



Love
is for
Life

IRISH BISHOPS'
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GOD'S PLAN FOR LOVE

There are few things in life as breathtakingly beautiful as a couple in love. Real love between a man and a woman changes almost everything about them. For each of them, the other is "the only you there is". Whether the couple have just fallen in love for the first time or whether they are years married and have grown into love, it's still a fantastic, beautiful, uplifting experience.

And so it should be. Love comes from God because God is love. Love is the greatest gift we can give or receive. To be deprived of love is a form of malnutrition.

Yet, this beautiful gift is often abused. Today, many make the mistake of thinking that love is about physical sex only. Sexual acts are sometimes associated with violence, to such an extent that they become an expression of hatred and evil rather than love.

Love then, is not as simple as it seems. It needs protection against human weakness if it is to be true to its best self and realise its full potential. Since love comes from God, since God is love, a good place to start is an examination of what God says about love.

SEX IS A LANGUAGE OF LOVE

First we look at the human experience of love. Sex is a means of communication, a language. We all know the importance of communication. We communicate with words; and we communicate with our bodies. Sometimes gestures speak louder than words and say things better than words can say them. There are many ways of expressing love by bodily language and the deepest physical expression of love is sexual union.

Sexual union says, "I love you", in a very profound way. By sexual union, a man and woman say to each other: "I love you. There is nobody else in all the world I love in the way I love you. I love you just for being you. I want you to become even more wonderful than you

are. I want to share my life and my world with you. I want you to share your life and your world with me. I want us to build a new life together, a future together, which will be our future. I need you. I can't live without you. I need you to love me, and to love me not just now but always. I will be faithful to you not just now but always. I will never let you down or walk out on you. I will never put anyone else in place of you. I will stay with you through thick and through thin. I will be responsible for you and I want you to be responsible for me, for us, no matter what happens".

Sexual union says all of these things, but if one of the partners does not really mean what the sexual union is saying, then he or she is deceiving the other. The body is saying one thing, the mind means another. There is deception when:

- One partner does not intend to be faithful or is, in fact, unfaithful to the other.
- One or both partners intend the relationship to be casual or temporary; sexual love is exclusive and forever.
- One or both of the partners knows that the other does not mean what the sexual action is saying; the sexual union in itself is experienced as superficial and deceitful.
- It does not mean what it says; it unites the body but leaves minds and lives separate.

Sexual union also speaks of man's willingness or readiness "to give a child to a woman as ours" and of a woman's readiness to bear his child. It speaks of a man's and a woman's desire to begin a new life together and to share their life around the child.

Furthermore, the language of love expresses forgiveness, reconciliation, healing of hurts, and conveys consolation and reassurance. It speaks of thankfulness for each other, peaceful contentment with each other, it carries the promise of seeing through together with each other.

Sexual union is only one part of the language of love. It should be made a



special moment in the whole conversation of love between husband and wife. The conversation is carried on by words, signs, silences, acts of thoughtfulness, attentiveness, remembrance and concern. It includes gestures of tenderness and affection. Above all, it includes real commitment to sharing life together "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health".

LOVE COMES FROM GOD

Not only does love come from God, but God himself is love. The phrase comes from St John, who says many times "God is love". These words sum up all that God reveals to us about himself. Creation is a special act of God's love made visible to us. Out of love he continues to care for us. Everything in the world is there because God loves us and wants our love. People in love feel that they are being brought closer to God by their love. This remains true even when the love is objectively sinful and shameful. Therefore we have a duty to keep love holy by respecting God's law of love.

God's love takes on a human body and

face in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's love made flesh and dwelling among us. Love is the source of all that God does.

GOD MADE US FOR LOVE

We resemble God in our capacity to love. We differ from the animal creation in our capacity for love and our need to be loved. Our need for love is endless. It can be satisfied only in God. It has been said that woman promises man and man promises woman what God only can give.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

God made man in order that man might love. God's first and greatest commandment is "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." The second commandment, which is inseparable from the first, is "You must love your neighbour as yourself." This is the whole purpose of the world, the whole reason for our existence. And our judgement will be totally concerned with whether we have loved or how we have loved.

faithfulness in love in spite of the repeated foolishness, ingratitude and unfaithfulness of his spouse, Israel.

MARRIAGE RESTORED IN CHRIST
The entire New Testament theology can be summed up in one sentence — Christian marriage was seen as marriage restored to its original condition before the first sin. Marriage is the sacrament which signifies Christ's love for mankind. It reflects Christ's love to the world through the love of husband and wife.

The basic vocation of Christian married partners is to love one another as Christ has loved them. In the words of Lacordaire: "They must aim to be the other's particular Christ." Their love, sealed by the sign of the Cross, looks to the crucifix. Not only do they find here the model of the love they are called to have for one another, they are also made capable, by the crucified Christ himself, of having that love for one another and persevering in it through difficulties.

