The Sacrament Of Marriage: Pursuing Sanctity As A Relational Being

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THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE:

PURSUING SANCTITY AS

A RELATIONAL BEING

by

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the requirements for the degree of

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“Father, you have made the union of man and woman so holy a mystery that it symbolizes the marriage of Christ and His Church...”

~ The Rite of Marriage

The Church takes notice of the beautiful mystery of love in marriage by recognizing it among the realm of its Sacraments. Marriage is understood to be a vocation worthy of acknowledgement by the Church as it draws one into the experience of the divine. However, the concept of Marriage presents a particular problematic. The very nature of marriage has often been misunderstood on account of an assortment of interpretations and cultural norms concerning marriage. The visible “sign” of marriage is oftentimes defined by various misconceptions, societal definitions and personal projections of what a marriage ought to be. The challenge of understanding marriage stems from the influences that interfere with the relationship’s potential to be consistent with the very “humanness” of persons. The Second Vatican Council recognized the dangers facing the understanding of marriage and stated:

The Purpose of the Sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also instruct . . . . With the passage of time, however, there have crept into the rites of the Sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose less clear to
the people of today; and hence to that extent the need arises to adjust certain aspects of these rites to the requirements of our time.¹

The reality of the sacrament draws one to the dynamic of marriage which points to the inherent truth of being fully human. Persons find clarity in the relationship of marriage as a sacrament. This takes place within the framework of theological anthropology, understanding the human persons as social beings dependent on relationships to develop their fullest potential as beings made in the Image and Likeness of God.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the sacrament of marriage as rooted in the development of the human person and the concept of otherness and reciprocity. This theological anthropology portrays marriage in light of the human person’s response to the ‘other’.* Furthermore, it depicts the Christian life as the pursuit of the otherness of God which is approached only through the emptying of oneself in order to be open to the remarkable presence of God and the ability of the human person to reflect that presence.

In focusing on the anthropological perspective of marriage, I portray marriage as consistent with the Image and Likeness of God reflected by the human person in pursuit of true personhood. Anthropology deals with a compelling focus on the individual’s growth towards what it means to be the ultimate version of humanity. This ultimate version of the human being with the capacity to reflect God’s Image and Likeness is viewed by the Church as that which is reached in salvation. With this focus on the development of the human person, the application of anthropology assists with the


* The ‘other’ is a philosophical term making reference to individuals in recognition of their alterity as understood by contemporary philosophers such as Emanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Michael Scanlon, John Caputo, and David Wood.
theological explanation of personhood. The individual is understood to be in need of relationships to reach this potential which is not possible through development as an isolated being with no connection to others. Because theology offers respite in the face of questioning personhood, the Church continues to harbor insight for the pursuit of one’s true humanity. The Church seeks to draw individuals towards full unity with God. This unity becomes a pivotal reality of Church and personhood.

This thesis examines the dynamic of salvation which exists in the very nature of Matrimony through the living commitment of spouses and the act of pouring themselves out as a response to the other. Matrimony allows for God to enter in as the couple is emptied of self-concern. In placing their focus beyond themselves, it allows for a state of openness to exist within the individual, allowing one to be drawn closer to God. It is this particular element of marriage which moves the Church to count Matrimony among the Sacraments as a sign of the Sacred which draws one to experience the Divine.

Chapter One: The Christianization of Marriage

Marriage as a sacrament originated from the secular practice of marriage. It became a part of Christian praxis as a result of the cultural influences moving towards its incorporation into the Christian realm. As Christianity sought to influence the cultures it encountered there were two which predominantly influenced the other cultures of that time. The two particular cultures that were intertwined with Christianity were the Roman and the Jewish people. Unlike the Romans, who practiced a polytheistic religion, the Jewish people practiced a monotheistic religion in which they had a covenantal
relationship with God. These two cultures had two very distinct understandings of how a marriage was consummated and consequently how that marriage would then "end."

The Romans had an established order as the dominant government and social rule at the time of Christ's death. As the spread of Christianity took place around 40 A.D. and permeated the civilized world even beyond the Roman Empire, the Christian lifestyle met with conflict on account of the varying practices of marriage and motivations for enacting marriages. Marriage did not always contain the sacramental nature that marriage as a Christian practice carries today. For the Romans, the civil practice of marriage served as a way to bring some stability to the culture and economic structure of the time. While the Roman praxis of marriage was the most common throughout the cultures not all of the essential concepts concerning the consummation for marriage were in correlation from one culture to the next. The various motivations behind the establishments of marriage in other cultures contained within the Roman Empire were practiced differently and subsequently the validations for a marriage to be enacted varied as well. Each territory that had come within Roman control had been allowed to keep their cultural practices so they generally held to their own concepts of marriage. This lack of consistency among cultures resulted in confusion over the issue of divorce, as the Church Fathers* sought to find some unison in teaching a Christian perspective on divorce. The Church Fathers struggled to find a common ground for placing restraint on the practice of divorce and allowing divorce in particular circumstances.

In order to address the question of divorce, Christian leaders began to look at the point of consummation for a marriage so that they could then decipher where cause for

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*Church Fathers include figures such as St. Basil, St. Ambrose, Origen, Justin Martyr and Clemens of Alexandria.
divorce would not contradict the Christian understanding of divorce as an evil to be avoided. Roman customs for marriage included a celebration of the union and the consummation of the marriage by the consent of the individuals. Roman conditions for a valid marriage were that individuals had reached the age of puberty, were free from an impediment of relationship, and that there was a mutual and voluntary agreement of the individuals entering into marriage. Thus, consent was the primary indicator of the actualization of marriage in the Roman practice.

According to Roman law, a marriage was made by the agreement of the spouses themselves or the consent of those who held power over them, such as their parent or guardian. When war became a dominant part of Roman lifestyle, it became common for parents to no longer offer consent on behalf of their offspring. Since intention and consent of the individuals were cause for the validation of marriage, it was presumed that cause for a divorce would require that the intention or consent were no longer present. With “consent” and “intention” existing as the mere cause for the existence of a Roman marriage, the lack of consent at any point in the relationship between individuals would consequently be sufficient cause for obtaining a divorce. Furthermore, “Roman law merely applied and appealed to certain principles and maxims regarding marriage when it was necessary to determine whether or not a man and his female partner were in fact married or as to what point they had become married.” For the Romans, marriage was understood to benefit society and bring about clarity in the Roman world so as to ensure legitimate heirs and protect the parents from false claims to their property.

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5 Philip Reynolds, Marriage in the Western Church (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 7.
provided a basis for order in the household which in turn reflected the order of the empire based on status, honor, and shame. Justinian, a Roman historian in Sixth Century, presents a view of marriage in his provisions of the law, providing a definition of secular marriage as "a union between a man and a woman 'involving a single, shared way of life.'" Evidently, the Romans viewed divorce as a normal part of life resulting from the removal of consent and the intention of individuals. This eventually led to conflict with the Christian concept of marriage and notion of divorce. Many Christians had converted from the Roman religion and were influenced by their Roman roots, but the Roman concept of divorce was in direct conflict with the Jewish concept. It became difficult for those Christians to adapt the Jewish practices that were influencing Christianity as the root culture from which Christianity had stemmed.

The Jewish practice of marriage was less focused on the consent of individuals and held the view that marriage was primarily enacted through the faithfulness of spouses. The meaning contained in marriage for the Jewish people was not only that it is an outward expression of the loving union existing between a man and a woman, but it is primarily an outward sign that reveals an image of the lasting (faithful), life giving love of God in a tangible way. Fidelity was essential to constituting a marriage; the marriage was believed to be dissolvable if a woman committed adultery and was unfaithful to her husband. The same practice of divorce did not apply to the case of the unfaithful husband. His unfaithfulness did not necessarily merit a right to divorce for a Jewish

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woman. This seemingly imbalanced right to divorce can be understood in the role that women faced as they possessed very few legal rights, at that time. Marriage, for women, meant they became transferrable property from the possession of their father to the possession of their husband. With this in mind, it would have been an inconsistency in the law to allow a woman to have a right to divorce a man for adultery because, in essence, she did not possess a right to that loyalty.

