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EXPERIENCES OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

by

JAMES PATRICK O'BRIEN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
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Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

This study interprets the stories told by eight couples about their experiences approaching marriage as a religious sacrament. The eight couples represented a purposeful sample selected using the following criteria: (a) They self-identified as having a sacramental marriage within the Roman Catholic tradition; (b) they appeared to be information rich sources who could provide an emic, i.e., an insider, view of the sacramental marriage experience; (c) they participated in the Catholic Cursillo movement; (d) they engaged in observable religious practices; and (e) they parented children.

Research methods included guided conversation, participant observation, and a timeline activity that asked participants to plot their life histories, including significant marital and spiritual events, on paper prior to discussing the recorded events. Guided conversation was the principal research procedure. During conversations, the eight couples spoke openly about the meaning of sacramental marriage; the interaction between spiritual, marital and social dynamics; and the challenges and rewards of approaching marriage as a sacrament.

Results of the study are presented in two forms: (a) reconstructed narratives of the couples' lives and experiences and (b) a more traditional social science discussion of emergent themes organized around the study's research questions. Key findings include the following: (a) faith was an all-inclusive paradigm by which the couples viewed the world and organized their lives; (b) service and ministry commitments expanded after a couple participated in a Catholic spiritual retreat; (c) ministry activities benefited each marriage; (d) faith, prayer, and an openness to change were common strategies to deal with life's challenges, and (e) the themes of *covenant*, *consortium*, and *sacramentum* appeared in the stories of each couple.

PREFACE

A marriage poem of the Tenth Century

Crinoc, lady of measured melody,
Not young, but with modest maiden mind-
Together once, in Niall's northern land
We slept, we two, as man and womankind.

I offer you a faultless love,
A love unfettered for which surely we
Shall not be punished in the depths of hell
But together ever walk in piety.

Seeking the presence of elusive God
Wandering we stray but the way is found
Following the mighty melodies that with you
Throughout the pathways of the world resound.

May the King give us beauty back again
Who ever did his will with quiet mind;
May he look on us with eagerness and love,
Our old and perished bodies left behind.

(O'Dwyer, 1995, p. 90)

A Chrinoc, cubaid do cheol, is attributed to Maoliosa, an Irish Catholic of the Tenth Century. The poem's theme of man, woman and God serves as a preface to this study of sacramental marriage.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study reported on marriage as a sacred activity from the perspective of eight information rich couples. The participants' experiences and understandings of marriage as a sacred activity were grounded in a Catholic sacramental¹ model.

Marriage as Sacred

Marriage as a sacred activity has a long tradition. The main Eurasian religions, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity emphasize marriage as "the most sacred or divine aspect of society" (Zimmerman, 1974, p. 6). In Jewish tradition, "marital relationships take precedence over every other human connection ... [and] the spirit comes ... through marriage and family life (Greenberg, 1993, p. 381). In Islamic tradition, there is little or no bifurcation between the sacred and secular in marriage, and "Islam recommends ... [marriage] for every Muslim" (Isben al Faruqi, 1993, p. 397). In Hindu tradition, marriage is central to the entire religious and spiritual structure, and is one of two *samskaras*, or sacraments, available to all classes of people (Sharma, 1993). Marriage is so central to the Hindu religious structure that "even the Hindu gods are usually married" (Sharma, 1993, p. 413). Throughout recorded human history, the sacred aspect of marriage and family is a common concept across cultures (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, Murray-Swank, 2003).

¹ Sacramental means that "divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit" (Catechism, 1997, p.898).

The sacredness of marriage and the family has not been lost in the postmodern era. Here in the United States, the definitions of marriage have broadened, and family configurations have changed; however, as described by Keagan (1994), “every family is a naturally and unselfconsciously religious place because every family is a place where day after day, year after year, a coherent and often undeviating disposition toward ultimate reality is expressed” (p. 267).

Pre-Christian Roots

In the First Testament, marriage was conceptualized as having three participants: man, woman, and God. In an early-Israelite marriage, the three participants braided themselves together into a single force because “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”^{2 3} Concurrently, in a different pre-Christian culture far removed from the early-Israelites, the Celts also had a paradigm of sacred unity among three sources. The *triskele*, an interconnected knot comprised of three strands of rope (Bain, 1973) was a common feature in Celtic symbolism. It represented the sacredness of three. The Celtic *triskele* is presented in Figure 1.1 as representative of a human trait that has transcended cultures and centuries: the sacredness of marriage.

² Ecclesiastes 4:12 in the New International Version Bible, 1985.

³ Elliot (2006) described braiding as a template for a contemporary Jewish “messianic marriage” (p.44).

Figure 1.1 Celtic Triskele as Representative of Pre-Christian Sacred Marriage



Early Christian Marriage

The prophets of the First Testament described marital love as a symbol of the love that Yahweh (God) had for his people. The early Christians adopted this description to their new religion. The early Christian Paul compared marital love with the love of Christ for his Church.⁴ As the centuries progressed, and as social and political aspects of marriage changed, Catholic scholars and authorities changed the theological concepts and images that defined marriage (Mackin, 1892, 1989; Lawler, 1987, 1993). In the twelfth century, the Catholic Church described marriage as a sacrament for the first time. However, as a review of the Catholic literature on marriage will demonstrate, the Roman Catholic tradition has been historically weighted toward institutional rules and regulations, and was unsympathetic to the personal aspects of marriage. The Church produced two thousand years worth of marital literature based on isolated and outsider experience. Prior to the second generation of this century, the Catholic theology of marriage was in a “retarded condition” (Mackin, 1989, p. 666).

⁴ Ephesians 5:22-24.

Catholic Marriage in Modern Times

In 1965, Pope Paul VI issued *Gaudium et Spes*, a document of the Second Vatican Council (hereafter referred to as Vatican II). For the first time, the Church recognized the importance of conjugal love and the virtue of the couple that regards their marriage as equal to the institutional duties of procreation and education (Mackin, 1989). Gradually, the Catholic literature expanded to include a personal description of sacramental marriage.

Recently, “an important shift has occurred in the work of a new generation of Catholic scholars” who, according to Cahill (2003), use a “strong dose of practicality and common sense” (p. 592-593). Lawler (2002), Gaillardetz (2002), and Salzman, Kelly and O’Keefe, editors (2004) are examples of the “new generation” (Cahill, 2003, p.78) of literature that include the personal experience of marriage.

Background

This section will briefly introduce the Cursillo movement, from which the information rich participants were selected; the nature of sacrament in the Catholic tradition, and the difference between a sacramental and a secular marriage.

Cursillo Movement

A purposeful sample (Patton, 2002, p. 46) was constructed from members of the Cursillo movement in the Diocese of San Diego. Each participant had attended a three-

day religious retreat that emphasized piety, study, and action.⁵ Martos (2001) described Cursillo as an experiential sacrament that had an “electric” (p. 134) effect on people, and where participants “return from the Cursillo [retreat] charged with an experiential insight into the meaning of their religion and their church” (p.134). Martos continued “the sacramental effects [of Cursillo] are not just short-lived” (p. 134) phenomena. In this study, each participant was active in Cursillo, as I had been for six years prior to commencing the study. Cursillo and my involvement with the participants will be further described in Chapter 3: Methodology.

Sacrament

There are seven sacraments⁶ in the Catholic faith. The exact number of sacraments and their meaning has changed over time but each sacrament is identified as a “sign and instrument of communion with God” (Catechism ,1997,p. 204). Each sacrament uses a common physical element to both symbolize and actualize the communion, or joining, of humans with God. Elements such as bread, wine, oil, and water are used in the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, and the Anointment of the Sick. In the Sacrament of Marriage, the common elements include the physical bodies, and the love relationship of the couple. In this study, a sacramental marriage was defined as a man and a woman consciously connecting themselves and

⁵ Piety is defined by Cursillo as the act of seeking holiness in each day, study is learning more about God each day, and action is living the Gospel message each day in the natural environments of home, work, and community.

⁶ The seven sacraments are Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage and the Anointment of the Sick.

their marriage to God each day. The study explored a God-oriented love and marriage, referred to here as a sacramental marriage,⁷ practiced by eight couples in a Catholic tradition.⁸

Sacramental Marriage and Secular Marriage

The difference between a sacramental marriage and a secular marriage can be visualized geometrically. A sacramental marriage has three points of reference: man, woman, and God. A secular marriage has two points of reference: man and woman. In the sacramental model, God is included as part of the relationship. The inclusion of an invisible third party is based upon faith. Faith is the “personal adherence to God” (Catechism, 1997, p. 878), while marriage is a personal adherence to another person. In a sacramental marriage, this personal adherence to two personas alters the shape and dimension of marital love. Represented geometrically, the inclusion of God in marriage shows a triangular love rather than a horizontal love between equal spouses.

The hypothesis of sacramental marriage is that all the aspects of the relationship are affected by the orientation of the husband and wife to God.⁹ The relationship is then considered a gift from God with sacramental grace, which in turn, strengthens and

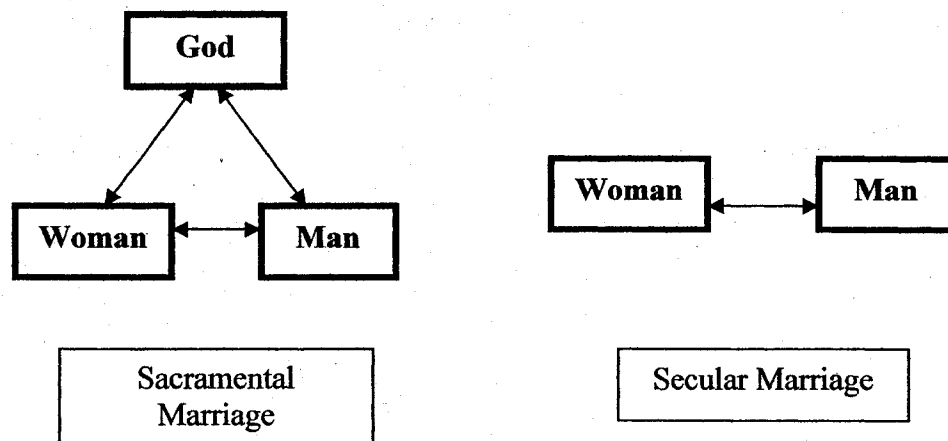
⁷ The Catechism (1997) defines marriage as “a covenant or partnership of life between a man and a woman, which is ordered to the well being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of the children.” (p. 886)

⁸ A sacramental marriage is not exclusive to Catholics. According to Vatican II, the sacrament is available to all baptized Christian believers (*Gaudium et spes*, 1965).

⁹ In a Christian sacramentality, the orientation is to Jesus Christ the Savior, (Mackin, 1989; Lawler, 1993).

fortifies the husband and wife to live their marriage vocation (Catechism, 1997). Figure 1.2 represents the differences between these two different orientations of love.

Figure 1.2 Sacramental Marriage and Secular Marriage (Wright, 1987, p. 12)



Statement of the Problem

The Catholic literature on marriage has historically been objective, scholarly, and “with the exception of Tertullian, and of the widowed, or divorced Paul, the product of celibate males’ observation of others’ marriages” (Mackin, 1989, p. 343).

In the second and third centuries, the early fathers of Christianity opined that marriage is a necessary but flawed lifestyle. For a thousand years, the Roman Catholic theologians could not recognize marriage as a sacrament because it included sexuality, and sexuality was prone to concupiscence, or an excessive appetite (Mackin, 1989). The

Roman Church did not list marriage as a sacrament until the Council of Lyons in 1274.¹⁰ At the Council of Trent (1563), in reaction to the Reformation, the medieval Church instituted canonical requirements to confirm its authority to regulate marriage (Martos, 2001). This medieval concept of marriage held by the Church remained relatively unchallenged into the beginning of the twentieth century (Martos, 2001). The personal and experiential aspects of sacramental marriage did not appear in the Roman Catholic literature until the middle of the twentieth century.

In 1965, Vatican II introduced a humanistic description of marriage “as a personal community within which the partners give and accept each other” (Kasper, 1980, p. 13). Vatican II emphasized the importance of marital love, the well-being, and spirituality of the couple, and the family as a domestic church (Mackin, 1989; Lawler 1993, Cahill, 2003). In 1983, the Code of Canon Law was revised to recognize the personal benefits of marriage, but the Canon maintained an institutional and abstract emphasis (Orsy, 1984). Most recently, and primarily since the year 2000 (Cahill, 2003), the Catholic academic laity has begun to describe the personal experiences of sacramental marriage.

However, the Catholic literature on marriage has only recently presented stories or insights from participants who live the sacrament, and only a few limited examples have appeared. Therefore, there is a need to expand the Catholic literature on marriage

¹⁰ The literature review found that other Catholic traditions, notably the Celtic (O'Dwyer, 1995) and Greek Orthodox (Martos, 2001), had established the *mysterium* or sacramental quality of marriage prior to Roman Catholic hegemony over the European catholic churches, and prior to the final Orthodox schism. These events occurred between the tenth and twelfth centuries (Orsy, 1986; Martos, 2001).

with emic, or inside knowledge, from Catholic men and women who consciously practice a sacramental marriage.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find the emic, or insider, meaning of sacramental marriage from eight purposefully selected couples. The study was organized to learn how Catholic couples described their marriage, and how their spirituality influenced their marital and family relationships, and visa versa. The study also focused on the personal challenges, responses, and rewards of marriage, and the study searched for sacramental signs described by the participants.