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PUTTING LOVE INTO LOVE

Sexual morality is all a matter of making sexual love an expression of genuine



can be extended also to other unities which God has sealed into sexuality. The unity between sex and a life commitment. The unity between sex and life-giving. The unity between sex, life-giving and marriage. The great sins against God's plan for sexuality are sins of separation. They separate sexual enjoyment from its God-given design.

Typical of this is the separation of sex acts from marriage. Separation of sex from marriage is one of the great contemporary sins against the plan God made in the beginning. Sex is seen, not so much as the giving of oneself exclusively and forever to another, but rather as the satisfaction of a momentary urge or need, which may be no more significant or important than the urge or need to eat when one is hungry. This is obviously wrong.

Some people say that to be "in love" is all that matters. However what seems like love often falls short of the true meaning of love. Sexual morality is education in real loving. It is not meant to condemn, but to point the way to love. It says yes to true and honest loving. It is a matter of falling in love with love.

SEX SEPARATED FROM LOVE

Nowadays, making love has come to mean having sexual intercourse. Its value is measured in sexual climax. The very term leaves out values such as fidelity, exclusiveness, dependability, stability, childbearing, founding of a family, love of children. In short, love tends to be seen as an experience, not a commitment, a mood which happens to one rather than a relationship which one patiently builds. A trance into which one falls, rather than a life project on which two persons freely pledge to set out. In such cases, sex is divided from love. The sin of separation is obvious.

PRE-MARITAL AND EXTRA-MARITAL SEX

There has been a sad increase in pre-marital sexual relationships and casual sexual relationships and pregnancies out of wedlock. Sexual relations between couples who are engaged to be married

fruitful, lifelong loving. St Paul warned Christians that they could abuse the freedom Christ brought to them and allow themselves to become enslaved once more to sinful self-indulgence.

Every age has had its surfeit of sin, but it can hardly be denied that our contemporary Western society has seen an unprecedented breakdown of what were once universally accepted moral standards, especially in the sphere of sexuality. It is as though "our whole civilisation is aphrodisiac."

Not all is lost though. It is true that there are good aspects to the modern sexual revolution.

— There is a new openness in discussion about sexuality. This is healthier than the fear which once prevailed.

— There is an acceptance of sex as natural and good, rather than a cause for shame.

— There is a general acceptance of the need for sex education of the young. This can give a balanced understanding of sex.

— There is a movement towards equality between the sexes and the greater recognition of the rights of women within marriage, the home and society.

— In the Church itself, there is less preoccupation with sex as a source of sin and temptation and an emphasis on the sacredness of sex in marriage and on marriage as a means of holiness.

Yet, there are problems. It is not easy for parents or children to know what is right and what is wrong. Powerful influences keep leading us away from the truth. We are all in danger of being led astray by the influence of people who have no right to teach about good or about evil. Many are sadly brainwashed into believing that "anything goes".

SEX AND MARRIAGE

"What God has united, man must not divide." These words refer to the marriage bond. Man has neither the right nor the power to break it. But the words



(All the commandments — you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not covet — are summed up in the single command: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Rom 13:9)

LOVE IN THE BIBLE

The Bible teaches that sexuality:

- is good
 - comes from God
 - reflects the image of God
- God looks upon man and woman and sees his image in their sexuality: "God saw all that he had made and it was very good." Man and woman are each offered by God as a gift to the other. Marriage is therefore designed, made and blessed by God. It is a union of one man and one woman and is unbreakable.

THE COVENANT AND MARRIAGE

When God speaks of love and covenant in the Bible, he can find no better language than the human language of married love to tell human beings about how he loves them. He loves them with a love which has all the characteristics of married love, but immeasurably surpasses the most devoted married love. God loves us with a love that is faithful, dependable, unconditional, irrevocable, a love which is patient and full of pity, love which is tender, yet strong, passionate but constant, love which forgives to the point of foolishness and never ceases to welcome the unfaithful partner home. The prophets, when they speak of God's covenant of marriage with his people, stress, above all, God's

or who have a steady relationship, seem to be almost taken for granted in many countries today. All relationships which separate sex from marriage are against God's law of love. We have to point out how wrong these practices are and how they spoil God's plan for human love.

Any separation of physical, sexual union from the fullness of its meaning, which is found only in marriage, is a disruption of God's plan. It is a betrayal of love.

All acts of sexual intercourse before or outside of marriage, are acts of fornication or adultery and these are, in themselves, always gravely sinful. This is the clear law of God, proclaimed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is as true and as binding today as it ever was. This is the clear and certain teaching of the Catholic Church today. In her ministry of preaching and teaching, the Church must witness to the truth of Christ; but this is a truth that sets us free with the truest of all freedoms, freedom from sin. Yet where sexual sin is concerned, the Church fully realises the difficulties people face in today's world. Like Jesus, the Church always says to the sinner: "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven". Do not be discouraged. There is always mercy and hope for those who struggle. The only way we can fail to receive God's forgiveness is to fail to ask for it. In the field of sexual love, the Church is not maintaining a "hard line". She is not showing insensitivity or hostility towards sex. On the contrary, she is saving love from trivialisation.