The Jewish people viewed the easy transition of Romans from being married to being divorced as a contradiction of their lifestyle and teachings about divorce. They viewed divorce as a consequence for unfaithfulness. The diverse views held by the two cultures striving to follow a Christian lifestyle reached conflict on the issue of divorce. The dissension among the Christian people required the Church leaders to then adapt the matter as one falling under their authority. Thus, the practice of marriage fell within the realm of Christian morality. As such, marriage became a matter to be explored by the Church and to be developed within the Christian understanding of the human person and holiness. As Church Fathers queried to find a Christian basis for the practice of marriage, they scrutinized the practices of Judaism from which Christianity had stemmed. This focus led to a particular regard of Hebrew Scriptures. The Church then began to integrate the secular praxis of marriage with the Scriptural understanding of marriage which influenced the Jewish practice of marriage. Hence, marriage began to be intertwined with an experience of the sacred presence of God in the world. When individuals committed to each other it was viewed as a sign of the deeper reality of humanity’s relationship with God. The Church Fathers discovered clarity to influence the practice of marriage and

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divorce for Christians as they sought to reflect the scriptural understanding of marriage and divorce. It brought the Roman and Jewish understanding of marriage to a point of agreement and allowed for the development of marriage as a sacrament. Today, the Church can still draw upon the Jewish understanding of the human person through the insights concerning humanity offered by Jewish philosophers.

Chapter Two: Marriage as Sacrament

Marriage received clarification as a Sacrament in response to the differences of opinion put forward by the Protestants in the 12th Century. The Protestants believed marriage to be contrary to the Christian pursuit of holiness, and they interpreted St. Augustine's teachings on human sexuality as a declaration of the sinfulness of sexuality even within the practice of marriage. In response to this Protestant perspective on marriage, the Church counted marriage among the sacraments of the Church. It declared the sacredness of marriage as a Christian practice consistent with the pursuit of holiness. The Church then faced the challenge of developing a theology to expound their reasons for counting marriage among the sacred practices falling within the sphere of a Sacrament. The Church began exploring the mystery of their decision which had asserted the civil practice of marriage possessed sacramental value. In this search was discovered Marriages inherent sacramental nature.

The process of recognizing Matrimony's true nature was rooted in the Church's long-standing attitude towards the sacredness of marriage reinforced through the scriptural portrayal of marriage. As a Sacrament, Marriage required a theology to support that which had stemmed from cultural adaptation. Sexual attraction and erotic desire
within the context of marriage possess sacramental value and are often used as a metaphor for God’s love.* The “nuptial liturgy” reflects the understanding of marriage as sacramental as the love of the couple being a reflection of God’s love. This liturgy states that “Love is our origin, love is our constant calling, Love is our fulfillment in heaven. The Love of man and women is made holy in the Sacrament of Matrimony and becomes the mirror of your [God’s] everlasting love.” This perspective on marriage understands marriage to clearly possess sacramental elements, and further examination of the sacrament points to the very dynamic of marriage being sacrament. Thus a theology of marriage was developed from the very essence of love that exists between a man and woman to commit oneself to that love for an entire lifetime.

When a theology is developed it often rests upon the strengths of philosophy to supply critical grounds for the elusive truth held within the sacred mystery. For example, the theology developed by St. Augustine hinged on the philosophy of Plato, and the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas pivots on the philosophy of Aristotle. St. Augustine’s understanding of marriage was influenced by his understanding of Plato’s philosophy which pointed to the physical aspects of the human person as that which limits one’s attainment of perfection. St. Augustine promoted the rejection of that which is physical, including submissiveness to sexuality, in order to seek after perfection and to live in

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* God’s Love “which is intrinsically perfectly free from desire and need, objectively seeks the response of the creature’s love. [. . .] Gods’ love for the world must not be regarded as a natural, necessary movement towards the creature, otherwise God will appear to be an indigent and dependent being. [. . .] the recognition of God in his essence as love, independently of the world, leads to the assumption that there are personal relations within God, which constitute the mystery of the Trinity. (Karl Rahner, Ed. Encyclopedia of Theology, London: Burns and Oates), 263.

pursuit of heaven. On the other hand, he did argue for the sexuality in marriage as being acceptable on account of the three "goods" of marriage. He placed value on marriage as much as it provided offspring, mutual love and faithfulness, and was a sacramental sign as explained in the Bible. Aquinas utilized Aristotle's philosophy to incorporate marriage into a complete Christian understanding of humanity. Within the confines of marriage the three "goods" of sexuality took on meaning that integrated the spouses' relationship with the humanness which oriented them towards God. His theology was able to have a profound influence amongst the confusion of the Middle Ages but as secularism permeated the culture, much of the value attributed to marriage was challenged. It was within this period of history that marriage was declared a sacrament to assert its sacred nature. The theology supporting the sacramental nature of marriage then required a philosophy to draw upon, in order to make the sacred reality of marriage known.

As the theology of a sacrament evolves it is supported by philosophies which disclose the sacred reality inherent to the very nature of the sacrament. The Sacrament of Matrimony is supported by theologians of the Church, who look to the philosophical works of individuals such as Immanuel Kant and Edward Westermarck. In understanding the sacramentality of marriage, the works of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber are examined here to provide a philosophy that may be attributed to marriage as well. The philosopher Emanuel Levinas expresses a philosophy that is extreme, but necessary, to understanding the giving of oneself to the other as a pathway to holiness. The philosopher

Martin Buber, whose philosophy serves to bring Levinas’ extremist views in check, emphasizes reciprocity in the relationship to attain a more precise mirroring of God.

Their philosophies do not specifically deal with the topic of marriage but rather with the individual person. Their reflections on the human individual and that individual’s relationship with God provide a compelling perspective. This perspective points toward marriage as the pinnacle of an individual’s call to be in the Image and Likeness of God as they embrace humanity in its fullness. These philosophies focus on the human person becoming that which God intended them to be at Creation. When they can simply be applied to an individual participating in Matrimony, they declare the holiness of that vocation as one which leads to holiness and thus makes the practice of marriage a Sacrament. Their philosophies lend support to the intricate detail given to the sacramental presence of grace and the sexuality of the human person, in the “re-turning” of sexuality to its intended meaning at creation, allowing for the overwhelming experience of grace through the mirroring of God’s love in covenant.
Chapter Three: Emanuel Levinas’ ‘Otherness’

Levinas’ emphasis, on the individuals embracing their humanity through the giving of oneself to the other, can be attributed to marriage; however, it becomes challenging to apply “the giving of oneself” in marriage as the cultural and societal views of marriage often distort the sacramental nature of marriage and lead one to misunderstand its meaning. Vigorous research done at the Mormon Brigham Young University by the Marriage Education Research Institute (MERI)* shows that, with the growing emphasis on individualism, the present day perspective on marriage has become one of egoistic fulfillment through a contractual agreement. A successful and happy marriage is based upon the assumption that human beings are primarily “driven by concern for self and congenitally seek the maximization of personal benefit.”12 Furthermore, the University’s findings showed; “Today marriage is understood mainly as a path to self-fulfillment. One’s own self-development is seen to require a significant other, and marital partners are picked primarily to be personal companions.”13 This contribution demonstrates the personal gain sought in pursuing and entering relationships. This perception stifles the development of individuals as they remain centered on themselves, contrary to the very meaning of marriage which is about relationship. This distorted view of purpose and meaning, in marriage, leads people to the

* The Marriage Education Research Institute was established by the Brigham Young University to conduct research to help people to develop and maintain healthy marriages and to reduce the poverty level as well. “Family Studies Center” http://familycenter.byu.edu/Sponsored%20Research/2008/MERI2008.dhtml (accessed February 29th, 2009).


13 Ibid, 3.
misconception that marriage is not a way to achieve sanctity and thus challenges the perception of marriage as being consistent with one’s quest to reach the fullness of their humanity. By seeking self-gain in marriage, people deny themselves the opportunity to develop in their humanity through the relationship; this is contrary to allowing them to give of themselves by focusing on the other in a context that nourishes that giving.