Research Questions

Three research questions were posed in order to understand sacramental marriage from the participants' point of view. Eight couples were pre-selected according to the criteria listed in Chapter 3: Methodology. Briefly, the couples were selected as information rich Catholics that were conversant in their faith and members of the Cursillo movement. The three research questions were:

- a. How do the participants describe their marriage, and what do they say, if anything, about sacramental marriage and visible signs of God over time?
- b. Over the years, how have personal, marital, family, and community spiritual experiences influenced one another, and how do these levels of spirituality influence marital dynamics?
- c. What are the rewards and challenges of a sacramental marriage, and how do couples react to these challenges?

Significance of the Study

Contribute to the New Catholic Literature

Until 1965, the literature and perception of the Catholic Church on marriage maintained a medieval orientation (Martos, 2001), and emphasized procreation and a paternalistic hierarchy. Vatican II, held between 1963 and 1965, altered that paradigm, and introduced the hermeneutic of marriage as an expression of interpersonal love (Cahill, 2003). Forty years after Vatican II, the Catholic literature on sacramental marriage still contains few personal expressions and experiences on marriage (see Lawler, 2002; Salzman et al., editors, 2004). This study will add to the personal, experiential expressions on sacramental marriage in the literature.

Address Sociological Factors

The significance of the study is abetted by two current sociological factors. One factor is the crisis of widespread divorce (Kasper, 1980; Lawler, 2002), and the other factor is the current crisis of confidence towards the institutional Roman Catholic Church (Catholic Reporter, 2003).

Divorce Culture

In his entry into the experiential or personal Catholic literature on marriage, Lawler (2002) stated “the Christian family has an important contribution to make in [correcting] the contemporary crisis of family in the United States” (p. 193). Cahill (2003) stated that the new Catholic literature had the mission to shape an “ethos about sex, marriage, and family...[to] combat the divorce culture” (p. 593).

This study contributed in a small way to understanding sacramental marriage as a model available to couples. It presented an ethos of marriage as a sacrament lived by eight couples, and offered an alternative vision to the divorce culture.

Crisis of Confidence

The second sociological factor that contributed to the significance of this study was the crisis of Catholic confidence in the United States towards the institutional church. According to George Gallop Jr., only 42% of American Catholics had confidence in the institutional church in 2002 (Catholic Reporter, 2003). In addition to a lack of confidence, there was a significant decrease in the number of Catholic wedding ceremonies in 2006 compared to 2005.

Roman Catholic weddings in the United States, and thus the number of couples attempting a sacramental marriage, were less numerous in 2006 than in the past years. In 2006, there were 212,000 Catholic weddings conducted in the United States. This was a decrease of 11,000 weddings from the year 2005 (Official Catholic Directory, 2006).

The loss of confidence in the institutional church lends added importance to the Vatican II emphases on the family as a domestic church. The study presented eight couples committed to their sacramental marriage; and, at different levels, committed to their families as Christ-centered domestic churches.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in the study:

God. “The infinite divine being” (Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter: Catechism), 1997, p. 880).

Faith. “Both a gift and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God [while] God invites his response ... ” (Catechism, 1997, p. 878).

Grace. “The free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocation to become his adopted children” (Catechism, 1997, p. 881).

Sacrament - “An efficacious sign of grace instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit” (Catechism, 1997, p. 898).

Marriage. “A covenant or partnership of life between a man and a woman, which is ordered to the well being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of the children. When validly contracted between two baptized people, marriage is a sacrament” (Catechism, 1997, p. 887).

Spirituality. “To be ‘spiritual’ means to know, and to live according to the knowledge, that there is more to life than meets the eye. To be ‘spiritual’ means, beyond that, to know, and to live according to the knowledge that God is present to us in grace as the principle of personal, interpersonal, social, and even cosmic transformation. To be ‘open to the Spirit’ is to accept explicitly who we are and who we are always to become, and to direct our lives accordingly, in response to God's grace within us” (McBrien, 1995, p. 48).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was conducted in response to the three research questions:

(1) What are the emic, or insider definitions of sacramental marriage, (2) how does marital spirituality influence marriage dynamics; and (3) what are the challenges and rewards of a sacramental marriage? Figure 2.1 outlines the literature review as it followed the three research questions.

Figure 2.1 Outline of Literature Review

Section One: Definitions of Sacramental Marriage	Section Two: Marital Spirituality and Dynamics	Section Three: Challenges and Rewards
<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Traditional Catholic Perspective (1930)</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
Definitions of Sacrament	<i>Gaudium et Spes (1965)</i>	Faith
Sacrament of Matrimony	<i>Familias Consortio (1981)</i>	Religion
Marriage and Sin	<i>A Family Perspective in Church and Society (1983)</i>	Individualism
<i>Code of Canon Law</i>	<i>Catechism (1997)</i>	Family Planning
Biblical Sources	<i>The Theology of the Body (1997)</i>	<i>Rewards</i>
Augustine: Doctor of Marriage	<i>Recent Academic Literature</i>	<i>Ecclesial Sources</i>
Marital Sexuality and Canon Law	Domestic Church	Spirit of Christ
Early Christian Marriage	Wright (2004)	Couples Encounter Christ
Development of the Canonici	Justice-in-love	Liturgical Reward
Marriage Cultures in the Canon	McDonagh (2004)	Conjugal Love
<i>Early Academics</i>	Friendship	Sanctification
Thomas Aquinas	Lawler (1993, 2002)	<i>New Generation Literature</i>
Middle Ages and Reformation	Dual Vocation	Companionship
<i>20th Century</i>	Rubio (2003, 2004)	Sexuality
Code of Canon Law (1917)	Social Mission	<i>Gaudium et Spes (1965)</i>
Casti Connubii (1930).	Kelly (2004)	Mackin (1987)
Second Vatican Council (1963 – 65)	Self-emptying	Lawler (1993)
Covenant and Consortium	Wright (2004)	Shivanaandan (1999)
		Healing and Growth
		Dominian (1987)
		Jenks, Woolever (1999)
		Generativity
		Lawler (2003)
		<i>Summary of Challenges and Rewards</i>

Marital Sexuality
Vatican II and Code of
Canon Law

*Summary of Marital
Spirituality and Marriage
Dynamics*

Post Vatican II Definitions

Kasper (1980)
Martos (1981, 2002)
Mackin (1982, 1984,
1989)
Lawler (1985, 1987,
1993, 2002)
Pope John Paul II (1997)
Kelly (2002)
Grabowski (2002)
Gaillardetz (2003)

*Summary of Definitions of
Sacramental Marriage*
MacBride (1994)

Figure 2.1 Outline of Literature Review (continued)

Part One: Definitions of Sacramental Marriage

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) describes itself as a “full, complete exposition of Catholic doctrine, enabling everyone to know what the Church professes, celebrates, lives, and prays in her daily life” (p. xiv). In this study, the Catechism’s description of a sacrament, and particularly the sacrament of matrimony (marriage), are reviewed.

Grace

The brief definition for sacraments offered in the Catechism (1997) is “sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us...They bear fruit in those who receive

them with the required dispositions” (p. 293). The sacrament of matrimony is one of seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic faith.¹¹

As efficacious signs of grace, the Catechism (1997) describes sacraments as “powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving” (p. 289). The sacraments, according to the Catechism, are capable of bringing divine grace into human affairs and of elevating human life towards the divine life of God. The Catechism (1997) explains: “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men...”, and by “words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express [faith]. That is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith’” (p. 291).

Faith

The importance of faith in the practice of a sacrament is emphasized by the Catechism (1997). Faith is necessary for a sacrament to convey sacramental grace. Faith is a gift from God that is strengthened by Holy Scripture, the Bible. By listening to the Word, the faithful develop “well-disposed hearts” (p. 293) and are able to fully participate in the sacrament and receive sacramental graces.

In other words, the participants in a sacrament, marriage included, must first have faith because “the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them” (p. 292). However, presupposed faith is not the only factor in the distribution of grace. In the same paragraph that stresses the need for faith, the Catechism (1997) also cautions that God has the ultimate authority in gifting people sacramental

¹¹ The seven sacraments are Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage and the Anointment of the Sick.

grace, “the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient but by the power of God” (p. 292). There is a paradox here between the requirement for an individual faith prior to receiving sacramental graces, and the equally certain doctrine that a completely loving and compassionate God does not withhold his love and grace in favor of rules. The paradox is not easily resolved, and the paradox was a contributing source both to the Eastern Orthodox Schism (1054), and the Protestant Reformation (c.1500).¹²

Church Authority

The Catechism (1997) upholds Church authority in the practice of a sacramental life. The Church describes itself with the feminine pronoun “she,” and views her role as the guardian of faith because she inherited the sacraments directly from the apostles. As the Catechism (1997) describes the source of Church authority:

The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith she received from the apostles – whence the ancient saying: The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays. (Catechism, 1994, p. 291)

¹² Both the Great Schism of 1054, when the Eastern Rite (Orthodox) and Latin Rite (Roman) Catholic churches split apart; and the Reformation started by Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564); were fueled, in part, by questions about grace, and the sacramentality of marriage. (Orsy, 1986).

Sacrament of Matrimony

The Catechism (1997) described the sacrament of matrimony in this way:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. (Catechism ,1997,p. 400)

In this definition, the Catholic doctrinal requirements for a sacramental marriage become apparent. Each individual is presupposed as having faith, each individual is a baptized Christian, and each individual commits freely to the other a life-long commitment open to the procreation of children. The presence of a priest or deacon is also required, but the sacramental significance of a Church official to be present is currently open to interpretation (Lawler, 2002). The Catechism (1997) continues:

God Himself is the author...[of marriage and] “since God created man and women, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man...and this love that God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation. (p. 401)

Marriage and Sin

The Catechism (1997) described the first sin of Adam and Eve as a break from God. The sin not only ruptured the original closeness to God but also broke the natural communion between man and woman. The Catechism (1997) explained:

Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience [of evil] makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character. [This] ... does not stem from the nature of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relationships, but from sin. (Catechism ,1997,p. 401)

The Catechism (1997) used Genesis 2:22 ¹³ as the Scriptural source to explain how the first sin changed the original divine gift of mutual attraction between the sexes into a relationship of domination and lust. “The beautiful vocation of man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth was burdened by the pain of childbirth and the toil of work” (p. 402). However, even though it was tainted, the grand order of creation persisted and “Man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his [God’s] help, man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them “in the beginning” (Catechism,1997, p. 402).

Summary of the Catechism on Marriage

The Catechism (1997) described the sacraments as necessary for salvation, and as effective signs of grace. Grace was dispensed through sacraments and “they [sacraments] bore fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (Catechism ,1997,p. 293). The sacrament of matrimony presupposed faith and a Christian baptism for both

¹³ Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (New International Version).

individuals. The sacramental quality of marriage was dependent on “free consent in a human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other”

(Catechism, 1997, p. 406). The act of mutual giving extended into all aspects of the marriage. The sacramental qualities of marriage benefited conjugal love and the family as a domestic church (Catechism, 1997).

Code of Canon Law

The Code of Canon Law (1983) is an extensive collection of rules that evolved from a wide variety of sources over the centuries (Orsy, 1986). It originated from both theological and legal sources; including the Torah, and the books of the First Testament, the Gospels of the first century, early Church theologians and the custom, or anti-custom,¹⁴ of the times.

Pre-Christian Sources

The Catholic understanding of marriage as a sacrament begins with an early-Israelite interpretation of Genesis that God created marriage as an image of God’s love and faithfulness. God created two equal partners and named them ‘*Adam and Eve*’ (Kasper, 1980; Mackin, 1989; Lawler, 1993). This faithfulness is emphasized in the Book of Hosea, which tells of “the intimate communion of a man and a woman ... [that is] also a prophetic symbol, proclaiming and revealing ... the steadfast love of Yahweh for Israel” (Lawler, 1993, p. 40). Three other books in the First Testament, Jeremiah,

¹⁴ Church theology is often formalized in reaction against particular customs. The Gnostic heresies, the rise of monarchies, and the advent of modernism all resulted in new legal and theological Church positions (Mackin, 1989).

Ezekiel, and Isaiah, reinforced the theme that marriage is sacred, and that it symbolically represented the everlasting love of God (Lawler, 1993).

Early Christian Interpretations

The Second Testament built upon the conception of marriage as a faithful covenant relationship, but instead of representing Yahweh-Israel, marriage was now represented Christ-Church. In the Gospels and in the letters attributed to Paul, Christian spouses are called to give way to one another, to serve one another, and to love one another as they love themselves, as Christ loves the Church (Lawler, 1993).

Canon 1136 reflects this biblical equality and self-sharing: “Both spouses have equal office and right to whatever belongs to the *consortium* of conjugal life” (Orsy, 1986, p. 206). A consortium, according to Orsy (1986), has no equivalent word in English, but literally means “a close association of persons sharing the same fortune, fate and destiny” (p. 51).