COHABITATION

There is, in modern Western culture, a growing acceptance of the practice of "living together" without marriage. Usually the couple intend to get married eventually.

These relationships are make-believe situations. The couple live as if they were finally committed to each other. They live as if they loved each other for life, yet each retains the freedom to walk out on the other. They are, in effect, saying to

each other "I want something of you, but I don't want you"; or "I want your body, but I don't want you"; or "I want you, but not just yet, maybe later"; or "I want you now, but I may want someone else after a while". You can't build a relationship on hedging or hesitation like that.

UNMARRIED PREGNANCY

When pregnancy occurs outside marriage it can come as a great shock and can cause panic. There is a risk of rushing into marriage in panic and the child can suffer if deprived of a normal home.

Yet now, above all, is the time for them to remember that there is no limit to God's mercy for those who admit their sin and ask his pardon. Sexual sin has elements of powerful passion which cannot always be fully foreseen. There can be circumstances which lessen the guilt. Priests will be particularly compassionate towards those people, especially young people, who have sinned sexually. Priests are ministers of God's forgiving love, not of human judgement or condemnation.

Parents should also show special love and compassion for their child in such circumstances. To insist on marriage, in order to save family reputation or for any other reason, can be disastrous. Instead, both the young mother and the child should be accepted and should be lovingly helped through the pregnancy and the birth, so that a mature decision regarding marriage may be made in calm and peace.

SEX AND PARENTHOOD

One undeniable effect of the wider and wider availability of contraceptives has been to encourage sexual permissiveness. In turn, the uncontrolled spread of sexual indulgence calls for more and more contraception, with sterilisation and abortion as back-up remedies for contraceptive failures. Indeed, it sometimes seems that from this point of view, modern society is organised on the basis of sex without control.

The contraceptive mentality has fostered the wide acceptance of a new



family planning and couples who for some reason, find it is not effective for them, can feel driven to the use of contraceptives. We cannot say other to them than that this is objectively wrong. They must do all in their power to avoid or terminate this practice, relying on God's help to make possible what seems humanly impossible. The only way to fail is to stop trying. "The saint is only the sinner who wouldn't stop trying." If people fail in their efforts, they must remember that God never fails in his mercy. His compassion and forgiveness are always available to them in the sacrament of penance. No matter what has gone wrong, men and women can always find that peace of conscience without which there cannot be happiness in marriage.

STERILISATION

When sterilisation was first practised in Europe by the Nazis, it aroused disgust and revulsion. It is a measure of society's moral decline since then that it is now widely regarded as morally acceptable and even socially progressive. The Catholic Church teaches that any form of sterilisation whose direct and immediate effect is to render the sex act incapable of procreation, is direct sterilisation and, as such, is absolutely forbidden. Catholic hospitals cannot provide facilities for such operations. Catholic medical personnel cannot co-operate with them.

Sterilisation also has serious psychological consequences. A husband or wife may feel damaged in their masculinity or femininity by the permanent loss of the power of parenthood. There can later be an intense desire to have a child.

PORNOGRAPHY

Sex is a language of love. Pornography is loveless sex. Pornography is a huge industry and a great evil. It combines the need for money with the passion for loveless sex. It even tarnishes innocent children. Pornography is despicable and debasing.

To those who say that pornography does no harm, the response must be that

sexual ethic. It has not made the new morality right or true. What we have in modern society is not a new morality of sex, but rather a radical rejection of the morality of the entire Christian tradition.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

The teaching authority of the Church forbids the use of contraceptives. There are, however, forms of control, of fertility which the Church accepts as morally lawful. Natural family planning is the truest form of responsible parenthood and is a great protection of the dignity and equality of women.

The cycle of life-bearing itself provides times when nature rests in its rhythmic task of setting up the conditions for new life. These times of rest are, themselves, part of God's plan for human fertility. Natural family planning has the great merit of making responsible parenthood the joint responsibility of husband and wife.

Women who cannot practise natural

pornography is wrong in itself. Should it be in books, advertising, comics, papers, magazines, records, video cassettes — pornography is wrong. It is an assault on the dignity of the human person — on the respect due to the human body, the reverence due to sexuality.

- Pornography constitutes an insult to womanhood because it reduces woman to the level of sex object for man's physical enjoyment.
- Women become merely bodies for exploitation and are never seen as intelligent and equal persons.
- Pornography places sex in a context of lovelessness, of violence, of taking without giving, of pleasure without commitment.