In striking contrast to the secular view of marriage that is promoted by society today, Emanuel Levinas presents a view of the human person as finding fulfillment in abandoning self in pursuit of the other. An individual disregards one’s own interests in the attempt to satisfy the needs of someone else. Emanuel Levinas was born in Lithuania on January 12th and was educated in the Jewish tradition by his Jewish family. He studied at Strasbourg University in 1924 where he was exposed to the French philosophy of Maurice Blanchot. He later attended Freiburg University in 1928 to study phenomenology under the direction of Edmund Husserl, and he was influenced by Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology, allowing him to view “experience” without the haze of prejudice and conceptualization. His focus on “the other” stemmed from this education in which the human person develops by virtue of consciousness as they are beheld in the eyes of the other. The encounter with the other calls for a dialogue between individuals

* Maurice Blanchot was born on September 22, 1907 into a Catholic French family. Blanchot had written an autobiography in which he presents the important aspects of his life in the perspective of encounters with friends: Emmanuel Levinas, Georges Bataille, René Char and Robert Antelme. His friendship with Levinas was the most enduring and influential of his friends even though he had been a student of Blanchot’s in 1925. Blanchot’s work, post-1945, often forms an implicit dialogue with that of Levinas, especially after the publication of Levinas’ Totality and Infinity in 1961. Timothy Clark. “Maurice Blanchot,” The Literary Encyclopedia (http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5175 accessed March 8, 2009)

* Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger are the two philosophers to whom phenomenology is credited.
which creates a sense of reciprocity, and Levinas then steps beyond Heidegger's and Husserl's phenomenology* to view philosophy as the “wisdom of love” rather than the “love of wisdom.” His philosophy developed through the adaptation of Heidegger's phenomenology which moved into the understanding of individuals through a series of the face-to-face encounters in which they participate in responding to the call of another. He portrays the creation story in light of relationship saying that “in the beginning was the human relation.”15 With this view of creation, Levinas achieves an inimitable way of describing the transcendence (or infinity) of persons. He focused on the transcendence of the other and the responsibilities due to the other.16 Levinas is a philosopher who develops an understanding of the human being in relation to the concept of otherness.

Levinas amplifies the essential pouring out of oneself in response to the needs of the other. Furthermore, it is by the very emptying of oneself that one is capable of being open to the life of God within them. Levinas reveals that it is through the act of giving that one embraces the image and likeness in which they were created: “True goodness is not possible without giving oneself away to something or someone in a real-concrete, ablative sense. This risky gift [of oneself] occurs in an eccentric movement without return to oneself. It is a movement to ‘something’ or ‘someone’: to ‘something’ or ‘someone’ by

* Husserl described phenomenology as the “certain kind of study of consciousness and its structures, the most basic of which is intentionality.” Heidegger went on to describe phenomenology as that which reveals the human person through essential structures of experience and not intentionality through understanding. Paul Gorner, “Understanding Phenomenology” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 506.


which the ‘self’ as much is transcended.”\textsuperscript{17} It is through the pouring out of oneself that an individual returns to the humanity for which they were created. It is through the emptying of oneself that God is able to enter in, while sustaining the soul in a restored relationship with God and others.

As one engages in the process of pouring out oneself, overcoming the self is key to the essence of otherness. Without overcoming oneself it is difficult to acknowledge the otherness of the one receiving because the act of giving could reduce the other to being simply a receiver or object of one’s giving. It is important then, to recognize the obligation already existing in oneself to give to the other which removes the element of objectification that giving could be projected on the receiver. “Rather than arising as an autonomous and independent monad, the self originates in the ethical obligation, in responsibility to and for the Other.”\textsuperscript{18} It is through the pre-existent obligation of one to give to the other which allows one to go beyond selfishness in giving, and it allows them to give with their sole focus on the needs of the other. Levinas stresses the importance of not seeking self-gratification through the act of giving to others. When someone is giving to others they often run the risk of giving in order to satisfy oneself rather than solely seeking to give for the sake of the other with no regard to self. According to the phenomenology that Levinas articulates, there is a prior attachment to the other before any contact, encounter or bond with the individual.\textsuperscript{19} He explains this through the call to relationship that exists by the very nature of humanity and the call to relationship with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Jeffrey Bloechl, \textit{Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 114.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 150.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Edwin E. Gantt and Stan J. Knapp, “The Ethics of Marriage: Contract, Commitment, and Covenant” (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2004), 14.
\end{itemize}
God that must be grasped at through relationships with humanity. In order for one to enter into deeper relationship with God, they must cultivate as relational sense of the person. On account of the very existence of this prior attachment, it is necessary to make a response that is not centered or rooted in one’s self. Rather, the self is required to overcome self even in the act of giving oneself to the other to enter deeply into the reality of response as a reflection of Gods image. If one seeks their own happiness in pursuit of otherness then true otherness and giving of self cannot be reached.

One must be responsive to the needs of the other rather than seeking out a need that they can fulfill. This understanding of the human person allows one to recognize their role in a marriage as well. Marriage becomes a relationship that allows for this responsiveness to be enacted in a way that exceeds everyday encounters with another. Levinas understands humanity to be more complete in their existence through their focus on the other. “To be, then, is for Levinas always already to be for-the-other, to be claimed by and accountable to and for the other, before the other.”20 One must give to the other out of their already existing call to relationship, in which they give solely to satisfy the need of the other. They are called to give responsively in such a way that their giving to the other does not make the need, which is satisfied, a part of the fulfillment of that need. In this way, “One must make certain that in giving to the other they do not reduce the other to the object of their giving.”21 If the other becomes the object to whom one is giving, then the other is reduced to become a part of the action that allows for the giver to become the subject, who gains through giving.


21 Ibid, 16.
In an effort to avoid objectifying others, one must recognize the “infinity” inherent to otherness. Infinity allows for an understanding of persons, concepts or God that goes beyond the human ability to grasp what is experienced. Because of the human limitations in understanding and seizing the fullness of experience or knowledge, infinity points to what is beyond the human understanding or possession. Thus, infinity is required as a means of truly responding to the other with appreciation for the transcendence of self, God and the other in order to go beyond the physical limitations. The acknowledgement of the other’s infinity allows one to go beyond the human limitations that would hinder giving without objectifying the other as the recipient of ones giving. This recognition of infinity is particularly necessary to marriage in which the spouses recognize the infinity of the spouse in the sexual encounter. With this understanding of the other, “The discovered does not lose its mystery in the discovery, the hidden is not disclosed, the night is not dispersed.” The infinity of the spouse is recognized and upheld in the other as the spouse encounters them, as other, free of risking objectification through self-gratification. According to Levinas, unless one recognizes that the self and the other are beyond the moment and the action, they risk causing the other to become the “object” of their response.

With his focus on the other, Levinasian philosophy may easily be applied to the sacrament of marriage. Marriage as a sacrament is not intended to allow one to use the other in to order further personal advancement and gratification. Rather, sacrament entails an aspect of the sacred that allows one to further their journey towards heaven. With this in mind, matrimony points to the sacred reality of otherness as one enters into a

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relationship that focuses on the good of the other. The relationality that is reached in marriage is rooted in the relationality of humanity. The Marriage Education Research Center uses Levinas’ philosophy to indicate a healthy understanding of marriage, stating:

Rather than conceiving of marriage as merely a relational means to attaining fundamentally individual, self-defined and self-serving ends, the Levinasian perspective proposes: (1) that all human relationships are primordially ethical relationships in which the self is constituted by its infinite obligation to the responsibility for the other, and (2) that marriage and family are two of the most profound ways in which we are able to respond to the call of the Other and take upon ourselves the ethical burdens of genuine social life. [. . .] We are all answerable to and for the other, constituted by an infinitely binding obligation that we have neither chosen nor can escape. 23

Although this philosophy is being applied to the Mormon concept of marriage, it is appropriate to apply this philosophy as a fundamental explanation for the sacramentality of marriage as well, since it describes marriage as a vocation consistent with the pursuit of heaven. The Church provides and to promote sacraments which “In themselves, that is as encounters with Christ, they [the sacraments] are fruitful: they communicate God’s grace and change people’s lives.” 24 Marriage easily falls within the realm of sacrament when the human need for relationship is understood.

