Ordination' applied to all three degrees of priesthood

Major points of revision (*cf Unit I: Principles of Vat. II reform*)

- excision of repetition (*caused by fusion of Roman/Gallican traditions*)
- clarification of central sacramental action:  
*Laying on of hands in silence, and consecratory prayer*

Theology of Vatican II

*expressed in: prayer of consecration; model homily*

*[Examine in some detail the rite of Ordination of Presbyters*

- *compare with former rite to illustrate change: structure, heightened theology of service and collaboration; less emphasis on power and independence from Assembly]*

## **RELIGIOUS PROFESSION; CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY**

Until 1970, orders and congregation used their own rituals

Model Latin rite published in 1970 (English translation 1971)

*not intended to do away with multiplicity of rituals  
offered as a normative pattern*

1970 ritual specifically excludes certain late medieval accretions, in accordance with Council's principles of reform

Structure: following principles for all revised rites

*Revised rites of commitment have similar structure:*

*Homily*

*Examination*

*Litany*

*Central act of profession*

*Blessing (new feature at taking of perpetual vows)*

*Illustrative rituals*

[Optional: Theology of Prayers, esp. Blessing (LG44)

*Salvation centred on Christ; religious life as following Christ  
not private specialisation; bound up with life of Church]*

## ***Bibliography and Documentation***

C.J.Walsh (ed) **Instructions on the Revised Roman Rites**, Collins 1979 [with reference to Marriage and Ordination Rites.] [N.B. Does not take into account the new Marriage Rite for England and Wales]

'D. A. Withey, **Catholic Worship**: Kevin Mayhew, 1990, ch.15

J. D. Crichton, **Christian Celebration**, Geoffrey Chapman 1981. Part 2: The Sacraments, chs. 7, 8. [N.B. does not take account of new Marriage Rite]