RAPE

The sinfulness of separating sex from love is most clearly seen in the case of rape. The wrongfulness of rape is recognised universally. Rape is wrong because it is a brutal assault on the dignity of women, and because it totally separates sex from love. Rape expresses not love but sheer physical lust, combined with hatred and violence; not respect for another's feelings but contempt; not the desire to give but the will to overpower, humiliate and dominate.

The increase in rape in modern society shows the special vulnerability of

women in a society where Christian standards of sexual morality are breaking down. A Christian society must ask whether the frequent association of sex with violence in the media may be directly related to the increase in the incidence of rape. It has been said with good reason that "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice".

The format for taking evidence from women who have been raped needs to be reviewed so as to make it less hurtful to victims and more sensitive to the shock and suffering they have endured. Following rape, immediate interventions to remove semen and prevent fertilisation are morally right. They are part of a woman's legitimate resistance to the rapist's attack. If, nevertheless fertilisation were to occur and pregnancy result following rape, there is a new and innocent human life present whose right to life must be respected.

HOMOSEXUALITY

The true meaning of sexuality is also negated in homosexual acts and sexual relationships between homosexuals. We must distinguish homosexual orientation from homosexual acts. Objectively, homosexual acts are intrinsically and gravely immoral.

Homosexual tendencies, however, as distinct from homosexual actions, can be

innate and irreversible. They can cause drives and temptations which are difficult to control or resist. For such persons, some homosexual actions may well lack the full freedom and deliberateness necessary to constitute grave sin. Each case must be judged individually and compassionately.

There has been a vigorous campaign in recent years to vindicate the rights of the homosexual community. This campaign, if it limited itself to outlawing social discrimination against homosexuals, would be good and necessary. It is not Christian to despise homosexuals and exclude them from society. Unfortunately, however, the campaign often claims for homosexual acts complete social, legal and moral parity with heterosexual acts. Such a campaign damages the homosexual community. It encourages others whose sexuality is not exclusively or irreversibly homosexual, to indulge in homosexual acts and habits.

Persons with homosexual tendencies deserve sympathetic, compassionate and patient care. It is un-Christian to look on homosexuals with disgust or disdain because they are a particular personality type.

Each person has to observe the moral law and all have to control sexual urges. For some the struggle can be much harder than for others. This applies to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Each, with the help of God's grace, has to try to attain virtue and holiness through their struggle with the difficulties inherent in their own particular personality structure.

SEXUALITY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

At the time of Christ's death and resurrection, the world was very similar to ours. Corinth was so depraved that it mirrored the thinking of today's world. Yet St Paul successfully preached Christ's teaching to the Corinthians. He said that we have control over our instincts, that our bodies are sacred because they share in Christ's death and resurrection. "You know, surely, that your bodies are

members, making up the body of Christ. Do you think that I can take parts of Christ's body and join them to the body of a prostitute. Never." (1 Cor 6-15).

Consequently, to sin sexually is unlike other sins because it is "to sin against your own body". "But we can never forget that our bodies are precisely not our own." (Cf 1 Cor 6.18-20).

Much modern liberal thinking seems to take it for granted that young people are incapable of chastity, of exercising control over their sexual urges. This is an insult to them. The Church believes in young people and believes that they can



observe chastity. The grace of Jesus Christ and the prayers and example of Mary are there to help them.

MARY EVER VIRGIN

In Mary, we see the beauty of chastity and its reward. We must return to the time-honoured practice of begging her each day to obtain for us, from her Son, the grace for that day's struggle. The once familiar words should often be on our lips again — "Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee".

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MARRIAGE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Marriage and the family are of fundamental importance for the Church and for society. They are put under unprecedented pressures at the present time. For nearly 2,000 years Western society accepted that marriage was with one person forever. Today even the very understanding of marriage is being threatened.

Because of rapid and unprecedented social changes, there is some weakening of traditional values. Lifelong commitment in every sphere of life is weakened. This influences attitudes to lifelong marriage as well.

The feminist movement is having an important impact on the context in which modern marriage has to be lived. The feminist movement is one of the most significant movements in our time. One of the most important challenges facing the Church today is to develop a truly Christian feminism — one which will share many of the values and struggles of the worldwide feminist movement but will judge them by the standards of the Gospel, rejecting what is contrary to the Gospel. The feminist movement has important implications for women's experiences in marriage. Couples will have to relate to each other as equal partners, sharing a satisfying relationship with each other.

We need to look at the effects of couples marrying at a younger age, the fact that people tend to live longer nowadays and, therefore, will face a longer period of life together.

Economic and social conditions also create stresses for marriage. The supply of housing for newly-weds never meets the demand. Couples don't have the privacy and peace and adjust to each other. In deprived areas there is still a scandalous amount of substandard accommodation. Unemployment is a demoralising experience for men and women. It is among the greatest sources of marital stress at the present time. To overcome these stresses a deep and proper communication between the couple is essential.