Alain Finkielkraut, a 20th century philosopher, particularly devoted to the philosophy of Levinas, applied Levinas’ understanding of the human person directly to

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the relationship of individuals in marriage and to human sexuality. He makes a
correlation between Levinas’ phenomenology and *eros* which is a passionate desire for
another. Finkielkraut portrays how Levinas would explain this kind of encounter as one
in which the alterity of the other becomes visible in its untainted form. The recognition of
otherness gives *eros* meaning that suggests the pursuit of the divine through the
encounter with the other. For Finkielkraut, “sexual passion puts one in contact with the
abstraction of the face. An ethical dimension derives from Levinas’ phenomenological
analysis of eroticism by preventing sexual encounter from resulting in a Hegelian
*master/slave* dialectic or a Buberian *I-It* relation where the other is degraded to an object
of pleasure.” In response to the other, one does not seek personal gain in sexual
encounter so that the other does not become the object to which one gives but remains
free of the risks of being objectified.

Levinas offers a philosophy that strongly supports the sacramentality of marriage;
however, in consideration with the theology concerning marriage, he falls short in some
aspects. There are five particular ways in which the sacrament of matrimony leads one to
deeper relationship with God and serves as a means by which one attains salvation. In his
essay on marriage as a call of God, William Roberts, a theologian who focuses on
marriage, identifies five sacramental aspects of marriage: it incorporates Trinitarian Love,
echoes the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, reflects the Body of Christ and the
Church, imitates the Eucharistic community, and participates in continuing Christ’s


26 *The Wisdom of Love, Alain Finkielkraut*, 6

27 *The Wisdom of Love, Alain Finkielkraut*, 7
mission and awareness of the Kingdom of God. The call to serve God can be fully realized and acted out in the vocation of sacramental married life. A deeper understanding of relationship than that of Levinas is required to allow for the relationship of marriage to be grasped as that which inherently possesses a sacred nature, existing through ones call to relationship.

In dealing with Levinas' philosophy Rudolph Bernet, professor of the Institute of Philosophy, Husserl-Archives Leuven: the International Centre of Phenomenological Research, also explores the implications of giving oneself as response with no regard to self. Levinas explains the unconditional giving of oneself as that which allows one to embrace the fullness of their humanity; however, the concept of response is challenged as it edges towards assuming a lack of freedom on the part of the self to not respond. “Given that their own self is inextricably linked with that which does not belong to the self, they would indeed, together with the forgetting of self, forget as well all the other people and the entire world. In doing this, they would surrender their own humanity.”

The very act of overcoming self has potential to damage one's own worth if not preserved by the acknowledgement of their own infinity as well as the infinity of the other. One must be aware of self, to some extent, in order to give of themselves for the sake of the other. “Without accepting oneself, one cannot accept others, and without accepting others one cannot accept oneself. This is not easy. Still, this shared endeavor – which is also called love – leads to an experience of self as a gift.” The beauty of this encounter allows for one to truly embrace the relationality of their humanness. It is the

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29 Ibid, 93.
call to love that requires a response from an individual. The call to love does not interfere with the freedom of the self to give. "In love, this gift of self by the other is experienced as an invitation to lose oneself for the other. Instead of fearing self-loss, the beloved lover is happy to share the burden of his or her own self with the other. The self which he or she gains has lost its unbearable weight." \(^{30}\) The "burden" of giving is no longer an impediment to freedom but rather extends an invitation to encounter the other in a way which enables the self to develop as well. As the other receives from the self, who gives for the sake of the other rather than of the self, an individual receives the sacrificial love. This sacrificial love does not remove one's freedom but rather engages it in the act of sacrifice.

Finkielkraut augments the teachings of Levinas as restricting one's freedom on account of the responsibility to respond. Finkielkraut says; "The existence of the other's vulnerable naked face within the Levinasian analysis calls one to responsibility. While for Martin Buber\(^*\) the I-Thou relationship is symmetrical, in Levinas the I-Thou relationship is asymmetrical, for the other takes priority over one's own self." \(^{31}\) As Levinas focuses on the necessity of seeking the other for the other's sake, there is something found lacking which is pointed out by Finkielkraut as the asymmetrical relationship. This lopsided relationship seems to lack the desired balance often sought in dealing with the humanness of individual's, since extremes often leave havoc in their wake. The lack of reciprocity suggests a relationship that fails to symbolize the


\(^*\) Buber is to be discussed later in this thesis.

\(^{31}\) Alain Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love* ( ), 1.
relationship of Christ with His Church and falls short of mirroring Divine love. The life of the Church is found in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This presence suggests reciprocity between the Church and Christ in a relationship that requires a responsive Love from each. Divine love is understood within the context of the relationship of the Persons in the Trinity. The love is reciprocated between these Persons to such an extent that God must be understood as being in relation and is best described using the analogy of Love.
Chapter Four: Martin Buber’s ‘I – Thou’

As a way of balancing the extreme philosophy of Levinas, Martin Buber upholds a reciprocal relationship between individuals. Martin Buber was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a Jewish family in 1878, and he was educated within the Jewish tradition by his grandparents. He was a strong supporter of education, taking particular interest in words and their meanings. His attraction to social philosophy and the concept of dialogue led him to adapt a lifestyle conducive to writing and lecturing. He was a prolific writer whose influence was strong and widely sought. Amidst the chaos of World War I, young men wrote to him seeking direction in their moral, religious, and political uncertainties. His responses to these men were looked to as an authority and often surpassed the popular ideals of the day.32 Buber is particularly known for his work on the ‘I-thou’ relationship of the human to others.

Like Levinas, Buber upholds an understanding of man as a relational being. Buber understands the human person as being so intertwined with the existence of those around him that the human person cannot be understood without understanding the relationship held with others. He criticizes the historical perspectives that would seek to observe man by himself without his connection to things, persons, communities, and God. By viewing man void of the mystery that transcends himself, he is negated by the lack of understanding him within the context of his relationships with others. Buber believes, “Philosophical theories of man have been abstract because they have neglected one or more of his essential relations or have divided him into warring parts.”33 By placing man

32 “Martin Buber,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (01-25-09)
33 George F. Thomas, Between Man and Man by Martin Buber. 83.
in isolation from relationality, one fails to understand the context which is consistent with humanity.

Buber reveals that the human person becomes more fully human as he develops in relationship with others. Buber asserts that "Man becomes a real person only when he ‘breaks through’ the confines of the self in its monologue with itself and enters into a living relation with another. He can do so only if he ‘turns towards’ the other instead of withdrawing in reserve from him."\(^{34}\) The *turning towards* the ‘other’ reflects the turning away from God that occurred in the garden with the first sin and in the proceeding sins committed by humanity. This *turning towards* allows for the individual to be open to God in a way that restores true humanity. This *turning towards* also draws human sexuality to the restored purpose and meaning that had been damaged by man’s turning away from God. Buber states that this *turning towards* requires action rather than passivity. One cannot turn towards God without actively encountering God and others. Buber emphasizes the active participation in encounter as he augments "I must cease being an observer and ‘become aware,’ I must ‘open myself’ to them [others]. This is the meaning of ‘responsibility.’ ‘Genuine responsibility exists only where there is responding.”\(^{35}\) Buber draws attention to the significance of response as one encounters another and this response requires one to take action.

Buber focused on the ‘I-thou’ relationship which refers to the person as ‘thou’ and differs from an ‘I-it’ relationship which points to an encounter between a subject and an object. An ‘I-thou’ relationship does not require a structure or the particular conveyance of information. The ‘I-thou’ relationship possesses freedom from the necessity for proof

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\(^{34}\) George F. Thomas, *Between Man and Man by Martin Buber*. 82

\(^{35}\) George F. Thomas, *Between Man and Man by Martin Buber*. 82
of an event in which an encounter occurs, but it is nevertheless very real and recognizable. He often refers to the real encounter with the 'I' and the 'thou' as a dialogue, in which both encounter the other. This dialogue directs one to deal with movement towards the other to bring a particular "power, or energy, to discriminate and to pursue it, to unify and to embody it."³⁶ For Buber, an encounter with the other calls for a disposition by which one is active in the encounter, "confronting it and freely integrating it according to its intrinsic value into the totality of one's self, 'becoming creative in it, and creating reality in it.'³⁷ One key to the 'I-thou' relationship that Buber distinguishes is that which can exist between a human being and God:

Just as the eternal source of art is 'a man faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work,' so in the sustaining source of an I-Thou relationship, the artist must yield to the no need for exclusiveness, for sacrifice, to the realization that, in its concrete uniqueness, 'the work does not suffer [him] . . . to turn aside and relax in the world of It; but it commands.' It must be treated as a 'Thou,' and if he does not serve it aright it is broken, or it breaks him.³⁸ Buber argued that this is the only way in which it is possible to interact with God, and that an 'I-thou' relationship with anything or anyone connects in some way with the eternal relation to God.