Augustine: Doctor of Christian Marriage

Augustine (354-430), the Bishop of Hippo, was the first to work out a systematic theology of marriage and was named “the doctor of Christian marriage” (Lawler, 1993, p. 56) by the Catholic Church. However, his influence was both progressive and restrictive. On the one hand, his schema of the threefold goods of marriage: procreation, fidelity, and *sacramentum*, became the basis of Thomas Aquinas’ description of marriage as a sacrament in the twelfth century. On the other hand, Augustine also influenced the devaluation of marital sexuality and of marriage itself for over two thousand years (Mackin, 2001).

Sacramentum

On the positive side, Augustine defined *sacramentum* as the third benefit of marriage that Christians received in addition to the benefits of procreation and fidelity that were available in non-Christian marriages. Augustine read the Second Testament in Latin, not the original Greek, and in Ephesians 5:32¹⁵ Paul's word *mysterium*, or mystery, was translated as *sacramentum*, meaning a sacred sign (Martos, 2001). Augustine interpreted this as meaning that marriage was a visible sign of the invisible union between Christ and his spouse, the Church. He also attached the deeper meaning of perpetual fidelity to it by associating a Roman soldier's pledge of loyalty, also called *sacramentum* (Martos, 2001).

In Augustine's theology of marriage, "the *sacramentum* of marriage was not only a sacred sign of divine reality but it was also a sacred bond between husband and wife...dissolved only by the death of one of the partners" (Martos, 2001, p. 366). This became a core understanding in the Catholic tradition and appeared in Canon 1141, where "marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or by any cause other than death" (Orsy, 1986, p. 210).

Augustine and Marital Sexuality

Augustine also influenced the Church's position on the relationship between sin and sexuality that has continued in the Catholic Church to this day. Propagation, as a gift of creation, was good. However, the human appetite for sexual intercourse was bad. In his more extreme statements, Augustine opined that sexual intercourse was always bad. "Those who use the shameful sex appetite in a legitimate way make good use of evil, but

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:32: "This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."

those who use it in other ways make evil use of evil” (Augustine quoted in Martos, 1997, p.366).

Lawler (1993) defended Augustine by attaching a historical context to the Bishop of Hippo’s interpretation of sexuality. Augustine, in his role as bishop, defended the Church against the arguments of the Pelagian heresy. Lawler (1993) explained that the Pelagian heresy preached that humans did not require God’s active grace because of the intercession of Jesus Christ. Augustine argued that there is a continued and constant need for God’s grace in human activities. Unfortunately, he associated the need for grace with the transference of original sin by the act of intercourse. Augustine wrote that the lapsed natures of Adam and Eve are inherited by each generation through the sexual act of their parents. According to Augustine, “the sexual appetite is always threatened by concupiscence¹⁶; and therefore, by sinfulness” (Lawler, 1993, p. 59). Thus, according to Augustine, the expression of sexuality within marriage resulted in a permanent exposure to sin. As Orsy (1986) commented, “in order to stress the importance of grace, he [Augustine] devalued our nature” (p. 21).

Marital Sexuality and Canon Law (1983)

In the Code of Canon Law (1983), marital sexuality appears as both a requirement for a sacramental marriage and as a possible impediment to sacramental marriage. The requirement for marital sexual intercourse appears in Canons 1095 and 1096. Canon 1095 requires the man and woman to be mentally, morally, and psychologically able “to assume the essential obligations of marriage” (Orsy, 1986, p. 130). These duties include

¹⁶ Concupiscence is the disordered pursuit of any appetite beyond its natural good (Lawler, 1993).

fulfillment of the *consortium* and the procreation and education of children. The second example, Canon 1096, goes even further. It requires “some form of sexual¹⁷ cooperation” (Canon 1096 in Orsey, 1986, p. 132) between the couple.

Impotency is defined as an “incapacity to perform sexual intercourse in a natural way” (Orsy, 1986, p. 107). It is listed in the Canon as an impediment to sacramental marriage, and such an impediment can invalidate the marriage. However, a spouse does not need to be fertile, but only be able to perform sexually in marriage. In the rule of the Canon, “antecedent and perpetual impotence to have sexual intercourse, whether on the part of the man or on the part of the woman, whether absolute or relative, by its nature invalidates marriage” (Canon 1084 in Orsy, 1986, p. 106).

Early Christian Marriage

In the first three centuries after the life of Jesus, Christians did not have a specific pattern for marriage ceremonies, and the sacramental quality of marriage was not yet established by the Church. In fact, the Church was not involved in marriage nor in marriage ceremonies. Marriage was a family and civil matter celebrated by local custom and ritual. But, as the Roman Empire declined in power and authority, the Church gradually took over the customs and, eventually, the definition of marriage. Bishops at different locations throughout the world became involved in marital decisions and wrote instructions and commentaries that, over time, became a source of Canon Law (Orsy, 1986).

¹⁷ Orsy (1986) mentioned that “a meticulously precise rendering of the Latin *sexualis* in this context should be ‘genital’” (p. 133).

After the decline of the Roman Empire, churchmen became more involved in marriage cases and in marriage ceremonies (Martos, 1997). Divorce, too, was allowed for a multitude of reasons. An Irish penitential book of the seventh century allowed one spouse to remarry if the other spouse entered into a monastery or convent to serve God (Martos, 2001). In another example of dissolubility, Pope Gregory II in 725 suggested that if a wife was sick and unable to perform her wifely duty, and “if the husband found the practice of continence impossible” (Martos, 2001, p. 369), the husband could have a second wife as long as he continued to take care of the first wife.

Development of the Canonici

The canon on marriage expanded as the Roman church itself expanded. Between the 7-12th centuries, the Church authorities in Rome slowly reigned in the wide cultural variations that there were in Catholicism. Irish, Breton, Anglo-Saxon, and Frankish penitential books with rules and decisions on marriage were brought under the jurisdiction of the Roman church (Martos, 2001). Many of the practices from these early Catholic churches were lost, and some became accepted Roman Catholic practice. For instance, the rules and clerical decisions that allowed an Irish Catholic egalitarian church to include both sexes in one organized, sacred, and domestic unit was lost (O'Dwyer, 1995). However, a compromise between the Germanic and Roman cultural definitions of marriage has survived into the present day Canon.

Marriage Cultures in the Canon

As the Church expanded its authority into Europe and became more involved with marriage, the Roman tradition that recognized marriage at the time of consent came into conflict with the Germanic custom that recognized a marriage after consummation

(Mackin, 1982; Martos, 2001). The University of Paris and the University of Bologna were the centers of the intellectual debate about marriage (Mackin, 1982) in the 11th century, and a compromise on consummation and consent was reached. Essentially, both cultural concepts are retained by the Church.

The compromise of the 11th century remains in the Canon revised in 1983 (Orsy, 1986). Canons 1095-1107 are concerned with consent. Briefly, consent means that a person intending to marry must be able to think rationally, must decide responsibly, and must confirm their consent in a public action.

If the validity of the promise is ever doubted, all that has happened before and all that has followed later can only serve as signs to determine the precise state of the spirit of the person at the moment of the exchange of the promises. (Orsy, 1986, p. 130)

The continuation of the Germanic requirement of consummation appears in Canon 1060, which states:

A valid marriage between baptized persons is called merely ratified, if it is not consummated; ratified and consummated, if the spouses performed between themselves and in a human manner the conjugal act that is apt in itself for the generation of children; the act marriage is ordered by its nature, and through it, that the spouses become one flesh. (Canon 1061 in Orsy, 1986, p. 67)

The Contributions of Early Academics

Hugh of St. Victor

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the stature of marriage improved, in part, when university and church writers combated the Albigensian heresy of southern France

(Mackin, 1982; Martos, 2001). The University of Paris and the University of Bologna were the centers of the intellectual debate about marriage (Mackin, 1982) in the 11th century, and a compromise on consummation and consent was reached. Essentially, both cultural concepts are retained by the Church.

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(Mackin, 1989). The heresy believed that matter was evil, and marriage was sinful because it brought new matter, new material beings into the world (Mackin, 1982; Martos, 2001). Hugh of St. Victor, teaching and writing at the University of Paris in 1130-1143, completed a treatise on marriage that started with the supposition that the spouses in a marriage were inseparable. From there, he concluded that to be inseparable, the relationship must contain a sacrament.

Gratian of Bologna

During this era, a canonist at the University of Bologna named Gratian collected and tried to harmonize all the major texts on marriage that were available to him. His work, called the Concord of Discordant Canons or simply the *Decretum* (c. 1139), attempted to use early scholastic methods to reconcile the contradictions found in the vast collection of material gathered from bishops, theologians, civil authorities, the Bible, popes, and the early church fathers, such as Augustine. Gratian's *Decretum* was the authoritative canonical reference for 400 years, and served as the basis of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (1556) formulated under Pope Pius V (1504-1572). These two documents, the *Decretum* (1139) and *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (1556), remained as the primary sources of Catholic jurisprudence until the 1917 Code of Canon Law (Mackin, 1982).

Thomas Aquinas

For approximately one thousand years, between the times of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, marriage was not recognized as a sacrament, and sexual intercourse was viewed as interfering with holiness (Mackin, 1982; Martos, 2001). As the sacramental theology developed, the theologians for the first half of Roman Catholic history disqualified marriage as a sacrament because a "relationship whose physical

union is dominated by sinful carnal desire can hardly be an instrument of holiness and a sign of an invisible divine reality” (Mackin, 1989, p. 149). In the early Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) and other Church theologians rediscovered the writings of Augustine, and expanded Augustine’s marital theology into a new theology of marriage.

Aquinas took Augustine’s three goods of marriage and rewrote them as the three ends of marriage that also produced three goods or benefits. Aquinas labeled the ends as principal and secondary based upon the order in which Augustine presented them. In this way, procreation and the education of children were institutionalized in the Roman Catholic Church as the primary end and benefit of marriage. This primary order stood for the next 700 years until Vatican II (1963-65) did away with the language of primary and secondary and placed the well-being of the couple as a benefit of marriage that was equal to procreation. This drastic change was confirmed by the revised 1983 Canon (Lawler, 1993).

Marriage recognized as a Sacrament

The greatest contribution to marriage made by Thomas Aquinas, along with the contributions of his teacher and collaborator, Albert the Great (c.1206-1280), was the recognition by the Roman Catholic Church that marriage was indeed a sacrament. Lawler (1993) credits the “combined theological authority of Albert and Thomas [as assuring] for marriage, albeit late in the Christian history, a place among the sacraments of the Catholic Church” (p. 62). The description of sacramental marriage provided by Aquinas states:

Marriage has as its principal end the procreation and education of children ... a secondary end [is] the sharing of tasks which are necessary in life, and from this point of view husband and wife owe each other faithfulness, [and another end in believers is] the meaning of Christ and church, and so marriage is called a sacrament. The first end is found in marriage in so far as man is animal, the second in so far as he is man, the third is so far as he is believer. (Aquinas quoted in Lawler, 1993, p. 60)

At the Council of Lyons (1274), marriage was listed with the other official Roman sacraments for the first time. Lyons was an attempt to heal the great schism between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Latin) Catholic Churches.¹⁸ One issue that separated the Churches was the status of marriage as a sacrament. The Eastern Church had developed a rich understanding of marriage both as a liturgical event and as a sacred *mysterium*, or sacrament (Martos, 2001). Rome, in what was a political maneuver as well as a theological shift, added marriage to the evolved list of sacraments. This list of seven sacraments “instituted by Christ” continued into present day Roman Catholicism^{19,20} (Catechism, 1997, p. 289).

¹⁸ The Orthodox Catholic tradition recognized marriage as a *mysterium*, or sacrament, by the sixth century. The Great Schism (1054) was due to doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political, and geographic issues (Makin, 1982; Martos, 2001).

¹⁹ The number, origin, and authenticity of the sacraments is interpreted differently by Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist Churches.

²⁰ Marriage was listed as a sacrament in Church documents one time prior to the Council of Lyons in 1274. In reaction to another Gnostic heresy, the Council of Verona in 1184, mentioned marriage as a sacrament in an official church document. (Lawler 1993)

In 1439, at the Council of Florence, the Roman Catholic definition of sacramental marriage, as understood at that point in time (Lawler, 1993), was summarized in this way:

The seventh sacrament is marriage, which is a sign of the union between Christ and his church...A triple good is designated for marriage. The first is offspring accepted and raised to worship God; the second is fidelity, in which each spouse ought to serve the other; the third is the indivisibility of marriage because it signifies the indivisible union of Christ and Church. And, although separation is permissible in the case of fornication, remarriage is not, for the bond of legitimately contracted marriage is perpetual. (DS 1327²¹ quoted in Lawler, 1993, p. 63)

Marriage and the Middle Ages

In the years 1457-1563, the Council of Trent further developed the Church's position of authority over marriage. This was in response to the Reformers, such as Martin Luther. The Church claimed absolute authority over marriage and declared itself above family or civil considerations. The Council of Trent established Church authority over compulsory canonical forms for marriage ceremonies, and established impediments or reasons for Church sanctioned dissolution (Orsy, 1986). The Council of Trent defined marriage as an institution for creating and educating future members of the Church. The personal welfare of the couple was not an important consideration other than the avoidance of concupiscence. Marital relationships were governed by the Church, and this

²¹ *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum* (1327).

remained the only major document on the sacrament of marriage by an ecumenical council until Vatican II in 1965 (Orsy, 1986).