Abuse of alcohol and excessive gambling are the cause of much strain in marriage and much misery in homes. Money is wasted, spouses are kept away from home, and the result is often quarrelling between husband and wife and even wife beating and child battering.

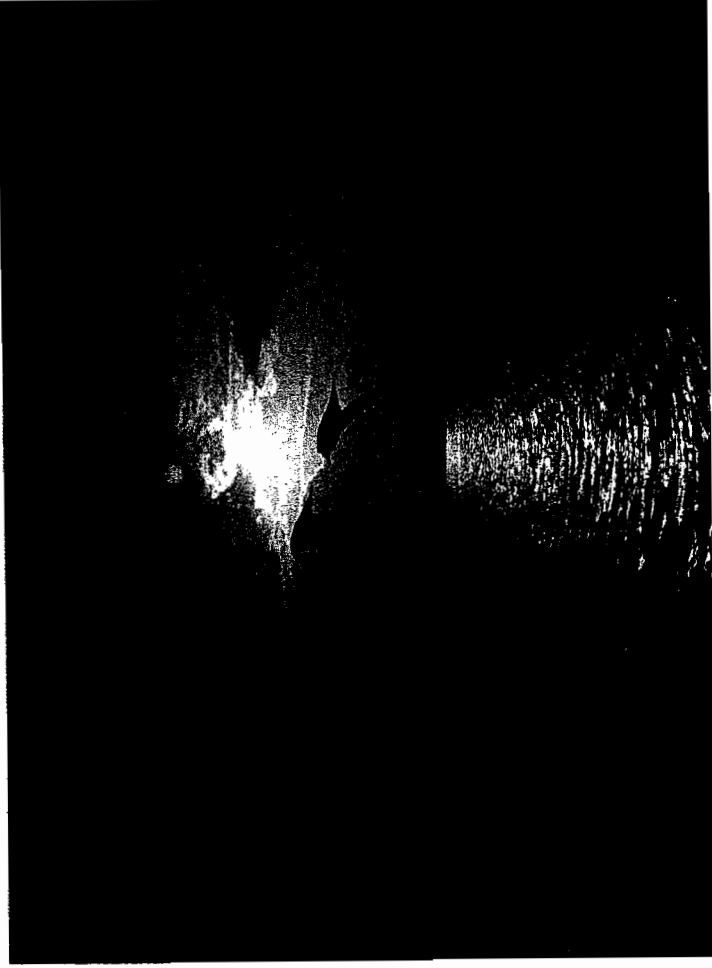
The greatest blow of all to the happiness of a marriage is infidelity on the part of a husband or wife.

This is the negative side of marriage and family life in Ireland today. It is a worrying picture. Nevertheless, it must not lead us to forget that the overwhelming majority of Irish marriages and families are happy, stable and loving, true schools of love for the next generation. We thank God for the many couples who give that witness and we thank those couples themselves for enriching the Church and the world by their love.

INCIDENCE OF MARITAL BREAKDOWN IN IRELAND

For one or other of the reasons mentioned above, a growing number of marriages are breaking down in Ireland today. The exact number is hard to quantify.

It is, however, false to assume that all or even most of the partners involved in broken marriages either desire divorce or would approve of its introduction.



Contrary to what is often claimed, statistics of broken marriages do not reflect statistics of demand for divorce. The question of divorce must therefore be examined. The examination must take account of both religious convictions and social considerations.

MARRIAGE AND FIDELITY IN CHRISTIAN REVELATION

Religious considerations naturally take first place (cf. part 1 of this pastoral letter). In summary it is clear from Scripture that God wants a real marriage to be to one person and for ever. The prophet Malachi (ref. Ch. 2 verses 14-16) puts it plainly. "Do not break faith with the wife of your youth; for I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel."

If the Church cannot permit divorce and remarriage, it is not because she is lacking in compassion and unwilling to do so. It is because she cannot do so. She cannot change the teaching entrusted to her by her Lord. She cannot act in a manner contrary to the clear command of her Lord.

For those, therefore, who accept the teaching of the Catholic Church, divorce with a right to remarry is not merely not permitted, it is impossible. What God has put together in marriage no man can put asunder. The bond uniting married couples is a sacramental bond coming from God alone. No man or woman, no human authority, no state or civil court can put this bond asunder. Remarriage of a civilly divorced person is not a real marriage in the eyes of God. God's law continues to bind no matter what the civil law says.

THE DIVORCE DEBATE

The divorce debate raises again the question of the relationship between law and morality, and indeed, the question of Church influence upon legislation. Because the Catholic Church teaches that remarriage following divorce is impossible, it does not follow from this alone that the laws of the state must embody this principle. Legislators have to aim at creating a body of laws which as far as possible favours reconciliation

between citizens and communities. Their first concern as legislators, however, is for the well-being and the common good of society as a whole.