Buber asserts that the 'I-Thou' relationship which seeks God as the Thou is simply reached through the very encounters one has with the other. However, the 'I-thou' relationship with God is not to be pursued but brought about through an openness to such

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a relationship. This openness is nourished through the ‘I-thou’ relationships with other humans and should not be pursued on account of the conditions that would exist in the case of pursuit. If a person is to pursue a relationship to fulfill a condition to allow for God to come to them, they risk objectifying the person with whom they seek a relationship. Thus, it is important to not allow a relationship to become an ‘I-it’ relationship which does not promote openness to God. If the relationship is based upon particular conditions it becomes reduced to what Buber calls an ‘I-it’ relationship in which the other becomes an object that simply satisfies those conditions.

Moralists point out that there is a piercing difference between persons and things and that treating a person as though they were a thing is morally wrong. Buber’s I-thou linguistics are often used to explicate the distinction of relationships that are morally good or evil.39 Maurice Friedman, recipient of the Jewish National Book Award for his biography on Martin Buber and Professor of Religious Studies and Philosophy, applies Buber to misconceptions people often have of relationships. He says, “It is all too easy, and sometimes necessary, to treat even our fellowmen as ‘things’ rather than as ‘persons.’ But this is to do violence to the true nature of the personal, and to diminish both I and Thou who reach full stature only in I-Thou relation [. . .] ‘He who goes out with his whole being to meet his Thou and carries to it all being that is in the world, finds Him who cannot be sought.’40 Therefore, it becomes essential that a person gives of themselves in relationship to the extent that the relationship does not become an ‘I-it’ relationship but rather an ‘I-thou’ relationship which leads to the development of a relationship with God.

40 Paul E. Pfuetze, The Life of Dialogue, 657
Buber emphasizes that it is by being open to the ‘I-thou’ that God will eventually come to you. By opening oneself up to the ‘other’ one synonymously opens the self up to God by the very act of being open. George F. Thomas, who explored the meaning of Buber’s philosophy, points out that “To Kierkegaard who says that man must give himself wholly to God at the cost of all other attachments, he [Buber] replies that the way to God is through His Creation and that He does not require a love for Himself that excludes His creation.”

Buber states that man is to embrace the other in order to open up for a relationship with God. Therefore, in being open to the ‘other’ in marriage one can be drawn closer to God through openness and love for the other. Buber asserts that “Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow-creature, by means of them and with them find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of all lives in whom all life is fulfilled.”

Buber points out that a person has been created to be in relationship; consequently, one cannot seek to be in relationship with God unless they acknowledge the relationality to which they are called.

When an individual has been able to pursue a relationship which is free of conditions and acknowledges the other as a ‘thou’ rather than an ‘it’, they promote a disposition that allows God to be a part of their lives and relationships. Having established an ‘I-thou’ relationship with others and recognizing the place that God holds in their lives allows an individual to hold others to a particular responsibility in relationship and community as well. Since an individual must acknowledge the existence of the ‘I-thou’ relationship, the encounter of the other in this relationship allows one to experience God in a related manner.

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41 George F. Thomas. Between Man and Man by Martin Buber. 83.
42 George F. Thomas. Between Man and Man by Martin Buber. 83.
Buber points out that being in relationship does not mean that one possesses something of the other, or that the other possesses something of the self. Rather, the very recognition of one’s own transcendence, as well as the other’s transcendence, allows for deeper relationship with the other. At the same time, the dialogue of these two beings implies that “our desire to please and serve should be driven by the needs of others, not by selfish ulterior motives. We should serve others for the sake of service rather than for personal gain.” 43 As this service transcends not only the self but also the other to whom the service is being done, it allows for a reciprocal relationship between the ‘I-Thou’ to exist. It is this transcendence of individuals that allows for them to be in relationship without a loss of self and without being in command of the other. Furthermore, in recognizing the transcendence of the “thou” in relationship to the ‘I,’ one asserts the reality that the other is not encompassed by the perception and knowledge of the other. For example, Buber articulates that “You has no borders – the transcendence of the other is emphasized in the you – one does not possess something rather they possess nothing and are in relation.” 44 Simply being in relationship maintains the otherness of each individual. The ‘I’ and ‘thou’ cannot possess the other without interfering with the very nature of the relationship.

It is fundamentally the recognition of each person existing beyond the perception and relationship with the other, which allows people to maintain a relationship without objectifying the other or allowing oneself to be objectified. If one is to love the other entirely, an individual must be offering love to another being as a person and not as an ‘it’. Buber elucidates, “only the ‘I-you’ can be spoken with ones whole being” since it

requires a particular sense of transcendence in the other to acknowledge one's own transcendence in the act of giving.⁴⁵ Thus, through the spoken relationship between oneself and the other there is recognition of the individual’s otherness and one's ability to be in relationship with them. Buber states, “It is through the spoken You that one can acknowledge the unspoken You of a relationship.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, the ‘I’ and ‘thou’ exceeds the mere encounter with the other and recognizes the otherness that is not grasped or known in that particular encounter or even limited to that relationship. In view of otherness that is beyond grasp, “To be human is to be bonded together, each with our weaknesses and strengths, because we need each other. Weakness, recognized, accepted, and offered, is at the heart of belonging, so it is at the heart of communion with another.”⁴⁷ The needs of the other are those which bring about belonging in the essence of an individual, going beyond the simplicity of the one giving without a response from the other. This need is reciprocal and adequately brings about a knowledge and understanding of the other requiring a two-way process of knowing. This reciprocity is discovered in the relationship of marriage, where couples commit to the other, while acknowledging that the other will have a response to their love.

Buber points out that even with the recognition of the others’ transcendence, to be in relationship requires something from the other as well. Jean Vanier, who received a doctorate in philosophy and then devoted himself to the development of relationship, further points out that while requiring something from the other, “The mature heart

listens for what another’s heart is called to be.”

This openness to the other allows for a relationship to develop. Buber says, “In order for the “I” to speak of relationship with the “you” there must be an experience by which one comes to acknowledge the “you”. The ‘I-thou’ can only be spoken with one’s whole being, the ‘I’ cannot give without the ‘thou’ nor can the ‘thou’ accomplish a ‘thou-I’ relationship without the ‘I.’ According to Buber, “I require a you to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.”

After the encounter with the other, the “I” and the “thou” are in relation to each other and they are free to enter into deeper relationship. Vanier expounds upon the encounter of individuals saying;

> Everything that is human needs nourishment: the body, the mind, the memory, the imagination, and particularly, the heart. They must be nourished by encounters with other hearts that can lead us into other gardens of the life, into a new and deeper vulnerability, and into a new understanding of the universe, of God, of history, and of the beauty and depth of each and every human being.  

Buber, points out that the relationship between the “I” and the “thou” requires something of the self in order to be stronger.

> The “I” and “thou” take on a particular role in relation to the other, one in which they are required to care for the other in a particular way. Love carries with it a certain responsibility of the ‘I’ for the ‘thou’ and it is not a responsibility that consists of a mere feeling between lovers. Rather, love whether great or small, minutely participates in the

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love of Christ poured out for all on the cross.”  

As one enters into love, sacrifice is required of the ‘I,’ yet that sacrifice is required solely because of the relationship with the other. Vanier points out that it is for this reason that the heart suffices as the expression of love because it is at the center of humanity. He says, “We have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness, the centre of sentimentality and emotion, instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centeredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow.”