Church Authority

In the centuries after the Reformation, the emerging nation states of Europe challenged the centralized authority of Rome on marriage. Heads of state, both Catholic and Protestant, sought to reestablish a non-ecclesiastical and secular dimension to marriage (Mackin, 1982). In response, the Church continued to emphasize the institutional aspects of marriage over the personal aspects. The ends of the institution of marriage continued to be procreation, and not the personal benefits of the couple. The Church also continued to emphasize its authority over marriage, and declared that regardless of the secular contract claimed by the emerging states, marriage was also a sacrament. The secular and the sacramental aspects of marriage were distinguishable, but they were not separable, and this, in the Church's opinion, gave the Church jurisdiction over marriage (Lawler, 1993).

Marriage and Church Authority Today

The 1983 revision of Canon Law maintained the Church's authority over marriage that was claimed in the 15th century. The Canon claimed jurisdiction "over the naturally ordered ends of marriage and its essential properties" (Orsy, 1986, p.49). The properties were detailed in Canons 1108-1123. These Canons rule on the form of celebration, Canons 1124-1129 rule on mixed marriages, and Canons 1141-1155 rule on the separation of the spouses. The Church asserted authority over the marriage of all baptized persons in Canon 1055, which states: "Therefore, between baptized persons no

valid matrimonial contract can exist that is not, by that fact, a sacrament” (Orsy, 1986, p. 54).

Catholic Marriage in the Twentieth Century

Code of Canon Law (1917)

Prior to the compilation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the Church relied upon a vast collection of rulings, opinions, council decrees, pronouncements, penitentials, and the writings of the early church fathers, such as Augustine, to juristic marriage at the parish level around the world. However, this conglomerate of material was not organized²², and the first organized code of law for the Church was produced in 1917 under the design and supervision of Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934). The Cardinal’s objective was to uphold and protect the institution of marriage against the threat of modernism. The Code continued the Augustinian tradition that listed procreation as the institutional necessity of marriage and paid little attention to the legitimate needs or desires of individuals (Orsy, 1986). The 1917 Code made no concessions to personal dispositions or circumstances. For instance, in a marriage where one spouse was not Catholic, the opinion of the non-Catholic spouse was not included in Tribunal proceedings. Only the Catholic spouse had representation in the Church’s Tribunal (legal) proceedings in the case of separation or annulment (Orsy, 1986).

The 1917 Code defined sacramental marriage as a contract between two persons. The primary end was procreation, and the secondary end was mutual help and “the

²² The *Decretum* (1139) and *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (1556) remained as the primary sources of Catholic jurisprudence until the 1917 Code of Canon Law (Mackin, 1982).

remedying of concupiscence” (Canon 1013.1 of 1917 quoted in Lawler, 1993, p. 66). The 1917 Code continued to reinforce the Church’s reliance on Augustine’s theology, and was a “reductionist definition of both the contract and the sacrament of marriage” (Lawler, 1993, p. 67).

Casti Connubii (1930)

Pope Pius XI (1857-1939) issued an important encyclical²³ in 1930 that began with the juridical aspects of the 1917 Code, but then moved to an unexpected support of the personal benefits of marriage (Mackin, 1989). The encyclical used the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1583) to describe “marriage as a union of conjugal love and intimacy” (Lawler, 1993, p. 67). Conjugal love was the important contribution of the couple to the creation of the sacrament. Pius XI specified that conjugal love demanded constant mutual help in both domestic and personal aspects of life. The Pope called upon couples to work together, to mature spiritually, and to grow together in the love of God and others (Mackin, 1989). This was an innovation for Church theology, and was later used by Vatican II (1963-65) to develop conjugal love as an equal good of marriage, along with procreation (Mackin, 1989).

Casti Connubii (1930) humanized sacramental marriage for the first time in the Church, and moved slightly away from the strict interpretation of institutional marriage as being designed solely for procreation. Pius XI was innovative in describing marriage as a sharing of life, and this foretold of the Vatican II return to the Roman definition of *consortium*, described shortly. Pope Pius XI, in 1930, spoke of marriage this way:

²³ An encyclical is a “circular letter” to the patriarchs, primates, archbishops, and bishops of the Church. It promotes the ideas of the Pope who sends it, but it is not a Papal bull, or declaration.

The mutual inward molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other...[is] the chief reason and purpose of marriage, provided marriage be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as the sharing of life as a whole and the mutual interchange and partnership thereof. (*Casti Connubii* (1930) in Mackin, 1989, p. 526)

Casti Connubii (1930) was also innovative when the papal document put the sacramental character of marriage, including indissolubility, into the power and choice of the spouses.

[The spouses] should strive with all their might so that their marriage, not only through the power and symbolism of the sacrament, but also through their spirit and manner of life, may be and remain always the living image of that most fruitful union of Christ and the Church...(*Casti Connubii* quoted in Mackin, 1989, p. 527).

Second Vatican Council (1963-65)

The impact of Vatican II²⁴ on the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of sacramental marriage was enormous. The document *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, featured a section on "Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family." The document stated that marriage was sacred, authored by God, and was an intimate *consortium* that shared conjugal love

²⁴ The First Vatican Council was from 1869-70.

and life. Marriage was defined as both a personal vocation and as a Church institution that was indissoluble.

Covenant and Consortium. The bishops of Vatican II combined the First Testament concept of marriage as a *covenant*, a steadfast love, with the classic Roman notion of marriage as a *consortium*, a union that is an undivided sharing of the whole of life (Mackin, 1987). They reintroduced the critical element of conjugal love from the writings of Pius XII, an element that had been missing in the 1917 Canon that described marriage as a contract.

Marriage, according to *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), was formed by “a marital covenant of irrevocable personal consent”, in which the spouses “mutually bestow and accept one another” (paragraph 48). The bishops developed a concept of marriage as a reciprocal gifting of persons that started with an informed decision. The bishops of Vatican II described marriage in abstract terms, viz.:

Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Matt. 19), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union, they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 48)

Marital Sexuality. The bishops of Vatican II also refuted the Augustinian interpretation of marital sexuality, and described marital lovemaking with intercourse as

the fullest and most characteristic aspect of conjugal love (Mackin, 1987). *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) explained:

The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely [intercourse] are noble and worthy ones. Expressed in a manner, which is truly human, these actions promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will. Sealed by mutual faithfulness and allowed above all by Christ's sacrament, this love remains steadfastly true in body and in mind, in bright days or dark. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 49)

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965), the traditional Catholic ends of marriage were reversed. The bishops readopted a biblical pattern. In Genesis, a man was first given a mate to relieve his solitude. After mutual love, Adam and Eve were given sexuality. Finally, procreation occurred only after mutual love and sexuality. By following this logic, Vatican II placed the good of the spouses, the mutual love of the spouses, before sexuality and procreation. Orsy (1986) commented that with this Vatican II reinterpretation of marriage, "the Augustinian theory that haunted the church for so long [was] put to rest officially and for good" (Orsy, 1986, p. 36).

In addition to the drastic revision on the goods of marriage, Vatican II also moved drastically to affirm the equality of man and woman, and to state that married persons were called by vocation to a life of sanctity and holiness, just as were the ordained clergy (Orsy 1986).

Summary of Gaudium et Spes. The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), reintroduced three older understandings of sacramental marriage. The bishops grounded their document in the biblical covenant, they re-emphasized the Roman notion of marriage as a consortium rather than a contract, and they expounded upon the goodness of marital love, including marital intercourse, based upon their understanding of Holy Scripture.

Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law

The documents of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) sought to revise the Church's definition of marriage. Twenty years after Vatican II, these revisions influenced, but did not entirely change, the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law from the 1917 Canon. The 1983 Code of Canon Law put more emphasis on the spouses in marriage, but it also retained the 1917 Canon's institutional purposes and rationales. Vatican II directed the Church's discussion of the importance of human persons, but the legal categories and institutional concepts inherited from the past continued to dominate the Code (Orsy, 1986). The 1983 revision of the Code moved slightly away from the marital contract language of the 1917 Canon to include the First Testament concept of covenant, as reintroduced by Vatican II. The 1983 Code also included the concept of *consortium*, whereby the couple shared their mutual fate in loyalty and fidelity.

Catholic Legal Description

Canon 1055 of the Code of Canon Law (1983) is the current Catholic legal description of sacramental marriage. The description developed over a long history that included political and theological influences. The newly introduced key words in the

1983 definition are covenant, consortium, and the good of the spouses. Specifically, the definition reads thus:

Matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a *consortium* of the whole life, [and which] by its very nature is ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between baptized persons. (Orsy, 1986, p. 50)

Post Vatican II Definitions of Marriage

The Catholic literature on sacramental marriage in the 1970s primarily reported on the changes instigated by Vatican II, and did not expand or reinterpret it. The wheels of Catholicism move very slowly, and the literature on marriage also moved slowly to incorporate the personal and humanistic aspects of sacramental marriage that came forth in Vatican II. This literature review picks up the literature in the 1980s when the pronouncements of Vatican II had been disseminated across the Catholic community.

The Literature between 1980-2000

The Catholic literature on marriage produced in the 1980s was primarily retrospective and historical, with a few topics raised out of pastoral concerns. Kasper (1980) first traced the history of the changing theology of sacramental marriage and then introduced the pastoral problem of divorce and the distinction between secular and church marriages. He concluded with a definition of marriage that relied upon the message of love and faith in Galatians 5:6.²⁵ Kasper (1980), who was later elevated to

²⁵ "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6).

Cardinal, used the phrase “lived in faith working through love” (p. 84), and this became a common pastoral definition of sacramental marriage, although it did not specify how couples achieved the sacramental quality of marriage. The definition follows:

In Christian faith, human beings make a total decision in favor of God, who, in Jesus Christ, made a total decision in favor of human beings. God’s unconditional love and faithfulness makes our unconditional love and faithfulness possible. Christian marriage is an actualization of Christian life lived in faith working through love. (Kasper, 1980, p.84)

Martos (2001) presented a historical review, and then moved to describe sacraments as symbols of human meaning. The historical analogy of marriage as a “sign of incarnate spiritual union of Christ and the church,” Martos (2001) explained, “is used...to bring Catholics to a deeper awareness to what their relationship to Christ and to each other is and ought to be” (p. 394). Marriage, according to Martos (2001), was always a sacrament “despite the fact that much of the history of marriage in the Catholic Church has been a legal history and despite the fact that the sacramental theology of marriage was for a long time formulated in judicial terms” (p. 394).

Mackin (1982, 1984, 1989) provided the most expansive and historically comprehensive review of marriage in the literature, and he called for the experience of marriage to be included in the theological development of the sacrament. Mackin (1982) wrote of sacramental marriage as a matrix that included both spiritual and human components. He moved the sacramental description away from the purely theological and

into a more humane description that included life experiences. Mackin (1989) described the formal religious traits critical to creating a sacramental marriage.

Both spouses must refer their persons and their marriage to God in some way that is both explicit and observable. They must pray ... this reference to God must be in and through Christ. He is God-among-us. (p. 676)

Mackin (1989) also defined the minimum traits necessary for a sacramental marriage. It is a clear directive of what to do to create a sacramental marriage, and is written as follows:

Both spouses must love in a caring, self-giving way. Both must be capable of open and honest communication. Both must be reasonably adept at the bodily sexual manifestation of their love and must desire it. If they are fertile both must be accepting of children and capable of nurturing them. Their marriage must be helpful to those near to and touched by it. Both must be willing to work at sustaining their relationship, at defying the law of entropy in it. (p. 675)

Mackin foretold of the new generation of literature (Cahill, 2003) when he advised, "No one can know what the sacrament is without first knowing what a marriage is" (Mackin, 1989, p. 702). He eventually took his own advice, left his Jesuit order, and married. (Silicon Valley Metro Weekly, February 9, 2005).

McBride (1994) contributed a description of sacramental marriage when he summarized the lengthy Catechism (1997). McBride (1994) took all of the abstract and theological descriptions of the Catechism and presented them as an analogy to the Irish

wedding ring, the *claddagh*. In the description offered by McBride (1994), “The claddagh shows hands folded in prayer around a heart of love beneath a crown of fidelity. The three symbols reflect the basic virtues needed for a happy marriage and to live the expectations of the Sacrament of Matrimony” (McBride, 1994, p. 151).

Lawler (1985, 1987, 1993, 1996, 2002, 2004)²⁶ adopted the theological and anthropological matrix of Mackin (1984) but retained the traditional language of the Church.²⁷ The combination of the two approaches led Lawler (2002) to describe marriage this way:

[Sacramental marriage is a] prophetic symbol, a two tiered reality ... [of] an intimate communion of life and love between a man and a woman ... and the intimate communion of life and love and grace between God and God’s people and between Christ and Christ’s people the Church. (p.14)

While the Catholic academic literature was moving in the 1990s towards a more experiential and less theoretical description of sacramental marriage, the ecclesial sources retained an abstract definition. As representative of the recent ecclesial language about marriage, Pope John Paul II (1997) used a “unity of the two” (p. 450) description for

²⁶ Lawler’s extensive work was cited throughout this study. This section only cited his definition of sacramental marriage.