The divorce debate undeniably raises questions of the public welfare and the common good. In any debate concerning divorce legislation, the position of the Catholic Church would be unchanged, as we have stated it on other occasions. We do not ask that Catholic doctrine as such be enshrined in law. Nevertheless, we have the responsibility as pastors to offer moral guidance to Catholics, to help them to form their consciences in respect of their moral responsibilities as legislators or as voters.

Law is among many other things, a statement of what society regards as socially and morally acceptable. People have a strong tendency to regard what is legally permissible as being also morally right.

The experience of other countries shows that the legalisation of civil divorce leads rapidly to acceptance of divorce and remarriage as morally right and socially normal. It is as though the legal availability of divorce builds up a social pressure, which for large numbers of people become stronger than moral or religious resistance.

DIVORCE AND THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

This is not accidental. It is a result of the fact that when it introduces divorce society is in fact redefining its legal understanding of marriage. From being defined in law as indissoluble, all marriages become immediately defined as dissoluble. Marriages become, in legal principle, a temporary union.

Experience throughout the world shows that restrictions on divorce are in practice impossible to maintain, and that expectations of a moderate and limited divorce law are pious hope rather than well-founded expectation. The concept of irrevocable breakdown seems a perfectly rational and almost self-justifying basis for the legal dissolution of marriage. It is presented as an obvious starting point for the introduction of

divorce in the Republic. In truth, irrevocable breakdown is the basis for the most unrestrictive form of divorce in the world today. It is the end product of a long evolution, whereby restrictions on divorce were abandoned, one after another. It can be established by the fact that one partner decides to leave the other and live separately. It can be imposed on an innocent and unwilling partner by an unfaithful spouse, and the innocent partner can do nothing to prevent it. It leads, in fact, to divorce on demand.

DIVORCE AND CHILDREN

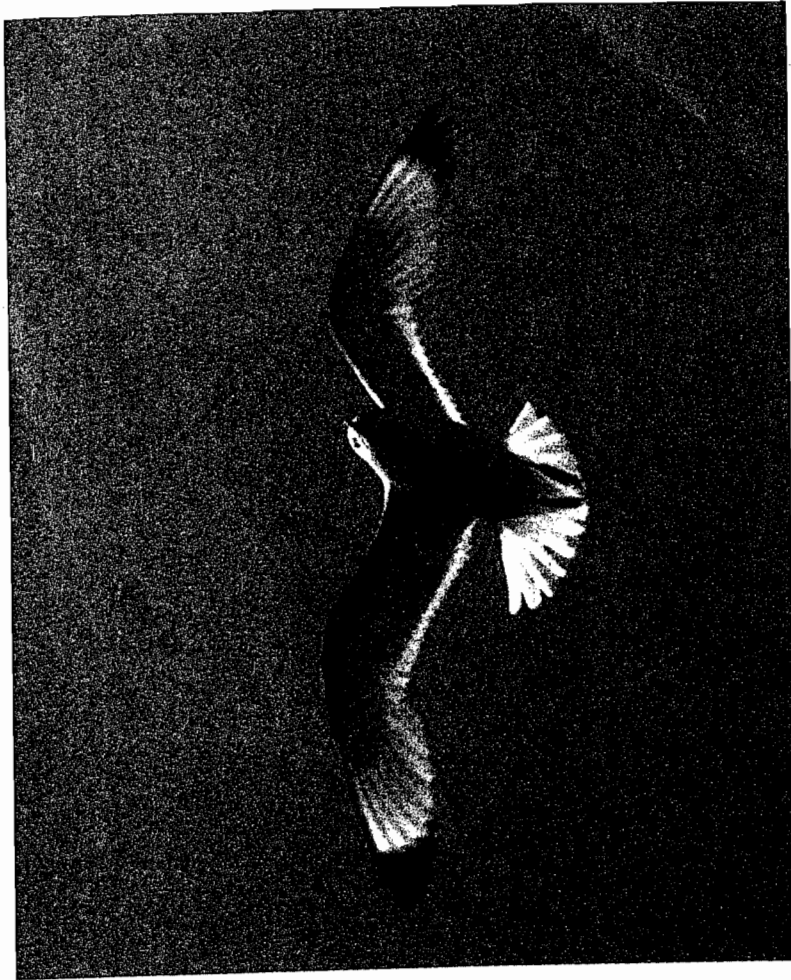
The main motivation behind the campaign for divorce is compassion for persons locked in intolerable marriage situations, suffering mental, emotional or even physical cruelty from their spouses, or deserted by their spouses who have set up house with another partner. This motive is praiseworthy and the victims of such situations deserve sincere compassion. There are, however, other persons than marriage partners affected by divorce. Compassion must be felt for these also. None are more deeply affected by divorce than children. Whatever law may say about marriage, parenthood at least is lifelong. Parents are forever. Children are the chief casualties and victims of divorce.