With this understanding of love it becomes clear that relationship is not contrary to humanity but rather it is fundamental to the human person. Relationship strengthens one to reach out to the other, and in a unique way, it empowers the individual with a stronger grasp on their humanity. With this in mind, Marriage increases ones human experience and enhances the fullness of their humanity. Through marriage, individuals can be drawn to God in a way which only a reciprocal relationship allows.

Understanding the human person through Levinas and then Buber, allows one to recognize the sacred reality existing in the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage. In viewing particular aspects that make a sacrament hold a sense of the sacred, one can see that there is a dynamic in marriage that allows it to be consistent with the very humanness of persons. This consistent pursuit of holiness is realized in the person’s portrayal of God’s presence in their life through the love they offer to others. Because of the aspect of marriage which calls forth a reciprocal love, married love parallels Trinitarian love more closely than most relationships.


52 Jean Vanier, Becoming Human (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 78.
Chapter Five: Marriage as a Reflection of God’s Image and the Church

In a special way, Marriage has the capacity to reflect the life of the Trinity. As people attempt to understand God through the limited capacity of human perspective, they find, revealed in scripture and tradition, the resounding claim that love best describes the elusive grasp on God. It is through the revelations made by God Himself that the human person gains an understanding of God as relational in the portrayal of a Trinitarian God. It is through this revelation, as well as the astounding personification of God in Jesus Christ, which the human person begins to take hold of the knowledge that love depicts a picture very accurately used as a metaphor for God.

As God is understood in terms of a being as relational, marriage in turn possesses a unique responsibility to reflect God to the world. Christopher West, a graduate of the John Paul II Institute, explores the depths of human sexuality and the call to love in order to reflect God to the world. He points out the incredible capacity of married love to reflect the mystery of God’s love, saying, “We are called to participate in the eternal “explosion” of love between the Father and the Son which is the Holy Spirit – a union of love that we cannot begin to fathom and the angels cannot even dimly see.”

This Trinitarian love is mirrored in the unique ability of a married couple to reflect the reciprocity of that love as well as its fruitfulness. With the unique call to mirror God’s love for the world, a married couple has a crucial role in particularly reflecting Christ’s love. St Paul demands “Husbands love your wives as Christ has loved the Church.” (Ephesians 5:22) Christ’s love was an agape love, a sacrificial love given for the good of the other and requiring nothing in return, only because humanity, in its fallen nature, fails

53 Christopher West, Heaven’s Song (Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2008), 119.
to reflect God in response to that love. The reciprocity is lacking as a result of humanity’s failure to be as God intended. In human brokenness, God healed humanity with agape love, but the love of the Trinity is not a love between broken and limited individuals. It is a perfect love of reciprocity as Christ’s love is meant to receive the response of love in humanity. Christ sacrificed so that humanity might participate in love, the sacrifice was a call to love Him. Human persons must reflect Christ’s love, but in order to reflect that love perfectly one must receive, for Christ still received the perfect love of the Father, and the sacrificial love of Christ was exemplified so that persons could return love to Christ. Even as he offered up Himself with selfless love for our sake, He desired a response of love.

Reciprocity becomes vital for a love that closely reflects Trinitarian love. The love between the Three Persons in the Trinity is “not one-way”, it is reciprocal. The love is life-giving and bears fruit. In the call to mirror God and to live as a humanity created in His image and likeness, one must essentially reflect Trinitarian love. Trinitarian love is a total giving of oneself but does not give without receiving love as well. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, there exists between two persons an incomparable openness to the Holy Spirit by the very nature of sacrament. The bond existing in marriage stems from the graces of Matrimony, which are imparted by the Holy Spirit and give life to the reality of the relationship. Often, when describing the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is understood to be the Love which exists between the Father and the Son, existing in such a powerful way that the Love takes on being (as the Holy Spirit). In a similar way, it is the Holy Spirit who acts as the bond between a woman and
a man; as such, the love of those individuals must be reciprocal in order to allow for the presence of the Holy Spirit as it is present in the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit works within the reciprocal giving of oneself to the other, dwelling in a powerful way through the relationship of the one individual to the other. Grace stems from the reciprocal giving of oneself to the other. The sacramentality lies within the very movement beyond oneself in response to the other. Grace is a gift received not only through the Sacraments but through the giving of oneself as well. In the act of giving, an individual is transformed to become an instrument by which God pours out His love for the other as well. Fr. Mark Lenneman, Chaplain at Carroll College, articulated this act, saying that the greatest spiritual reality is this: If you want to be truly happy, find a way to make a gift of yourself. In doing so, you become a part of the channel of grace, in which God pours Himself out through you as you give away that which God has given to you, His love.  

In bestowing a gift of self, the individual reflects not only Christ’s sacrifice on the cross but the empowering love of God at creation as well. It is the pain of overcoming self, in order to respond to the other, that enacts a moment of grace by which God is present through the love being shared. Living as a channel of grace is not limited to the moments of sacrifice but sacrifice does facilitate the presence of God in a particular way. It becomes evident that Grace does not come into existence on account of suffering, but suffering allows one to witness grace in “many facets and colors.” The reciprocal love exchanged between two individuals opens the realm of grace.

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The reciprocal love that exists between a man and a woman is particularly strong and compares to the concept of friendship which is easily understood to imply a reciprocal love existing between two individuals. Todd A Salzman, a theologian whose work specifically deals with the topic of marriage, reveals, “Aquinas claims that marriage between husband and wife is the greatest friendship possible for two human beings. And while non-Christians can share this friendship, it is the nature of spousal love, united in Christ through grace that distinguishes Christian marital friendship from non-Christian marital friendship.”56 Thus, friendship reaches its full potential in the sacrament of Matrimony and becomes indicative of the love that God intends for humanity to participate in. Despite the inherent reciprocity of marriage, friendship often displays reciprocity in a clear manner that is not mistaken. Evidently, friendship becomes a more decisive point of reciprocity than marriage. It is for this reason, that marriage is viewed in light of being the ultimate form of friendship.

Although a relationship is called to be reciprocal in order to mirror the relationship of the Trinity, the human person is also called to participate in the love that Christ displayed through His sacrifice on the Cross. By Christ’s death, humanity is “restored,” and original sin is removed enabling one to enter into “right-relationship” with God. Baptism is understood to be a “birth” into the restored spiritual life. With this in mind, Matrimony moves one towards the renewal of human sexuality, restoring it to the qualities God had intended at creation. With a renewal of humanity the restoration of

human love becomes necessary as all things once again possess the ability to magnify the essence of God. As humanity reflects God’s Love that love becomes life-giving, committed, lasting, beautiful, and a reflection of God’s likeness is restored and evidenced in sacramental love.

By dying to oneself, in order to give oneself to the other as a response to the otherness of the spouse, matrimony reflects Christ’s dying so that we might have life. A couple participates in the love of God. Through a greater understanding of sacrificial/selfless love one can come to a better understanding of Christ’s love. The sacrifices of Love strengthen ones understanding of Christ’s love and suffering by revealing the meaning of that pain. Scripture states that “God so loved the World that He gave His only son.” (John 16) Admittedly, Love gives meaning to the pain experienced by an individual. In the case of marriage, love draws the ‘other’ into the love held by the self, and the sacrifice of the self requires a response from the ‘other’ just as the self must respond to the love of the ‘other.’

Just as humanity is called to participate in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, they are invited to participate as members of Christ’s Church as well. The Church was established for the very salvation of the individuals participating in the particularly intimate relationship with Christ through Church. Jesus often refers to the Church as His Bride, making reference to the nurturing and reciprocating love that He possesses for the Church. Because the ‘life’ of the Church is found in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit reciprocates Love to Christ despite human shortcomings. In this way the human person participates in relationship as a member of Church which enables reciprocity to exist.
The family in turn acts as a “miniature Church” that reflects the greater institution of Church as a reality amongst the world. The sacrament of Matrimony also provides an intricate portrayal of Church, as a couple serves to model Christ’s relationship with the Church and family becomes essential to the concept of Church. The home is understood to be the domestic Church in which love is flowing between individuals and God is present in the relationships of one to the other. The family serves as a powerful image of what it means to be community and matrimony allows charity to be viewed in a unique way, portraying love in visible commitment and devotion to the other. Marriage provides a nurturing environment for love in the form of belonging as well. “Belonging, then, is part of being human. The first and primary belonging is in family, where we find life and acquire language, customs, culture, attitudes, and, in many ways, our psychological characteristics.”