²⁷ Lawler (2002) joined Mackin (1989) in the call for the experiential study of the sacrament of marriage. He asked for a theology of Christian families to “uncover the meaning embedded in the ancient Catholic concept of domestic church” (Lawler, 2002, p. 208).

marriage. Marriage was a mutual relationship that included God. In fact, the Pope emphasized God, and nearly lost the man and woman. Pope John Paul II (1997) explained:

It is a question here of mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other "I." This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (p. 450)

New Generation Catholic Literature: 2000-present

(Cahill, 2003) described the Catholic academic literature since the year 2000 as coming from a "new generation" (p. 592). The Catholic academic laity began to describe the personal experiences of sacramental marriage with a vigor not apparent before this new century.

Kelly (2002) described sacramental marriage in terms of agape love, or God's love. According to Kelly (2002), this divine love was evident and experienced in the couples self-gifting to each other. The love of sacramental marriage was self-transcendent, and it moved the couple beyond human limitations. Kelly (2002) continued:

Marriage as an everyday reality confirms and lives out agape love through the experience of self-gift, ... realized in moments of marital bliss, ... and especially in moments of real suffering and poverty. The experiences of offering and accepting forgiveness...The recognition and acceptance of limits ... The experience of transcending one's own needs and wants ... for the good of the other ...commitment affirms the self-transcendence of married love. (p. 86)

Grabowski (2002) was only slightly less abstract in describing sacramental marriage as a Trinitarian love. He suggested that a couple who live every day in Christ's model of service were sacramental. Marriage was a place where the husband, wife, and other members of the family served each other. Each person in the family became a source of sacrament, and grace for the others, and connected the family to Trinitarian²⁸ love. Grabowski (2002) explained,

[Sacrament] is not just ... heroic acts performed by members of a family or evening significant sacrifices²⁹ but also ... the mundane daily tasks that make up the common life of a household.³⁰ ... families and their members are in a certain sense "sacraments" to one another by concretely embodying grace over the course of their lives and in very ordinary and day-to-day events....they also constitute the "self-giving" that reflects and makes present Trinitarian love. (Grabowski, 2002, p. 80)

²⁸ Trinitarian refers to the three-ness of God. The Trinity is composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

²⁹ Grabowski's (2002) examples are "a parent who gives his or her life to save a child, a sibling who donates a kidney to save another... a spouse who gives up a career to be at home to care for children when they are young, a family who welcomes an elderly relative into their midst instead of institutionalizing him or her"(p. 80).

³⁰ Grabowski's (2002) examples include "shared work, housecleaning, preparing food, washing dishes, caring for a sick child in the middle of the night, juggling schedules or carpooling so that children can take part in extracurricular activities, seeking to be reconciled after arguments, showing hospitality to guests, and outreach in the wider community" (p. 80).

Gaillardetz (2003) described sacramental marriage in terms of vulnerability.

Gaillardetz (2003) matched the private vulnerability of husband and wife with a public witness that included communion, mutuality, intimacy, and companionship for a complex definition of sacramental marriage.

First, marriage in the church is a public witnessing that emerges from living in communion, mutuality, intimacy, and companionship. Communion is the encounter with one's spouse, not as an object of gratification but in his or her subjective worth....such communion, can be communion with God ... Mutuality is the giving and receiving of each other's gifts in gratitude....embodied fully in Jesus' death on the Cross. Intimacy is more than closeness – it is...vulnerability before one another”....vulnerability is ultimately openness to God and the way in which God will be welcome in one's life. (Gaillardetz, 2003, p. 61)

Summary of Changing Catholic Descriptions of Marriage

This section of the literature review covered the changing descriptions and definitions of marriage over the history of the Church. Marriage was not recognized as a sacrament until the 12th century, and languished as a second-class vocation behind the celibate priesthood until Vatican II (1963-1965). Following Vatican II, theologians such as Kasper (1980) and historians such as Mackin (1984) called for the participation of married couples in the development of marital theology. The inclusion of experiential knowledge into the Catholic descriptions of marriage has only occurred recently.

Part Two: How Marital Spirituality Influences Marriage Dynamics

This section of the literature review examines the effect that spirituality has on the dynamics of marital life, and on the effects that married and social relationships have on spirituality. The review confined itself to literature produced in the last fifty years.

Traditional Catholic Perspective

Pope Pius XII represented a traditional Catholic perspective on marriage during his 1939-1958 papacy, and he made a positive contribution towards the work of Vatican II by emphasizing the humanistic qualities of the sacrament. His attention to the social matrix of marriage was carried forward at Vatican II after his death.

Pope Pius XII was concerned for the roles of husband and wife in the post-modern world. The Pope referred to the family as “the primary and essential cell of society” whose purpose “is to multiply life” (Pius XII quoted in Huber, 1950, p. 8). Family roles and the status of family members were hierarchical, but the established roles of husband and wife were also to be collaborative, so that the sexes would be mutually complementary. The traditional roles outlined by Pius XII were the husband as breadwinner, wife as homemaker and soul of the family, and child as obedient learner. The authority of the husband was based upon Christ, and the role of the woman was “based upon her temperament and the gifts particular to her sex. [That is] a mother in the physical sense of the word [but also] in the more spiritual and sublime ... sense” (Pius XII quoted in Huber, 1950, p. 72).

Gaudium et Spes (1965)

The Second Vatican Council, called together by Pope John XXIII shortly after the death of Pope Pius XII, was an attempt by the Church to integrate modern human experience with traditional Christian dogma. (Kelly, 1992) The Council moved away contractual and legalistic language on marriage and returned to Scripture for the concept of covenant. The covenant was between equal partners, husband and wife. However, the equality of the spouses still included traditional roles. *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), in the chapter on Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and Family, described an ideal family dynamic for parents, families, and children. Figure 2.2 presents the roles described by *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

Please turn the page.

Figure 2.2 Ideal Family Dynamics of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965)

Parents. With their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness. (paragraph 50)

Family. The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses. (paragraph 50)

Father. The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to ... [the children's] formation. (paragraph 51)

Mother. The children, especially the younger...need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account. (paragraph 51)

Children. Children contribute ... to making their parents holy. They will respond to the kindness of their parents with sentiments of gratitude, love and trust. They will stand by them as children should when hardships overtake their parents and old age brings its loneliness. (paragraph 52)

Familias Consortio (1981)

Pope John Paul II highlighted the singular importance of family love and gave direction for the roles of families. With love as his point of departure, he emphasized four general tasks for the family. The family was to form a community of persons, serve life, help develop society, and share in the life and mission of the Church. The Pope's direction to families was to become themselves. The Pope described it this way:

The family finds in the plan of God the creator and redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is: its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: Family become what you are. (*Familias Consortio*, 1981, paragraph 17)

A Family Perspective in Church and Society (1983)

The United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops responded to *Familias Consortio* (1981), and gave directions on how to accomplish Pope John Paul II's model of sacramental marriage. In *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* (1983), the American bishops identified the following tasks for families to perform.

1. The family is to serve life in its transmission, both physically by bringing children into the world, and spiritually by handing on the values and traditions as well as developing the potential of each member to serve life at every age.

2. The family is to participate in the development of society by becoming a community of social training and hospitality, as well as a political involvement and activity.
 3. The family is to share in the life and mission of the Church by becoming a believing and evangelizing community, a community in dialogue with God, and a community at the service of humanity.
- (p. 7)

Catechism (1997)

The family dynamic promoted by the Catechism (1997) was influenced by *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) and *Familias Consortio* (1981). It described the family as a domestic church where “all members of the family exercise[d] the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way” (p. 413). The Catechism (1997) described the family as the first source of Christian teaching, as “a school for human enrichment” where a person “learn[ed] endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous-even repeated-forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life” (p. 413).

The Theology of the Body (1997)

Pope John Paul II returned to his discussion of marriage in *The Theology of the Body* (1997) where he assigned equal responsibility between the sexes for the natural regulation of fertility. John Paul II (1997) explained the dynamic of marital unity, whereby the “woman’s sincere gift of self is responded to and matched by a corresponding gift on the part of the husband ” (p. 456). Pope John Paul II (1997) called

“men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by its constant doctrine, [and] teaches that each and every marriage act (*quilibet matrimonii usus*) must remain open to the transmission of life” (p. 431). Pope John Paul II (1997) continued,

That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. ... By safeguarding both these essential aspects...the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man’s most high calling to parenthood. (p. 431-432)

Summary of Ecclesial Literature on Marriage Roles

The ecclesial literature on marriage roles emphasizes traditional hierarchies in the family with the father as the head “as Christ was head of the Church” (Catechism, 1997). Post Vatican II, it emphasizes the equal responsibility of the husband and wife for natural family planning. The ecclesial literature does not describe how spirituality is connected to these behaviors, other than in abstract language and in traditional analogies.

Recent Literature on Spirituality and Marital Dynamics

The recent literature on sacramental marriage from the laity identified a new set of dynamics associated with marital spirituality. The dynamics described in the new generation (Cahill, 2003) of literature included the concepts of domestic church, justice-in-love, friendship, sexuality, dual vocations, and social mission.

Domestic Church

Wright (2004) described the dynamic of a domestic church as “a family [that] borrows rituals or prayers from the repertoire of the gathered church community and incorporates them into their own practice” (p. 188). In Wright’s dynamic, storytelling is a major function of both the domestic and institutional churches. Domestic and religious stories are “woven together – through sacramental participation, familiarity with scripture, ethical awareness, prayer, or other spiritual disciplines” (p. 188).

Justice-in-love

McDonagh (2004) called for the primacy of love in Christian marriage and for it to include “justice-in-love” (p. 183). According to McDonagh, the “justice-in-love” dynamic was needed in all marital activities: the marital act, domestic duties, finances and, especially, in parenting. McDonagh (2004) continued,

Justice-in-marriage love, beyond patriarchy or matriarchy, beyond sentimentality, neglect or violence, provides a profound opening to the transcendent as each person encounters more fully the holy in the other. ... in practicing justice to the neighbor [spouse], one is also reaching out to God and being vulnerable to the Holy.” (p. 183)

Friendship

Lawler (1993, 2002) associated friendship with marital spirituality. Lawler described friendship as the source of the original attraction to marriage and that “friendship between spouses is a good recipe for a good marriage” (p. 140). Lawler’s (2002) marital dynamic included *philia*, “the particular, preferential, and reciprocated love of a friend over all others, [as well as]...*agape*, the universal non-preferential, and

not necessarily reciprocated love of others, the love commanded by Jesus,” (p. 145), and “also, of course, affection (storge), and sexual love (eros)...” (p. 151). Lawler (2002), emphasized the necessity of friendship in marriage in this description:

Friendship-love ... occurs only when my love is reciprocated by another who wills my good in return. This mutual friendship-love between equal selves creates between us the communion, the reciprocal bond that is the distinguishing mark of lovers, the fertile root from which we draw life from and give life to one another. Reciprocal love does not lead to communion; reciprocal love is communion (p. 152).

Lawler (2002) continued:

A friend who is also a spouse, as Aristotle argued, daily reflects to me an honest appraisal of myself; she offers me support against the constant temptation to loss of interest in and commitment to our on-going consent to be a coupled-We; she provides me with daily opportunities to do good and to grow in virtue.

(Lawler, 2002, p. 55)

Marital Sexuality

Mackin (1987) interpreted *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) to imply that marital sexuality was also affected by marital spirituality. In a sacramental marriage, intercourse was a path to holiness, as described by Mackin (1987) in this way:

Since the fullest expression of [marital love] is in sexual lovemaking, their sacrament is lived most fully there. Since Christ comes to them in their sacrament, he comes to them most fully in their lovemaking. And since the Holy Spirit

works in them through the sacrament to bring them to maturity in faith, trust and love, he does so through their lovemaking. (p. 50)

Dual Vocation

Rubio (2003, 2004) described family life as a dual vocation. To the traditional description of marriage as a vocation for the procreation and education of children, Rubio (2003) added “the primacy of discipleship” (p. 98). The discipleship included strict obedience to God regardless of the cost or consequences. The marital spirituality of Rubio emphasized duty and discipline, as was needed in raising children. However, in addition to raising children, Rubio (2003) asked the couple to also perform a public mission. Rubio’s (2003) concept of discipleship presumed public activity, and she stated the need for it thus:

One can practice Christian virtue, keep many of the commandments of the Old and New Testament, and obey God’s will at home and in one’s family...However, one cannot...fully realize the demands for discipleship to Jesus of Nazareth unless one also has a public vocation. (p. 99)

Social Mission

Kelly (2004) had a broad concept of marital spirituality and described the ideal marriage as “an integrative whole of sexual love, friendship, and agape” (p. 150). In this model, all families are intrinsically sacramental, including non-Catholic and non-Christian marriages, “wherein there is a real presence and interplay of sexual love, friendship, and agape” (p.151).

Kelly (2004) included the requirement of four social missions for a sacramental marriage and summarized Pope John Paul's II's *Familiar Consortio* (1981), describing the mission of the married couple in this way:

The four concrete aspects of a family's mission as domestic church [are]: (1) forming a community of persons, (2) serving life, (3) participating in the development of society, and (4) sharing in the life and mission of the church.

(Kelly, 2004, p. 147)

Self-emptying

Wright (2004) described the Christian spirituality of marriage as having a particular focus. That focus was centered on the revelation of Jesus Christ, and was "defined by relational love. Love of God, love of friend, love of neighbor, even love of enemy... it is also marked by the capacity for forgiveness...and is kenotic, or self-emptying, as was the life of Jesus" (Wright, 2002, p. 189).

