

# The Papal System – XV. Marriage



Continued from [XIV. The Sacrament of Orders](#).

THE most sacred of human institutions occupied an appropriate place in the arrangements of the early Christians. It is not improbable that marriage was, in some measure, an arrangement of the Church; or, at any rate, that it was entered upon after consultation with its officers. Tertullian says: "How may we be able to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church recommends, and the oblation confirms, and the benediction seals; the angels report it, and the Father ratifies it?" From this statement, it is evident that the Church, in some way, aided in arranging marriages, and solemnly blessed them with religious services. And more testimony of the same description, in abundance, is scattered over the primitive fathers.

The Council of Laodicea, A.D. 365, forbids all church members to enter into communion with heretics, by giving their sons or daughters in marriage to them, or receiving their sons and daughters in marriage.

The marriage of first cousins was prohibited by the Council of Epone, and condemned in other synods.

The widow who married before her husband had been dead a full year was to be regarded as one worthy of infamy.

Justinian first recognized the kindred of sponsors, and forbade any man to marry a woman for whom he had been surety in baptism; the Council of Trullo prohibited the sponsor from marrying the infant for whom he was godfather, or its mother.

The second Council of Arles forbade penitents to marry while they were under the censure of the Church. And as this condition lasted, frequently, for years, the decision was one of great severity.

The Council of Epone prohibited marriage between a man and his deceased wife's sister, in A.D. 517. And the Council of Neoexsarea, in its second canon, ordered a woman who had been the wife of two brothers, to be excommunicated till the end of her life. Such a union was regarded with unaccountable but intense horror in the early churches.

Second marriages were sometimes condemned among the laity in the primitive Church, and commonly only tolerated; but third marriages were inexcusable. St. Basil says: "The custom of his church was to excommunicate, for five years, those who married the third time; that, in other places, they were only put under penance for two or three years."

The ring had a place in marriage before Christ's day, and was used among his disciples in espousals in the second century. In the ninth century, in betrothal, the man presented to the lady the espousal gifts; and among these he put a ring on her finger; at a convenient time afterwards, they were solemnly married in the church, receiving from the priest the benediction and the celestial veil; and, on retiring from the sacred edifice, they wore crowns or garlands upon their heads, kept in it for that purpose.

When the man betrothed his future wife, the contract was confirmed by a "solemn kiss" which he gave her. This custom was the result of a law enacted by the Great Constantine. When it was given, the heirs of either party, if one of them died before marriage, received half of the espousal gifts; when it was neglected, the donations, in case of death before the nuptial ceremony, were restored. Probably all the gifts were seldom returned.

In a marriage between Christians in the fourth century, each took the other by the right hand. "The young couple joined their right hands together, and both their hands to the hand of God," and entreating his approval, the minister invoked his blessing and pronounced them husband and wife.

#### THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND MARRIAGE.

Canon I.—"If any one shall say that marriage is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law, but that it was invented by men in the Church, and does not confer grace; let him be accursed."

Canon III.—"If any man shall say that only those degrees of consanguinity and affinity expressed in Leviticus can hinder men from contracting matrimony or dissolve it when contracted; and that the Church cannot dispense with some of these degrees, or appoint that others may hinder or dissolve it; let them be accursed." Here is a modest canon! It curses a man for denying that the Church can change the laws of God revealed in Leviticus.

Canon X.—"If any one shall say that marriage is preferable to virginity or celibacy, and that it is not better and happier to remain in virginity or celibacy than to be bound in wedlock; let him be accursed." A good many, doubtless, are quite satisfied that it is not happier or better to dwell in the shades and darkness of a single life, than to rejoice in the light of wedded love; and would say with the Almighty: "That it is not good that the man should be alone," even though his "Holiness" of Rome should curse them for it.

Canon XI.—"If any one shall say that the prohibition of the solemnization of marriage at certain seasons of the year is a tyrannical superstition, proceeding from the superstition of the heathen, or shall condemn the benedictions or other ceremonies which the Church uses in it; let him be accursed."

Canon XII.— "If any one shall say that *matrimonial causes* do not belong to *ecclesiastical judges*; let him be accursed."

In every part of our country the marriage laws are under the control of

secular judges; and we all realize that this is right, and we say it on fitting occasions; for which this zealous curse travels from Trent by way of Rome, over the ages and the Atlantic, and pours the vials of its execrations upon us.