Through the charity revealed in family, one can reach an understanding of how charity ought to be displayed by all Christians. A married couple embodies other virtues as well that are particularly apparent in their relationship with each other. As Father and Mother a couple also reflects the Church’s life of Grace. As the woman receives the love of her husband she responds in passing on the love through birth to children and bestowing love on them. The Church draws people to the love of God bestowing new life on them just as the mother gives “life” to a Child.

The Eucharistic community is centered on a sense of oneness that is reached through the sacrifice made by Christ and a partaking of the same Body. In community we become the “body of Christ” through His sacrifice of self so that we might receive that particular Grace or Love. As Christ gave of himself we are called to give of ourselves in

order to reflect that sacrifice and allow others to share in the love and life that we have to offer. We transcend ourselves as we seek to assist them in their needs and respond to them in a way that allows them to remain transcendent as well. We are called to echo Christ’s words, “This is my Body given up for you”(Luke 22:19) as we seek to embrace a response to others that puts aside self gain as we “give up” ourselves for the other. We enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ’s self-giving as we too give of ourselves for another’s sake alone.

As a member of the Eucharistic Community, one is called to announce the Kingdom of God as a present reality, in their living out of Faith and Love. Through the giving of oneself to the other in response to present needs one is able to participate in that kingdom. Participation in the eschatological mystery of the Kingdom takes place as individuals recognize their personal transcendence while admitting the transcendence of the other. The promise of love in the here and now takes place as individuals nourish relationships that seek the good of the other and reach completion in heaven. It is through this response that individuals give witness to Christ’s Love; words are not even necessary to convey an understanding of the Kingdom of God as their acts of love give expression to God’s Kingdom and God’s presence through grace.

As a sacrament Matrimony holds a significant place in the lives of Christians. The importance of marriage may be overlooked by those who miss its meaning and nature but marriage is a vocation to holiness as it calls one to embrace the relationship which leads to holiness. Clearly, there is a distinction between the mere praxis of marriage and the sacrament which enhances the already existing sacred reality of relational humanity.
Chapter Six: Biblical References to Marriage

In an effort to bring forth a sacred understanding of marriage the Church turned to the picture of marriage depicted by the scriptures. While turning to the Old Testament in which a Jewish understanding of marriage was portrayed, the Church Fathers focused particularly on the New Testament in order to decipher Christ’s teachings on marriage as well as the disciples’ teachings on marriage in the Gospels and letters to the Christians. The New Testament presented marriage in light of one’s relationship with God which was somewhat beyond the Jewish understanding of marriage in reference to God. The Old Testament portrays marriage in relation to God as a metaphor for the unfaithfulness and unloving response of the Israelites to God with their behavior reflecting that of a disloyal wife to a loving husband.

The New Testament compares the practice of marriage at that time as an example of Christ’s relationship with His Church which is a reciprocal one and differs from the Jewish understanding of marriage in this way. Paul emphasizes Christ’s relationship with the Church as a model for the relationship of the reciprocal love of a married couple, rather than the love of a husband for a wife who fails to return that love through her unfaithfulness. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, written during Paul’s imprisonment around 60 A.D. states, “For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which He is the Savior. Just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.”(Ephesians 5:31) As a man cared and supplied for his wife, the wife in turn would care and provide for her husband according to her abilities and her role in that time. In this way the relationship was one of

reciprocity and it is this kind of relationship that Paul applies to the Church’s relationship with Christ.

Moreover, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians discloses an image of marriage that is reflective of Church and God’s act of creation. Ephesians says, “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:31)\(^{59}\) Paul applies the mystery of love between a man and woman that joins them as one flesh to understanding the relationship of the Church to Christ. In this way, Paul elevates marriage as a practice in which a couple reflects the relationship of God with humanity. Paul consequently gave marriage sacred meaning as a Christian practice in his suggestion of sacramentality. He attributed an external sign, an internal grace and the institution by Christ to the practice of marriage. In doing so, he planted the seeds for the development of marriage as a sacrament, which St. Augustine drew upon to define marriage as a sacrament.\(^{60}\)

As St. Paul asserts the sacramental life of marriage he goes so far as to portray the reality of a reciprocal relationship between the Church and Her founder through the practice of marriage. He portrays humanity’s relationship with God as a positive one unlike that which is portrayed in the Old Testament as a negative one. He states;

> Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. He is the savior of His body. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their

\(^{59}\)There are also comparable versions of this passage in Colossians and 1 Peter.

husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the
curch, and delivered himself up for it: That he might sanctify it, cleansing it by
the laver of water in the word of life: That he might present it to himself a
glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should
be holy, and without blemish. So also ought men to love their wives as their own
bodies. He that loves his wife, loves himself. (Ephesians 5:22-28)

St. Paul clarifies the distinct relationship between a married couple as one which is
pointedly reflective of God’s love when lived out as intended. Because of a married
couple’s call to serve as a model for the Church the efficacious sign brings about the
reality of this mirroring despite the various cultural practices and influences of the society
at the time.

As Paul focuses on the sacrifice of the spouses for the other he calls for a
relationship of reciprocity. Christ gave His life for the Church and the husband must
follow His example; consequently, the Church also is required to reciprocate love and
sacrifice through the life bestowed on her in the Holy Spirit just as a wife must
reciprocate the love of her husband, in “being subject to him.” Aspiring for the good of
the beloved is the desire of both individuals and this becomes a reflection of Christ’s love
for the Church and the Church’s response of love for Christ. Christ is the aim of the
Church as Christ also desires the good for His beloved. Furthermore, in the New
Testament, Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus’ teaching on marriage as one which upholds
the permanence of that commitment saying, “Wherefore they [the couple] are no more
two, but one flesh. What therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”
(Matthew 19:16) Matthew’s Gospel contains an exception clause for the case of divorce
which appears to be a contradiction to the permanence of marriage. On the other hand, this clause accentuates the will of God for marriage and defines the misuse of marriage and sexuality as grounds for divorce, serving as a defense for the sacred nature of marriage.  

While Matthew presents Jesus’ teachings in light of His acknowledgement of the cultural influence on the subject of divorce, he reveals that Jesus asserts the will of God within the practice of marriage and divorce. According to the Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary, “While still reflecting the first century patriarchal culture, Jesus has transcended its views of marriage and family by making marriage an element of the will of God, expressed in creation rather than merely a culturally conditioned contract on the human level.”  

Marriage enters the realm of covenant rather than being a social contract as the biblical language affirms the sacred nature of marriage within the concept of covenant.

The Biblical concept of covenant is located in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. At the center of both the old and the new covenantal concepts underlies the portrayal of covenant as a reciprocal love between God and His people. It is the duty of the individual to love God; however, the individual must love their neighbor as well. Thus the essence of the covenant is love being required from the individual who enters into the covenant. It is for this reason that marriage also falls under the sphere of covenant as a married couple gives witness to God’s relationship with His people.  

God is understood to be in relationship with his people in the concept of Covenant.

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62 *New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 8, 386.
announced that He had come to bring a new Covenant, which had reached fulfillment in His death and Resurrection.

Marriage also reflects the covenant as it is a reciprocal understanding of the responsibilities of one towards the other. The Concept of marriage as covenant then means that "rather than being a relational arrangement within which one seeks some form of gratification, whether in explicitly individualistic terms or in more rationalistic formulations, marriage in this approach is a sacred expression of one’s willingness to face up to one’s covenant responsibilities to and for others."64 Through a covenantal understanding one reaches a level of sanctity through there commitment of the other which allows them to participate in the life of grace and imitation of God’s love.

The reciprocity of married love indicates that marriage is not simply an agreement but a covenant. Within the very definition of covenant is the inherent condition of reciprocity between the individuals entering into the covenant. Covenant cannot exist with the mere giving of oneself without a response being required. In a covenantal relationship, individuals begin to reflect the reciprocal relationship that God requests of His people. Jesus reiterates “If you love me, follow my commandments” as He calls individuals to responsibility, in their relationship with Him, to reciprocate love. Thus, marriage developed to be a reflection of reciprocal love as one is drawn closer to God in covenant.