Wright (2004) described the family unit as an intimate laboratory to develop *kenotic*, or self-emptying, love and described self-emptying as expanding our present capacities for love and allowing us to grow and become "more spacious, more capable of genuinely loving each other and ourselves ... the ramifications of this expansion are enormous" (p. 189). Wright (2004) described an ideal marital spirituality where the sacramental life goes beyond the seven formal sacraments. Wright (2004) acknowledged the "central and privileged" (p. 190) position of the seven sacraments in Roman Catholic tradition, and then defined a sacrament as "simply a visible medium through which an invisible reality is manifested" (p. 190). From this definition she continued, "There are potentially an infinite number of sacramental times, places, persons and events that can

reveal God's presence among and with us. It is especially the relational or in-between experiences of God-with-us that are experienced in family life." (p. 190)

Summary of New Generation Literature

The recent contributions of Catholic academics on spirituality and marital dynamics have included both familiar themes, such as mission and vocation, and have also introduced new themes, such as self-emptying, and justice-in-love. The two avenues of discussion merge into a model for marital and spiritual dynamics called the domestic church.

Part Three: Challenges and Rewards of Sacramental Marriage in the Catholic Literature

The literature review will now examine the challenges and rewards of sacramental marriage. Challenges include faith, religion, individualism, and family planning.

Challenges

Faith

Faith is necessary for the sacrament of matrimony to occur (Kasper, 1980; Mackin, 1983; Lawler 1987). The Catholic tradition holds that the "virtue or the know-how of faith is bestowed in baptism [but] for that virtue to become a personal act of faith, it must be activated, freely, explicitly, consciously and however minimally" (Lawler, 1993, p. 32). The implication for sacramental marriage is that the faith of each spouse

must be exercised. A sacramental marriage is not automatic, and the effects vary from couple to couple based on the choices made with faith.

Mackin (1987) discussed how human qualities and behaviors, the human matrix, determines the sacramental qualities, or the blessings of grace, in the marriage.

Christian sacraments are sacraments each in a different way. Much of the difference is determined by the human matrix in each case....One does not marry unconsciously and indeliberately. Nor does one love in marriage unconsciously and indeliberately. And where a marriage is a Christian sacrament, it is in the character of the love that its sacramentality is found." (p. 38)

Gaudium et Spes (1965) described the need for faith in a sacramental marriage as a day-by-day requirement.

This profession of faith demands that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and of the family. God, who called the couple to marriage, continues to call them in marriage. In and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them, revealing and presenting the concrete "demands" of their sharing in the love of Christ for his church in the particular family, social and ecclesial situation in which they find themselves. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 48)

Faith is the foremost challenge to a sacramental marriage because there is no sacrament without faith (Kasper, 1980; Mackin, 1983; Lawler, 1987), and because the

degree of sacramentality varies according to what actions the couple takes in response to faith (Mackin, 1987).

Religion

Religion was listed in the literature as a possible challenge to marriage. Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) concluded from their sociological studies that:

Religious compatibility between spouses at the time of marriage has a large influence on marital stability, rivaling in magnitude that of age at marriage and, at least for Protestants and Catholics, dominating any adverse effects of differences in religious background. (p. 385)

However, Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray-Swank (2003) cautioned that a greater religiosity, or perception of sanctification, can challenge a marriage. "Greater sanctification of marriage may heighten some couples' idealism about marital harmony, making it more difficult to admit and deal directly with serious conflict" (p. 230). Either way, strong or not-so-strong religion can be a challenge for a marriage.

Individualism

Individualism was identified as a challenge to sacramental marriage by Pope Pius XII (Huber, 1950) and again by Lawler (2002). Lawler (2002) called for a Christian response in this way:

Many see expressive individualism ... at the root of every problem faced by marriages and families in the United States ... The historical Christian tradition offers [an] antidote to this exaggerated individualism...Christians understand

themselves as in the fictive-kin family promised by Jesus, dedicated to the reversal of the individualistic tide that pulls families and marriages in an isolationist direction and fails to nurture the next generation. (Lawler, 2002, p. 212)

Family planning

The challenge of family planning was addressed in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).³¹ The bishops at Vatican II suggested that only parents themselves could make decisions on family planning, although parents were to be submissive to the Church's teaching. The challenge was described thus:

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted....they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator ... and make decisions by common counsel and effort. ... The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But ... spouses should be ... submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 50)

³¹ *Humane Vita* (1968) also addressed natural family planning.

Rewards

The rewards of sacramental marriage appear in the literature as both spiritual, and physical properties. The review will start with the ecclesial sources, and then move to the academic literature.

Spirit of Christ

The bishops at Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), described the reward of sacramental marriage as a person, and persons being penetrated with the spirit of Christ.

The description tends to the abstract in this way:

Authentic marital love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother. ... as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 48)

Gaudium et Spes (1965) also included sexuality as a benefit of sacramental marriage. Like many Church documents, it is hard to ascertain the consequences in the language of the Church.

The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely [intercourse] are noble and worthy ones....These actions promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will.

Couples Encounter Christ

Familiaris Consortio (1981) expanded on the concept of Christ as the reward of sacramental marriage. According to John Paul II (1981), there are three properties of marriage that reward the couple with grace and the hope of meeting Christ. The properties are:

Marriage, like every sacrament, is a memorial, actuation and prophecy. As a memorial, the sacrament gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children. As actuation, it gives them the grace and duty of putting into practice in the present, toward each other and their children, the demands of a love, which forgives and redeems. As prophecy, it gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ. (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, p. 13)

Liturgical Reward

Pope John Paul II (1997) went deep into abstract expression when he described the reward of sacramental marriage as liturgical language expressed in the language of the body. Pope John Paul II (1997) described it this way:

Thus, liturgical language, that is, the language of the sacrament and of the mystery, becomes in their life and in their living together the language of the body in a depth, simplicity and beauty hitherto altogether unknown. This seems to be the integral significance of the sacramental sign of marriage. In that sign, through the language of the body, man and woman encounter the great mystery.

This is in order to transfer the light of that mystery – the light of truth and beauty ... to the language of the practice of love. (John Paul II, 1997, p. 380)

Conjugal Love

The Catechism (1997) described the rewards of a sacramental marriage as benefits or as goods. Christian spouses, according to the Catechism, have the benefit of Christ dwelling with them and it is his grace that:

Gives them strength to take up their crosses [problems, difficulties] and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, ... and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he [Christ] gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb [heaven]." (Catechism, 1994, p. 410)

The Catechism (1997) described the benefit of a Christ-based conjugal love as a love that became purified and strengthened through God's grace. As this transformation occurred, the marriage acted as a sign and expression of Christian values. Ultimately, the benefit of conjugal love was the shaping of a person's identity, as the Catechism (1997) explained:

Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of a person enter – appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul. (Catechism, 1997, p. 210)

Sanctification

Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray-Swank (2003) found that a family's perception of sanctification gave them a deeper sense of meaning. The belief

that a family relationship was a holy gift provided people with a special sense of good fortune, joy, and security. Mahoney et al. (2003) also addressed the benefits to children and the reward of improved marital functioning in this way:

Sanctification may enhance the intergenerational transmission of faith which, over the long term, may serve as a “feedback loop” between parents and children that amplifies their respective individual spirituality. Another set of positive implications of sanctification revolve around the possibility that family members will work harder to protect and preserve relationships ... the sanctification of marriage represents a unique aspect of religion tied to more adaptive marital functioning. (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, Murray-Swank, 2003, p. 227)

New Generation Literature on Marital Rewards

The recent academic literature on sacramental marriage included such diverse rewards attributed to the sacrament as companionship, sexuality, healing and growth, and generativity.

Companionship. Gaillardetz (2003) saw the reward of companionship as: interacting with one’s spouse as a fellow traveler, an interaction in which the spouses share and give/receive nourishment ... Married spirituality...can be understood as a living prayer...Such a spirituality will be realized to the extent one participates in communion, mutuality, intimacy, and companionship. (p. 63)

Sexuality. Mackin (1987) combined the spiritual and the anthropological into his matrix of the sacrament and noted that for couples who lived marriage as a sacrament,

sexuality was a path of holiness. "Since Christ comes to them in their sacrament, he comes to them most fully in their lovemaking" (Mackin, 1987, p. 50).

Lawler (1987) explained the rewards of marital sexuality as a gift from God. "Sexuality and genitality, sexual passion and genital pleasure, derive their sacramental character...not from human beings...but from the simple theological fact that they are from God. They are gifts from God in creation, and they are good gifts" (p. 210).

Shivanaandan (1999) presented the scientific and theological rationales behind Pope John Paul II's theology of the body. Sexuality, according to Shivanaandan (1999), was freed from the traditional negative evaluations given it by the Church. The Pope's model for marital sexuality resolved original solitude and opened a person to their spouse and to the transcendent. As Shivanaandan (1999) explained Pope John Paul II's theology of the body, "The body and sexual intercourse in marriage are the expression of the transcendence of the person. ... the body speaks as a prophet of interior spiritual realities" (p. 140). Shivanaandan (1999) continued with a description usually applied to marriage in general, but here she applies it to sexuality, "It is a sign of the nuptial union between God and the soul, God and his people, Christ and the Church" (p. 140).

Healing and Growth: Physical and Mental. Dominian (1987) identified "three ways in which grace operates in contemporary marriage ... not excluding other possibilities" (p. 161), and listed them as sustaining power, healing, and growth. Sustaining power included couples supporting each other emotionally and economically. Healing included overcoming the wounds of each person's family of origin and being complimentary to a spouse's strengths and weaknesses. Growth included the filtering of

ideas between spouses and, ideally, moving from intelligence to wisdom (Dominian, 1987).

Jenks and Woolever (1999), in an epidemiological study not specific to sacramental marriage, found that men experienced better health when married. When the mortality rates of 36,000 single and married men were compared, the study found that unmarried males had higher rates of death from all kinds of events and illnesses.

Unmarried males die at a much younger age than do married males.

Generativity. Lawler (2003) described the rewards of sacramental marriage in three ways. He listed “the primary fruitfulness of marriage” (p.102) as the “becoming a we, a two-in-oneness” (p. 102). Along with this benefit to the married couple, Lawler (2003) added the benefit of children. Then, and importantly, he expanded beyond biological parenting and included the reward of generativity. Lawler described generativity as “the capacity to generate and nurture life beyond oneself” (Lawler, 2003, p. 102).

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature of the Roman Catholic Church on marriage runs very wide and very deep. It includes the works of pre-Christian prophets, apostles, early bishops, popes, medieval academics, and non-Roman church traditions. This literature review only skipped across the surface as an introduction to a near endless source of literature. The review demonstrated that the Catholic description and definition of marriage has changed many times. The literature review included both traditional and postmodern interpretations, and demonstrated that the recent “new generation of Catholic scholars”

(Cahill, 2003, p. 78) have begun to expand the Catholic literature with descriptions based on experiential knowledge about sacramental marriage.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Method

The research questions were designed to study the emic, or inside, perspective of sacramental marriage. The study had the goal of building a complex, holistic understanding of sacramental marriage from the perspective of eight couples who claimed to approach marriage as a sacrament.³² The research questions followed this goal, and focused the research on the participant's descriptions of sacramental marriage, on the interplay between spirituality, marriage, and social dynamics, and on the challenges of marriage. Both qualitative and descriptive quantitative data were gathered and presented, but the ethnographic nature of the research goals and questions made this primarily a qualitative study.

Emic Meanings

Constructing an inside, or emic, perspective on sacramental marriage was the goal of the study. The study wanted to reveal and describe a small portion of inside-knowledge about sacramental marriage as understood by eight couples. Emic refers to the subjective meaning held by participants, rather than an etic, or outside meaning held by non-participants. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 demonstrated that the Catholic

³² I wanted to approach sacramental marriage as an anthropologist would approach an island community. I wanted to arrive at the island of sacramental marriage and immerse myself in it, as I had done in 30 years of anthropology on small atolls in the western Pacific Ocean (see O'Brien, 1992; 1993).

literature on marriage has been developed from an etic, an outsider, perspective for most of its history.

Research Design Strategy

Sample Selection

The study used a purposeful sampling method, as described by Patton (2002). The participants were selected because they were “information rich and illuminative, that is, they offered useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). The sample selection was “aimed at insight about the phenomenon, [and] not an empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

Figure 3.1 *Purposeful Sample Selection Criteria*

1. *Sacramental Marriage*: The participant had a self-reported understanding and commitment to a sacramental marriage in a Catholic context.
2. *Christian Formation*: The participant had a self-reported program of spiritual development.
3. *Catholic Practice*: One or more spouse had an observable Catholic practice.
4. *Domestic Church*: The family included two or more generations.
5. *Service*: The participants had an observable practice of service and leadership in the community.
6. *Cursillo*: The participants were active in the Catholic Cursillo movement.

Cursillo as a Sample Criterion

The study sample selected participants from a pool of Roman Catholics active in the Cursillo movement. There are more than 1000 active Cursillo members in the Diocese of San Diego, according to the records of the local movement. I selected eight couples based upon my familiarity with them during the six years I had been active in the Cursillo movement prior to this study. The convenience of selecting eight pre-known participants contributed to creating a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002). Eight couples were selected because this was a manageable number of interviewees. I believe that many other couples in the San Diego Cursillo movement could have acted as information-rich participants, but this study was limited to eight couples, for a total of 16 participants.