It is argued, of course, that the real damage suffered by children is due not to divorce but to the marriage breakdown. Reliable studies indicate, though, that children prefer even an unhappy marriage relationship between their parents to divorce of their parents. Divorce is always a disaster for children.

DIVORCE AND WOMEN

After children it is undoubtedly women who are the chief sufferers from divorce. There are many indications that divorce favours men rather than women. Many divorced women and their children are forced to depend on social welfare and supplementary benefits.

It would, of course, be wrong to identify divorce as the cause of all problems of broken marriages. Undeniably, however, the existence of



divorce increases the rate of marriage breakdown. The remedy for a minority of marriages which fail itself becomes a factor causing more marriages to fail. Divorce cannot be restricted in law and its growth cannot be limited in fact. A divorce mentality spreads through the community.

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MARRIAGE IN SOCIETY AND IN THE CHURCH

The Constitution of the Republic of Ireland commits the State to the protection of marriage and the family. (Article 41, *Bunreacht na hEireann*). We don't always live up to the high ideals set there. We fall short of the Holy See's Charter of the rights of the family (1983). "Those who wish to marry and establish a family have the right to expect from society

moral, educational, social and economic conditions which enable them to exercise their right to marry in all maturity and responsibility".

Saying no to divorce imposes on society a greater obligation to provide alternative legal and other remedies.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

Marriages contracted at too young an age are particularly at risk. Statistics show that marriages with the highest risk of breakdown are those contracted under the age of eighteen. The minimum legal age for marriage, therefore, should not be less than eighteen. Legal backing should be given to the requirement of adequate prior notice of intended marriage.

There is urgent need for more systematic preparation for marriage. So-called sex education is not an adequate education in human sexual relationships. Human sexuality is not just a physical phenomenon which can be

taught in biology classes. It must not be isolated from its emotional, moral, spiritual and religious dimensions. Education of children in human sexuality and in relationships is primarily the right and duty of parents. The atmosphere of love and forgiveness between parents and children is the best preparation which children can receive for their own future marriage and parenting.

More formal education in male/female relationships is, however, also necessary. Parents must, therefore, be helped by schools in providing the necessary instruction. Excellent programmes exist already in the majority of Catholic schools. The state should support and facilitate what is already being done. There is need for co-operation between State, school and parents.

Education by itself will not ensure right behaviour. Society educates even more than schools. The responsibility of preparing young people for marriage and family life is shared, therefore, by the whole of society.

A FAMILY COURT

Many areas of family law need revision. The specific recommendations in the full text of the Pastoral about various legal reforms should be studied.

The Holy See's Charter of the rights of the family sums up many of our recommendations. "The institutional value of marriage should be upheld by public authorities; the situation of non-married couples must not be placed on the same level as marriage duly contracted." (Article 1c). It also declares "all children whether born in or out of wedlock enjoy the same right to social protection with a view to their integral personal development." (Article 4e).

The legal reforms which will take account of the rights of illegitimate children should not undermine the principle that marriage is the legal basis of the family.

SOCIAL POLICY AND THE FAMILY
It is time to take a comprehensive look at social policy and taxation in view of their impact on the family.

Unemployment is by far the greatest

social factor damaging family life and contributing to marriage breakdown.

The State also needs to look at how prisoners and their families are treated. The Charter of the rights of the family states that "a detainee should remain in contact with his or her family" and that the family should be "adequately sustained during the period of detention."

MARRIAGE IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Marriage and the family have a special place in the community which is the Church. "The future of the world and of the church passes through the family." "The future of humanity passes by way of the family (*Familiaris Consortio*). " Much is already being done under the auspices of the Church. The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council is doing excellent work. It is staffed by almost 2,000 trained, voluntary personnel. CMAC is itself an impressive sign of the concern of the Church in Ireland for marriage and its problems.

Cura is also such a sign. Cura deals with more than 6,500 calls annually, both north and south.

There is also a vast network of church related services for families, single parents, unmarried mothers and their babies, teenagers, battered wives and families in all kinds of need, material and spiritual. We wish to assure the people who do so much work here of our admiration and our gratitude for their work. There are many lay organisations for promoting the spirituality of marriage and the family.

Nevertheless, there are gaps. This pastoral letter is intended to give a new impetus to all members of the Church to intensify their efforts in all areas of pastoral care of marriage and the family.

Priests must play their part too. Priestly visitation of homes has always been given a high place in Irish pastoral tradition. It is more important than ever today. There is a special need for pastoral visitation of newly married couples and couples with young families. It is vitally important that couples who find tensions

developing should seek help at a very early stage.

Forty per cent of Catholic couples now attend a pre-marriage course — but 60 per cent do not. We should encourage people preparing for marriage to attend a pre-marriage course.