The Christian understanding of marriage developed within this Biblical understanding of the practice and it began to be a part of Christian lifestyle. In the Sixth Century, Pope Gregory I began to stress the value of marriage in regard to its element of

love rather than the procreative aspect of marriage which was often viewed as the only positive element of marriage. He declared that marriage was an example of living out Christian love as he said, "the law of Christ is love, for it was this that prompted Him to bestow bountifully His blessings on us and to bear our evils in patience. Then, therefore, do we fulfill the law of Christ by our imitation of it, when we, too, are generous in bestowing our own good things, and lovingly endure the evil things of our fellow men." Thus, Gregory I declared that it was through the love of a man and a woman for each other in marriage that enabled them to imitate the sacrificial love of Christ as they gave of themselves to ensure the well-being of the other.

The reciprocal generosity of the spouses reflected the generosity of Christ. With the growth of Church understanding that marriage correlated with the Christian life, marriage increasingly developed as a representation of Christ’s love through the generosity developing in the relationship of married couples. As marriage grew to reflect Christ’s love more closely on account of the Church and societal influences, it became an example of Christian ideals. As individuals sought to overcome themselves and go beyond lives centered in the world, marriage became a viable opportunity to reflect Christ’s sacrificial love. The ascetic life of celibacy that had been viewed as the most certain way to gain salvation was loosing its hold as the sole path to holiness and sanctity in marriage was understood to be an attainable path to heaven.

The Christianization of marriage as a practice took place as a result of the almost unavoidable adaptation of marriage on account of its very nature being entwined with the elusive reality of the sacred contained in the sacraments. The praxis of married life called

65 Arthur Preuss, Ed. The Sacrament (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1917), 188.
for the development of a theology which pertained to the Christian understanding of life in accordance with Church teaching. As people sought after a way of life that would ensure their salvation as they sought to live in accordance with the will of God (and the Church), they often turned to the vocations of virginity and celibacy which were exalted as a sure path to God. With virginity and celibacy being glorified as the guaranteed way to bring about God’s will on earth, marriage necessitates a theological understanding of its implications on sanctity in order to bring notice to the salvific nature of the sacrament. The Church fathers developed an understanding of marriage within the context of the Christian life so as to understand the impact of divorce upon the Christian lifestyle and to emphasize the Christian values in the state of marriage. Their understanding of marriage matured into the formation of marriage within the spiritual realm, developing into its clarification as an essential sacrament of the Catholic Church by the Council of Trent in the 12th Century, following the Reformation.

**Conclusion: Implications of understanding Persons in terms of relationship**

As a part of contemporary theology, John Paul II has challenged the individual to live a life of holiness amongst a secular world driven by desire and ravished by the craze for advancement. John Paul II declared the call of all Christians to the vocation of love, and it becomes evident throughout his papacy that he understood the human person in terms of love and their response to love. He emphasized that “We only know who we are and how to reach God when we encounter another through love.”66 When the understanding of relationships as being consistent with the very personhood of

66 “Called To Love,” *Columbia*, April 2009, vol. 89. num. 4 Knights of Columbus, 11.
individuals is reached, it carries a particular impact on the concept of relations in general as well as to marriage despite the dominant cultural norms at the time. Possibilities of encountering the other throughout an ordinary day provide an opportunity for one to experience of sacred numerous times throughout an ordinary day. George Thomas reveals, “To those who make ‘the religious’ something exceptional which transcends the everyday and lifts one out of time into the eternal, he replies: ‘I possess nothing but the everyday out which I am never taken – I know no fullness but each mortal hour’s fullness of claim and responsibility.” Therefore, to engage in one's journey towards God the present, every hour of the day, must be recognized as having the call to holiness rather than existing merely in sparse moments of one's life.

The concept of man as relational has reverberations beyond marriage and carries a social responsibility as well. George Thomas points out that “The most fruitful applications of Buber’s insights about man are in the realm of social philosophy. Man in the modern era suffers deeply from ‘the increasing decay of the old organic forms of the direct life of man with man,’ which had given him for a time ‘a sociological security’ after he had lost his ‘cosmological security’ in an infinite world.”

It becomes necessary to understand the need for encounter lest the risk of losing one's sense of self and personhood become distorted by the world’s impression of humanity. Thomas reveals, humanity has influenced the world to become independent of human necessity on account of increasing technology, politics and economics. With these advancements, persons struggle to be in command of a world which they have caused to move beyond human control. This world possesses individualism and collectivism which

“are expressions of this condition of homelessness and solitude, the former accepting and glorifying the isolation of the individual, the latter trying to escape it by losing personal identity in the mass. Both are false, because direct personal relations (‘dialogue’) are essential to man’s nature and are possible even under the conditions of modern impersonal technology.”⁶⁹ The world has developed as a place where the human person is expected to be void of relationship, maintaining their identity through the rejection of others. The misunderstanding of personhood presents a challenge which attacks the essence of a person as they strive to attain become a being contrary to their nature.

This concept has incredible implications in the realm of marriage and human sexuality because it requires personal response to the other allowing one to enter into their humanness and reach out in the direction of the other with a responsibility that is their own. Yet, this personal responsibility does not imply that community is not to be sought; However, “real community between persons in which they are ‘turned towards’ one another as persons. In such a community, persons can preserve their identity and their responsibility for their political decisions, which is impossible under collectivism.”⁷⁰

Pope John Paul II, observed the risks facing individuals with their very humanness being presented to them in a warped understanding of human purpose. John Paul II urged individuals to grasp at the true nature of humanity. He presented his own understanding of the human person as a relational being in his “Theology of the Body” homilies. According to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, the Trinity is the primary example of love and gift. While the love of a man and woman is a “paradigmatic” case of a total gift of self in our experience, love as a call to give oneself facilitates the presence

of God in that relationship. In Waldstein’s prologue to the *Theology of the Body*, he
emphasizes this concept of love in the metaphor of a triangle:

The first point on this triangle is a general account of love as a gift of self. From
this point, one line extends horizontally to the thesis that the gift of self is present
with particular completeness in the spousal love between a man and a woman.
Another line extends upward diagonally, to the analogous application of the same
account of love to the Trinity. [...] The descending line from point three to point
two represents the thesis that communion between created persons, particularly
the communion of spousal love between man and woman, flows as an image from
God’s own Trinitarian communion.”

This metaphor of a Triangle for love allows one to recognize the profound effect
of a reciprocal relationship on the ability of persons to reflect the image and
likeness of God to which they are called.

John Paul II’s theology of the body reflects Martin Buber’s philosophy on the ‘I-
thou’ relationship as the means of entering into the fullness of humanity. John Paul II
addresses this as the most complete human love being the reflection of God. It is the
reciprocal relationship which in essence is complete. John Paul II affirms, “The essence
of spousal love is self-giving, the surrender of one’s ‘I’... The fullest, the most
uncompromising form of love consists precisely in self-giving.” As John Paul II
recognizes the beauty of self-giving love, he correlates married love with the ultimate gift
of self as it allows one to receive from their giving as well. In married life, the ‘other’
becomes one with the life of the “I.” The “Thou” is not reduced to an object but rather

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71 John Paul II, 24
72 John Paul II, 32
participates in love which is given as well as received in a reciprocal way. John Paul II clarifies the presence of God in reciprocity as he proclaims, “A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, *like the marriage union and surrender*, in which the goods of both [...] are possessed by both together.”

The alterity and the mutuality of a relationship draw one closer to God and make the relationship of marriage a Sacrament. In this way the marital relationship transcends the constraints of history and cultural norms in order to be sacrament. It is through the recognition of alterity that each individual is able to participate in a relationship which is influenced by the social norms but is not limited to them. Through mutuality a relationship reflects the love of the Trinity despite the confines of cultural practices. The Sacrament of Matrimony exceeds the boundaries of time and culture to allow one the pursuit of the fullness of humanity among a world swayed by its history and development.

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73 John Paul II, 28
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