An Explanation of the Cursillo Movement. Cursillo de Cristiandad, is a “short course in Christianity” (Martos 2001, p. 134) that originated in Spain in the 1940s and came to the United States in 1961. The Cursillo movement emphasizes the daily spiritual practice of piety, study, and action,³³ and includes married and unmarried Catholics. The Cursillo movement places a strong emphasis on people becoming effective leaders to spread the Gospel as a means of transformational change. Martos (2001) describes Cursillo as an experiential sacrament. Martos (2001) explains:

[Cursillo] teaches what a Christian community can be by surrounding the participants with a living example of one: the Cursillo itself. [Participants are] charged with an experiential insight into the meaning of their religion and their

³³ Piety is defined by Cursillo as seeking holiness in each day, study is learning more about God each day, and action is living the Gospel message each day.

spread the Gospel as a means of transformational change. Martos (2001) describes Cursillo as an experiential sacrament. Martos (2001) explains:

[Cursillo] teaches what a Christian community can be by surrounding the participants with a living example of one: the Cursillo itself. [Participants are] charged with an experiential insight into the meaning of their religion and their church...very often becoming more active members of their parish communities, and so its sacramental effects are not just short-lived. (p. 134)

Cursillo Method. Cursillo programs begin with an intensive three-day retreat, attended separately by men and women. The retreat has the potential to impact an individual's faith significantly due to the frequent experience of metanoia, a spiritual awakening, by the participants. Married couples attend on successive weekends. Following the three-day retreat, Cursillo members participate in small weekly fellowships of three to ten people. These fellowships are organized according to gender. The purpose of these weekly fellowships is to give each person an opportunity to describe their efforts each week with the Cursillo goals of piety, study, and action. Cursillistas, as the participants are called, and their families gather monthly into a larger group, called an Ultreya. The purpose of the larger group is to expand friendships, and to share spirituality.

The Cursillo movement in the Diocese of San Diego provided a convenient subculture of the larger Roman Catholic population from which to draw a purposeful sample. The Cursillo subculture informed the study, but it was not the subject of the study. The subject was the phenomenon of sacramental marriage.

Personal Involvement in Cursillo. Prior to the start of this study, I had six years of personal experience with the couples in Cursillo. This study has taken two years, and I now have eight years experience with Cursillo, and with the participants of this study. This personal relationship with the Cursillo movement was important to establishing trust prior to asking the participants personal questions about the spirituality of their marriage.

Data Collection

Researchers Role

The goal of an emic or insider view of sacramental marriage required me to become a full participant in the activity and to minimize distinctions between myself and the participants (Patton, 2002). The participants' reactions to me as a researcher were minimized due to my previous six years of friendship with the participants within the Cursillo movement. During the data-gathering phase, this friendship allowed me to move quickly into the research questions, and minimized the participants' reactions to the tape recorder sitting on the table between us during the guided conversations.

Three Sources of Data

This study framed sacramental marriage as a cultural phenomena, or world-view, that could be investigated using a small sample of uniquely qualified cases. Data were collected over a twenty-two month period using ethnographic interview and participant observation techniques. The third source of data was individual timelines drawn by the participants to represent their lives.

Guided Conversations. The series of interviews followed a modified interview guide (Patton, 2002) to develop as guided conversations. The guide listed questions explored in the course of the conversation, but it did not dictate the sequence or exact

wording of the questions. The guide allowed open-ended responses by the participants. The responses were generally long conversations between the spouses with the occasional probe offered by me. The subject matter, and direction of the conversation provided the starting-point for the next question or probe. I did not use a stimulus/response model even in the initial questions/answers phase of data gathering. Rather, I tried to guide the conversation gently, and often the two participants would then carry the topic forward without my interjection. The interview guide is included as Appendix A.

The guided interview technique ensured that the same primary questions were asked of each participant, and the use of probes ensured that each conversation was on track to investigate the couples' perception of sacramental marriage. Variance in the conversations away from the topic of sacramental marriage was held to a minimum early in the interview series but grew wider in the third and, in two cases, fourth interviews. Probes (Patton, 2002) were used to supplement the modified interview guide. The types of probes used included detail-oriented probes that collected more information by filling in the "who, what, and where" aspects of the conversation. "Who was the priest," led one participant to remember a whole series of events leading up to her marriage. In another interview, a simple elaboration probe such as, "Tell me more about that," opened the conversation for the husband to tell how he had changed throughout the marriage. In one complex discussion, a clarification probe such as, "Hmmm, how's that again?" rewarded me with a deeper explanation on how God had appeared in the marriage. Each interview established a free flow of information rather than a stimulus/response mode of

questions/answers in order to reach a level of “trustworthiness of the data”

(Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 176) that could be interpreted to represent an emic perspective.

Participant Observation. The anthropological fieldwork technique of participant observation was used to gather data based on personal, eyewitness observations (Patton, 2002). The data was collected in a random series of public and private events that included Mass, Cursillo, and other Catholic functions, such as funerals, weddings, and baptisms. Following the direction of Patton (2002), I was “fully engaged in experiencing the setting (participation) while at the same time ... [I observed and talked] with the other participants...” (Patton, 2002, p. 265).

Participant observation contributed to the study by gathering data on behaviors, rituals, and language. I immersed myself in the subject with the participants “to think, see, feel and sometimes act as a member of its culture” (Powdermaker, 1966, p. 9 quoted in Patton, 2002, p. 268). Like the classic anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1961), I wanted to derive my information from “the surest sources- [that is] personal observation and statements made ... directly by the natives in their own language [and] without the intervention of an interpreter” (Sir James Frazer in Malinowski, 1961, p.vii). My participant observation resulted in a series of field notes that contributed to the data analysis phase of the study.

Participant Timelines. In the study, I asked the participants to draw a timeline of their life. The participants included events such as jobs, weddings, graduations, births, and deaths, along with points indicating any spiritual experience or noticeable change in their spirituality. The timeline for each spouse was discussed in a guided conversation. The timeline provided a document to reference marital, social, and spiritual experiences

over time in a visual way. The timelines were compared between spouses to see how marital spirituality correlated with outside events and personal situations.

Saturation

The study reached a data saturation point twice. The first data saturation point came when my conversations with the couples did not generate additional material on sacramental marriage. This was after I had reviewed the written text of our prior conversations and after we had discussed any corrections or clarifications; it was also after we had reviewed the timeline created by the participants. The participants appeared saturated with my inquiry, and I was saturated with answers to my questions.

My continued data analysis also indicated this first level of saturation. I analyzed the narrative gathered from each couple, and I coded their comments and stories. I felt saturated with data at that point, and I wrote my first draft of the dissertation based on the categories developed at that time.

The second data saturation point occurred when I went back into the data to write a second draft of the dissertation. I returned to the data, and I returned to the interview process to gather more data from two under-represented participants. I also returned to the literature, and expanded the literature review. As the study became more organized around the research questions, I realized a second data saturation point, and a sense of completeness to the answers I found to the research questions.

Data Analysis

The study methodology included three to five hours of guided conversations with each couple. The conversations were transcribed and the transcribed narratives provided

the primary material for data analysis. The data sets gathered in this study were analyzed in two distinct ways. The two methodologies are distinct, but their names are similar. The data was subjected to narrative analysis and to an analysis of narrative, as described by Polkinghorne (1988, 1995), Sykes (1998), and Patton (2002).

Analysis of Narrative

The narratives of the couples were analyzed according to the analysis of narrative technique (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Sykes, 1998; Patton, 2002). Narrative, according to Polkinghorne (1988), is another word for story, and narratives “organize human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Narratives tell about some phenomenon that occurred, such as a sacramental marriage, and the analysis of narrative allowed the study to discover ideas and combinations of ideas in the language of the participants. Patton (2002) emphasized that family stories and life histories provided narratives that “reveal cultural or social patterns through the lens of individual experience” (p. 115). The study expanded the use of narrative to examine spirituality as a cultural phenomenon.³⁴ The analysis of narrative procedure included a series of coding events where I attempted to delve deeper into the meaning of sacramental marriage as held by the participants. Figure 3.2 summarizes the stages of this process.

³⁴ Polkinghorne (1991) suggested that “self-concept or self-identity” (p. 265) can be studied with the analysis of narrative procedure. In this study, spirituality is that portion of self-concept or self-identity that includes a supernatural aspect.

Figure 3.2 *Analysis of Narrative Procedure*

What was done	Why it was done
Descriptive Phase	Deconstructed large narrative into manageable units.
Initial Coding	Labeled key words and key themes.
Participants Coding	Included "native language" in coding.
New Categories	Grouped coded narratives into new categories.
Sub-categories	Aligned consistencies and differences into sub-categories.
Category Saturation	Included all possible codes that fit the category or sub-category.
Link Categories to Research Questions	Created a place to regroup similar categories into the three research questions.
Construct Additional Category	Provided an additional category that did not fit the research questions.
Create Case Study from Narrative Analysis	Developed a short personal history of the sacramental marriage of each couple.

Procedure Described

The procedures followed in the stages of the analysis are more fully described in the following section.

Descriptive Phase. After each conversation, the tape of the conversation was transcribed into text. This made the conversation observable, and provided a primary data base for analysis.³⁵ The transcription was read over with a pencil, and key words were circled. The key words included "God," "sacrament," "holy"; and descriptive words, such

³⁵ The field notes from participant observations, and the participant timelines added to the data base.

as “good” and “bad,” and “love” and “hate,” which were opposites of each other. I used opposites as an introductory way of sketching distinctions among the participants.

Initial Coding. I read the data for each couple three times and made additional slight pencil marks around the key words. Then, when I read the data the next few times, I marked the key words and initial themes or ideas that appeared not only as words, but also as paragraphs and short narratives. This method of coding continued until the study was completed.

Participant's Codes. The coding of the text, from start to finish, emphasized the key phrases or key words that the participants used in their stories. The codes were taken from the emic language as much as possible. The words from the participants that were coded included: “gift,” “divine intervention,” and “change.” Some of these participant codes were later expanded as categories. This method of coding continued until the study was completed.

Linking Categories to Research Questions. Groups of categories were formed by similarly coded narratives, and some categories appeared more rigorous than other categories. Categories were compared to the research questions. Some categories, for example “ministry,” fit with more than one research question, and other categories were more limited in their application to the questions. The process was facilitated by the creation of electronic files; for example, for research question one, Definitions of Sacramental Marriage, an electronic file was started, to hold each phrase or paragraph that was coded close to or approximated sacramental marriage. The same procedure was completed for the research questions on marital dynamics and life challenges.

Constructing Additional Categories. Not all narratives and not all codes were able to fit into the research questions. As the coding of the material continued, the unique qualities of each couple formed unique categories and subcategories. The codes applied to the narratives led to categories tagged as values (forgiveness), virtues (hope and faith), as well as benefits (sexuality), and hardships (cancer). In the final stages of analysis and write-up of the results, a supra-category was formed to hold “faith”, a topic that was found in all of the research questions.

This completes the stages for the analysis of narrative method of interpretation. The Case Study followed the narrative analysis method.

Case Study. The construction of the case studies, one case study for each of the eight couples, was completed through the narrative analysis method described by Polkinghorne (1995), and Sykes (1998). The case studies were built by taking individual coded events, and attaching them to a plot of sacramental marriage. The final case study, and the pseudonym for each couple, was a condensation of all the data gathered from the couple. The story included data from the narrative text, field notes, and timeline. The final case study, or short story (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998) is included for each couple in Chapter 4: Findings, and a further explanation of the narrative analysis method follows.

Narrative Analysis Method

The goal of narrative analysis is to develop a final story about each couple that fits the data gathered in the many hours of conversation, but at the same time the story must “give an order and a meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves”

(Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). I modified the steps outlined by Sykes (1998)³⁸ to develop a story about each couple. I determined that the outcome or the plot for each story was sacramental marriage, as lived and understood by the couple. The data from the conversations were arranged chronologically, and any element of data that added to the plot of sacramental marriage was included in the story. The gaps in the story were filled-in by collecting additional data in successive interviews. The final short stories represented coherent developmental accounts, or case studies (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998) of the couples' sacramental marriage.

Interpretative Phase

The interpretative phase began at the beginning of the study, and extended to the final act of writing the results of the study. The first narratives were analyzed and coded, prior to additional conversations with the participants. This allowed gaps in the data to be recognized and filled in the next interview. The following section describes the steps taken in the interpretative phase of this study.

Narrative Analysis Interpretation

The interpretation of the data for the short story was guided by a best-fit methodology. I decided to use sacramental marriage as the central plot for each of the stories. The plot formed a guideline to attach the data that most closely matched the plot. As narratives with better fits were found, other narratives in the story were dropped. In

³⁸ The steps were slightly modified to avoid redundant steps. Sykes (1998) studied clients of the government agency where he was an administrator, and used more steps than this study needed to get a close impression of the participants.

this way, a short story was constructed that was similar to a quantitative study where a best fit mathematical equation is applied to represent scattered data points, but no data points actually meet the equation exactly.

Analysis of Narrative Interpretation

In the analysis of narrative, I kept my own interpretation of the phenomena to a minimum. The codes were first selected from the couples' own narratives. As the process continued, I tagged some codes to meet special needs, such as conveying a larger theme. When I aligned the data categories to the research questions, I relied upon direct quotations to indicate an emic understanding.