The Council of Trent generally placed a decree on record, and then followed it by canons on the same subject; the decree on matrimony has ten chapters, two quotations from which we give:

“They who shall try to contract matrimony otherwise than in the presence of the parish priest, or of some other priest by his permission, or by the license of the ordinary and in the presence of two or three witnesses (shall fail), and the holy synod renders them utterly incapable of thus contracting it; and decrees such contracts void and null; as it makes them void and annuls them by the present decree.”

According to this papal statute, and according to the understanding of it in the Catholic Church, all marriages contracted before a magistrate or a “heretical preacher” are prohibited. And it has often happened that such nuptial ceremonies have been nullified by a second marriage immediately after by a Catholic priest.

“If any one shall presume knowingly to contract marriage within the prohibited degrees, he shall be separated and deprived of the hope of obtaining a dispensation.”

In this chapter provision is made for granting dispensations in some cases, but it is firmly declared that, “In the second degree no dispensation shall ever be granted unless between great princes, and for a public cause.” A couple of poor young cousins (the second degree) might be tenderly attached to each other; and might have a nobler love than ever burned in the breast of an Alexander, a Caesar, a Charlemagne, or a Napoleon. And as the God of Christians is no respecter of persons, as before Him kings and the brethren of Lazarus, in regard to earthly dignity and importance, are on a perfect equality, He looks with disdain upon this aristocratic, timeserving, and unchristian toleration, which would let the king keep his wife-cousin, but would ruthlessly tear her from the bosom of a mere mechanic or other honest son of toil. If it is a sin to marry a first or a second cousin, no mortal should give a dispensation to commit a transgression against God; the great Ruler Himself assuredly would neither gratify a sovereign of men or a prince of fallen angels, for any cause, public or private, important or insignificant, with any such indulgence.

If a license is to be conferred on any one to marry his first cousin, confine it to no crowned owner of a nation’s womanly charms, whose love would be welcomed in almost every cottage, mansion, and palace in his own land, and in a dozen other states and kingdoms. Let the dispensation reach the sons of obscurity, whose sources of enjoyment are so few. Denied of everything but sunlight, liberty, and grinding toil; if it is not a sin, let them have the light of LOVE; which, next to religion, is the brightest sun, whose dazzling rays have scattered floods of hope over human hearts and homes; even should that light come from the cherished affection of a first cousin.

The tenth chapter of this decree prohibits marriage from the Advent to the Epiphany, and from Ash Wednesday till the octave of Easter.

*The Catechism of the Council of Trent on Marriage.*

Quotation from question two, chapter eight, and part the second: "It is called matrimony because the female ought chiefly to marry that she may become a mother; or because to a mother it belongs to conceive, bring forth, and educate her offspring."

From the third question: "Those who are united in the fourth degree of kindred, a boy before his fourteenth year and a girl before her twelfth, ages which have been appointed by the laws, cannot be fit to enter upon the just engagements (of marriage)."

*The Mission Book on Marriage Preparations.*

"Parents who love their children will never allow them (those who are engaged) to associate freely together, out of their presence, and least of all when they are already promised to each other. All secret interviews, lonely walks, and every familiarity, contrary to Christian decorum, ought to be prohibited."

"Never let it be forgotten that marriage is a sacrament, and must be received in a state of grace . . . to avoid committing a sacrilege, and also to deserve more fully the blessing of God upon their union, the parties affianced ought to purify their hearts by a good confession, and on the very morning of their marriage receive the holy communion. It is sometimes advisable to make even a general confession, or at least a review of several years, either to remedy the errors of a past sensual life, or in order to enter with more thorough and perfect dispositions into a state so new and responsible."

*Impediments to Marriage which annul it when contracted.*

"Marriage is forbidden between third cousins or any nearer degree of kindred: and this impediment exists when the relationship arises from an illegitimate birth."

"It is forbidden to marry the *third cousin* or any nearer relation of *one's former husband or wife*."

"Spiritual affinity is a species of relationship contracted by means of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. For this reason, parents cannot marry with the sponsors of their child or with any person who baptized it; nor can sponsors marry with their god-children. So, if one baptizes the child of another, even although it were a case of necessity, he cannot afterwards marry either with the child or its parent."

"DIFFERENCES OF RELIGION MAKE A MARRIAGE NULL AND VOID BETWEEN A BAPTIZED PERSON AND ONE WHO HAS NEVER BEEN BAPTIZED."