The priest must conduct a pre-nuptial enquiry in order to establish the couple's freedom to marry, their maturity of consent, their adequate understanding of marriage as a human relationship and as a Christian sacrament. **It is for this reason that three months prior notice of marriage is now obligatory in every Irish diocese.**

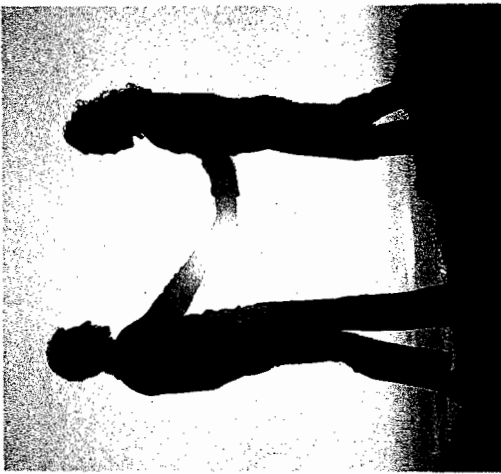
Preparation for marriage must include spiritual preparation of the couple by prayer and by the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Preparation of partners for a mixed marriage needs special pastoral care and sensitivity.

CHURCH ANNULMENTS

The Church in Ireland has put heavy commitments of resources and personnel into its marriage tribunals. It is part of the Church's ministry of compassion. Before declaring a purported marriage to be null the Church must have conclusive proof that the conditions for its validity did not exist at the time of its celebration. This can in no way be compared with divorce whereby the state purports to dissolve a valid marriage. The concepts of nullity and of divorce are totally distinct and there must be no blurring of the distinction.

Church marriage tribunals exercise the responsibility with scrupulous care. In 1976, 79 annulments were granted in the thirty-two counties of Ireland; in 1977, 104 were granted; in 1978, 91; in 1979, 75; in 1980, 76; in 1981, 73; in 1982, 83; and in 1983, 94.

There are obvious legal problems arising from Church annulments and some legal mechanism is needed to deal with them. These problems are invoked as an argument for the necessity of divorce legislation, but divorce is neither necessary nor desirable as an answer to these problems. One must not alter the



legal definition of all marriages to cater for the problems the very few which are found not to have been valid marriages at all.

THE CHURCH'S COMPASSION IN DIFFICULT CASES

Married couples and families even without fault on their part can find themselves in intolerable suffering. Some are drawn into irregular situations; in these situations the Church must firmly but gently maintain her doctrine and discipline, for these are entrusted to her by God.

Nevertheless, the Church continues to extend her compassion to all persons and couples whatever the difficulties or wrongfulness of their situation.

There are many pressures in modern society which lead to an increase in civil unions and unions without any form of marriage. When Catholics enter such irregular situations they still remain in the Church's care and must not be allowed to feel rejected from her love.

Love is our only way to win them back. A love which is always patient and kind.... (1 Cor. 13: 4-6).

These couples cannot share in the Eucharist. A couple who are not by the Sacrament of Marriage one flesh in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, cannot be one in the Body of Christ which is the Eucharist. However, the

Church believes that those who have rejected the Lord's command and are still living in this state will be able to obtain from God the grace of confession and salvation provided that they have persevered in prayer and in penance.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Marriage in Church is not just a ceremony taking place in the building. The home which results from marriage is the Church in miniature. The family is the domestic church.

Parents remain and always will remain the first and the most important teachers of the faith to their children, (*Handing on the faith in the home*). The family must therefore keep growing in faith in order to hand on the faith to the next generation.

"Unless there is prayer in the home even the beautiful forms of school prayer will be dropped when school days are over" — *Handing on the Faith in the Home* No. 7.

SEXUALITY AND HOLINESS

Sacramental marriage is a sexual as well as a spiritual union. It is spiritual not in spite of being sexual but in and through its sexual expression. Sexuality in marriage becomes a source of grace and means of holiness. Sexual union fosters love and love is from God. It can be a call to prayer, to praise of God, to thanksgiving.

Married couples have a special

vocation, following directly from their special sacrament. They are called to "be the Church". By their love for one another they say to the world: "This is what God's love means: this is how Christ loves the world."

Some have come to feel that marriage stunts personal growth. This must be shown not to be true. There must be all round growth of each partner as a person as well as of the couple as couple.

SINGLE PERSONS AND WIDOWS

Great though the vocation of married people in the Church is it must not be forgotten that each person has a special vocation from God. Widows need special care and support from the Christian community. Single people too make "a great contribution towards the holiness and apostolic life of the Church" (LJ No. 4).

In conclusion we make the words of John Paul addressed to Irish families in Limerick our own:

"May the Irish always support marriage through personal commitment and through positive social and legal action."

The New Testament describes Our Lord's Second Coming as an eternal wedding feast. Married couples will have a privileged place there. We greet and we bless all married couples in the words of St Paul:

"We wish you happiness; try to grow perfect, help one another. Be united, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Cor. 13 11).

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