"All persons who have made solemn vows of chastity, by entering into some

religious order, are incapable of contracting marriage; and so are all orders of the clergy, beginning with sub-deacons and upwards."

"Marriages contracted without the presence of the parish priest and of two witnesses, *are made null and void*" by the Council of Trent. In the United States, however, where the decree of the Council has not yet been published, those marriages, although sinful, are valid. ("The Council has been published in St. Louis, New Orleans and Detroit. In these dioceses, therefore, clandestine marriages are invalid," that is, without the presence of a priest.)

"It is a most wicked and detestable thing that Catholics should ever so far forget all dictates of faith and piety, as to be coupled like heathen before a civil magistrate, and EVEN SOMETIMES BEFORE A HERETIC PREACHER, IN CONTEMPT OF THE CHURCH OF GOD AND OF THE SANCTITY OF THIS SACRAMENT."

"The bond of a previous marriage is an impediment which death only can remove. .... For certain just causes, especially for adultery, they may live separately, but they are still married, and cannot marry again. If, after such a separation, or after a divorce granted by the law of the land, either party should marry another person, it would be no true marriage before God, but an adultery."

*Prohibitory Impediments which involve Guilt in a Marriage, but do not Annul it.*

"MIXED MARRIAGES ARE FORBIDDEN, VIZ., THE UNION OF CATHOLICS WITH HERETICS AND PERSONS EXCOMMUNICATED BY THE CHURCH..... When some grave reason exists, and the danger of perversion is removed, a dispensation may be obtained which will make such a marriage LAWFUL. No VALID dispensation, however, can be given, unless upon dishonorable conditions."

ON WHAT TERMS A PROTESTANT MAY MARRY A CATHOLIC WITH THE APPROBATION OF THE CHURCH.

"First, it must be mutually agreed that the Catholic husband or wife shall enjoy a perfect liberty in the exercise of the Catholic religion; secondly, That ALL THE CHILDREN SHALL BE EDUCATED IN THE CATHOLIC FAITH; thirdly, Besides this, the Catholic party must promise to seek the conversion of the other by prayer, a good example, and OTHER PRUDENT MEANS. When a dispensation has been obtained upon these conditions, the marriage may take place without sin (not, however, without disgrace); but still it must not be supposed that such UNNATURAL UNIONS are approved of by the Church, She only permits them reluctantly and MOURNFULLY. She forbids them to be celebrated within church-walls, or to receive the solemn benediction of the priest."

The ordinary form of uniting in marriage in the Catholic Church requires the young couple to approach the altar, when the priest, habited in a surplice and white stole, and assisted by the clerk, who carries the book and a vessel of holy water, meets them; he then asks them the usual questions, and receiving an affirmative reply, he orders them to join their right hands, over which he throws one end of his stole, saying: "I join you together in

matrimony, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." He then sprinkles holy water upon them both; after which he blesses the nuptial ring in these words: "Bless, O Lord, this ring which we bless in thy name, that she, who wears it, may preserve entire fidelity to her husband, may continue in peace and in obedience to thy holy will, and live always in the exercise of mutual charity, through Christ our Lord. Amen." The priest sprinkles the ring with holy water in the form of a cross, and hands it to the bridegroom, who puts it on the ring-finger of the bride, while the priest says: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The married couple kneel, while a nuptial blessing is pronounced.

There is a particular mass for marriage, with an epistle and gospel of its own. Such is the sacrament of marriage in the Church of Rome.

Continued in [XVI. The Celibacy of the Clergy](#)

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- [I. The Ancient British Church](#)
- [II. The Ancient Irish Church](#)
- [III. The Ancient Scottish Church](#)
- [IV. Councils For Seven Centuries Repudiate Papal Jurisdiction](#)
- [V. Christendom at the Beginning of the Seventh Century](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 1](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 2](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 1](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 2. Pope Innocent III Abolishes the Magna Carta](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 3. The Excommunication of Queen Elizabeth](#)
- [VIII. The Council of Trent](#)
- [IX. Baptism](#)
- [X. Confirmation](#)
- [XI. The Lord's Supper, The Eucharist, The Mass](#)
- [XII. The Confessional](#)
- [XIII. Extreme Unction](#)
- [XIV. The Sacrament of Orders](#)
- [XV. Marriage](#)
- [XVI. The Celibacy of the Clergy](#)