Interpretation of the Timelines

In the study, each couple drew a timeline of their life. The timeline included physical and temporal events, as well as spiritual events or phases. The timeline provided a way to reference the self-perceived development of spirituality in the participants to actual events in their lives. Dates and events were compared to the self-reported times of spiritual insight or change. This allowed a more complete picture to evolve from the narrative material, and it placed me closer to the emic understanding of sacramental marriage held by each couple.

Interpretation of Participant Observation

My role as a participant observer provided descriptive material about the environment and social context, and marital and social behavior of the participants. It contributed a background in the development of a thick description of sacramental marriage. Such things as the music at a baptism, the people who were present at a particular funeral, and the décor around the family diner table became data for the study.

My interpretation as a participant observer followed the anthropological techniques of Malinowski (1961) and Burroughs (1963). I endeavored to assume an emic, or insider perspective on the cultural phenomena of the study: sacramental marriage.

Limitations of the Study Methodology

Small Sample Size

The study was limited by the small sample size of participants. Eight couples were selected based upon the unique qualifications (Patton, 2002) listed in the selection criteria, and eight couples provided data to reach a saturation point to answer the research questions.

Results Can Not Be Generalized

The study used ethnographic research methods to develop a set of emic answers to the three research questions, as held by a unique sample of eight couples. The combination of the methodology and the small sample size limits the description of sacramental marriage to this study. The study cannot be generalized to other populations, and it has no statistical predictive capacity. These limitations were recognized when the research goals and questions were developed, and the study was designed accordingly.

Limited Literature Review

The study was also limited by my ability to review the extended Catholic literature on marriage. The Catholic tradition has two thousand years of literature on marriage, and I was only able to review a small fraction of it. In this study, I tried to keep

the literature closely matched to the research questions. In addition to recognizing the accomplishments of the Catholic literature, I also wanted to establish the need for inside perspectives on sacramental marriage to be included in the literature.

Researcher's Background

The study was influenced by my own history and perspective. I came to study sacramental marriage via a long and curious route. My parents have been married for 55 years, and I was raised in a feminist household with four sisters. Due to this close upbringing with women, I have always valued male/female relationships. My family of origin was a mix of Irish, Californian, and Catholic cultural values. In 1974, I went to the small atoll cultures of the western Pacific Ocean as an anthropologist, and have continued in this profession to the present day. My first marriage resulted in a civil divorce, and a Catholic Church nullification for lack of form.³⁹ I later remarried in the Catholic Church. My wife and I have five school-age children, we are employed, and we both provide workshops for the Office for Marriage and Family Life, Diocese of San Diego.

This personal background influenced the choice of the study topic, the equality given to the participants' perspectives, both male and female, and my non-dogmatic perspective on the Catholic literature on sacramental marriage. My professional history as an anthropologist influenced my interaction with the participants, my data gathering techniques, and my emphasis on an emic, or insider, description of the studied phenomena.

³⁹ "Lack of form" means that, according to Canon Law, my first marriage did not follow the proscribed rules at the time of the wedding ceremony.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

The trustworthiness of the findings were established by being well-grounded and supportable in the narratives of the couples (Polkinghorne, 1995, 2000; Sykes, 1998). The study used qualitative methods familiar to the field (Patton, 2002), and used a consistent format in each of the guided conversations. The codes and categories used to deconstruct, and then to reconstruct the data were derived as much as possible from the language of the participants. In addition, a series of reviews were used to verify that the processes. The three stages of review included outside, participant, and peer groups, and are discussed in the following section.

Outside Review

I tested the codes and categories early in their development by looking for alternative explanations, and by having other people review the material. Two advanced degree professionals, one a psychologist and the other an engineer, reviewed the initial coding and the transcripts to advise me if the codes were true to the data. Later in the study, my professors challenged my codes and interpretations. In some instances, the selected categories held firm, and in some instances they were altered for a better fit to the data.

Participant Review

The validity of the study was established through repetitive member checking. In each successive interview, the data from the previous interview were checked for validity by the participants. As the categories were developed, the participants of the study were provided an early draft of the short stories and other findings to comment on, and their comments contributed to the refinement of the study and the final presentation.

Catholic Peer Review

The reliability of the findings about sacramental marriage was checked in a peer-review process. The findings were presented to 20 people gathered at the offices of the Bishop for the Diocese of San Diego. The composition of this peer review consisted of the professional staff of the Dioceses who responded to a general invitation. The response from the peer-review indicated that the study was a reliable, or trustworthy, description of sacramental marriage, as they themselves understood the topic.

Summary of Methodology

The goal of this study was to interpret sacramental marriage from an emic perspective. Sacramental marriage was identified as a cultural phenomenon, and the study selected eight “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) couples. Marital stories, and insights on sacramental marriage were gathered in a series of guided conversations. The conversations were held in the dinning or living room of the couple. A series of three extended conversations were held with each of the eight couples, and two additional conversations were held with individual participants to fill-in the missing data. The participant observation techniques and a timeline constructed by each participant also added to the data pool.

The lengthy conversations were transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed following two distinct methodologies. Narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998) was used to develop a case study or short story for each couple around the plot of sacramental marriage. An analysis of the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998; Patton, 2002) was used to develop categories of meaning from the data. The categories were based as much as possible on the natural language of the participants. Categories

were connected to the three research questions in a best-fit model. Additional categories occurred that did not fit the questions. The findings are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add at least a modicum of dense description (Geertz, 1973) to the existing Catholic literature on sacramental marriage. Prior to Vatican II (1963–65), the Catholic literature was unsympathetic to the personal aspects of marriage. (Mackin 1988) The literature emphasized the institutional aspects of marriage and did so in an abstract manner. Following Vatican II, the literature expanded to include personal topics but rarely included emic or insider descriptions of the sacrament. This study relied upon self-reported data from eight pre-selected couples to explore the concept and practice of marriage within a Catholic subculture, the Cursillo Movement in the Diocese of San Diego, California.

Methodology of the Study

I used a purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 2002) to select eight couples who were “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Each couple met pre-specified criteria that included an ability to converse about sacramental marriage, an active program of religious study that included the Bible or Christian books, a Catholic religious practice that could be observed, such as attending Mass, experience with child-rearing, and an observable practice of service and leadership. The purposeful sample selection was based upon my knowledge and close proximity to the couples over a six-year period prior to the study.

The study findings are presented in three sections. The first section presents a

short story for each of the eight couples developed through narrative analysis. The second and third sections are findings based on analysis of narrative methods.

Couple Descriptions

Comments about the use of the Story Form

The study methodology included three to five hours of guided conversations with each couple. The conversations were transcribed and those narratives provided the primary material for data analysis. The data was analyzed in two ways, as was described in Chapter 2. The first method, narrative analysis, provided a way to reduce the hours of data down into a short story that “fit the data while at the same time ... [gave] an order and meaningfulness that ... [was] not apparent in the data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16).

The narrative analysis followed Sykes’ (1998) example and established a short story, or a case study, for each of the eight couples. In this study, the length of the marriage, including courtship, offered a systems boundary within which to place the story, and the concept of sacramental marriage provided an integrated plot to attach the data elements (narratives) from the guided conversations. The short stories of the marriage⁴⁰ were written as emplotted narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998) of the larger story of sacramental marriage.

The use of Pseudonyms

A pseudonym was assigned to each of the eight couples. Pseudonyms were assigned with the goal of capturing my holistic reading of the couple’s relationship. The

⁴⁰ Wright (2004) emphasized the importance of story and described both marriage and the Church as “communities of storytelling [that] help us know who we are” in life (p. 188).

task was difficult because any alias chosen for the couples carried its own sense of identity.⁴⁰ I wanted the names to have meaning and to give the stories a more personal connection. I considered the names of saints, ethnic names, geographic names, and commonplace names, but they did not fit my goal. I settled on a type of *nom de guerre*⁴¹ in the French military tradition, designed to protect anonymity but to also include a hint of the spirit and purpose of the person. The pseudonyms appear in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Pseudonyms Used in the Study

The Quest Couple. Beginning with the first day of a forty-year marriage, they have always searched for God's will and presence in their lives.

The Open-Home Couple. Together they attract, teach, and nourish young adults and open their home to all.

The Young Love, True Love Couple. They were married as teenagers against their parents' wishes, and kept together through hardship and success.

The Pragmatic Couple. Faith and self-reliance guided this couple in times of hardship and in success.

The Service Couple. For twenty years, they have served family, parish, and community.

The Heart and Mind Couple. They share their compassion and intellect, and bring good-natured humor into every room.

The Cross-Cultural Couple. They united Irish and Hispanic cultures within a common Catholic faith.

The Covenant Couple. Their autistic third child added to the challenges of marriage but also reinforced their covenant with each other, and God.

⁴⁰ As an example, Lawler (1993) uses Will and Willma.

⁴¹ Nom de guerre are "names of war".

Part I: Brief Stories of the Eight Marriages

The Quest Couple

The Quest Couple knew “right from the beginning that ... [their] relationship wasn’t complete without the Lord.” When they met, she practiced her Catholic faith diligently. He was an orthodox Lutheran of the religiously conservative Missouri Synod. “God was so important to him, growing up in his faith and the same with me,” she remembered. Then she added that he became Catholic before the wedding “for the children and for one religion in the family.” He recalled, “I still found it [conversion to Catholicism] a transition. It didn’t just happen over night. It was a process of practicing the faith.”

He built a career in law enforcement as she raised children, and did parish work. They diligently followed the Church teachings in “what in those days was called the ‘rhythm method’—or ‘Vatican-roulette’ in our case,” he confided. She added, “While we were really struggling with that, we researched it and found out why the Church was recommending natural family planning versus birth control.” This early research into Church teachings to support an ongoing reliance upon their faith was a hallmark of the Quest Couple.

The couple went to church diligently, prayed as a family, and taught their children the Catholic faith. They expanded their worship to special seasonal devotions, such as the Stations of the Cross at Easter. They also attended individual retreats in their quest for growth. He attended seminars and retreats for career advancement and she for her spiritual formation, such as talks on Scripture or Catholic teachings. Thirteen years into their marriage, they both went to Marriage Encounter. Marriage Encounter is a Catholic

marriage enrichment program conducted over a weekend with a Catholic priest and a team of married couples as facilitators. This was how she explained the changes that occurred after their first Marriage Encounter weekend:

Marriage Encounter was the first couples' retreat that we went to and we experienced a transformation. It was a big change within our own relationship to one another and our relationship to God and the Church. When we walked away from there, the light bulb clicked in us.

Eventually, the local Marriage Encounter team asked the Quest Couple to join it and to present the program to other couples. But this commitment, she told me, meant that "he would have to step back as far as climbing the ladder in the police department." The children were young and the family depended upon his employment. He had finished a college-level law-enforcement degree program, and his career was moving forward. Both giving up time with their young children and letting go of economic advancement was extremely worrisome to the young couple. They each described this time as a time they needed faith.

He: It was like letting go, but still hanging on at least for me. It was like I jumped into the water, but I still held on to the lifeline. Where before I was up in the boat and everything was comfortable. Now, I'm in the water but I still had the lifeline. I reevaluated my job, finished school but then changed my job within the department. I was off the fast career cycle, off the boat.

She: We were out of the fast lane to promotion. And then, in retrospect, when you look back, he got a job opportunity that we would have never ever fathomed

that he would get. Again, it was divine intervention.

The Quest Couple has spent forty years in the ministry. Eventually, they both went to graduate school and became a marriage and family therapists, while raising their own family of three children. They managed the marriage and family ministries at a large parish and later reshaped that ministry at the Diocesan level. Now, they continue to seek out new knowledge and understanding of their faith and of Church teachings.

The Open-Home Couple

The Open-Home Couple grew up in opposite ends of California in different types of families. She came from a model Catholic household and had what she described as “a very happy childhood growing up.” She added: “In my family, everything was always based around the priority of God first, family second, and, I guess, my fun and games were third.” He, however, described his family as dysfunctional and emphasized how the dysfunctional elements of his early family life influenced his own marriage, albeit in a positive way:

I came from a very challenging background. Parental attention and care was rare. I grew up convinced that nobody cared about me, and I was invisible. I figured nobody would even see me. I was invisible. And so, for me, having a family and having kids was something that I was going to do right. Because of my own deprivation, I knew the importance of a kid being nurtured. I made my own mistakes, but my kids never suffered from any sense that they weren’t loved.

Before he met his future wife, this husband had moved south from northern

California after 19 years in Catholic schools where “much of my parenting [was] from Irish nuns.” She was just out of college, where she “had discussed dating and marriage and stuff out at the Newman Center.”⁴³ She recalled that she knew what she was looking for and that her future husband met her criteria: “He loved kids; he loved to play with kids. He was Catholic, and he was willing.” They wed in the church where she had been baptized as a baby and where they later baptized their two children. He began a legal career and, over time, was appointed a judge. She followed their mutually developed plan for her to be a stay-at-home mother for the kids, although she did eventually use her background in accounting and finance to develop her own home business.

Eight or nine years into the marriage, they attended Marriage Encounter, a three-day retreat designed to enrich Catholic marriages. “That really enlivened our marriage,” she remembered. “That re-centered us on each other and on the sacredness of our relationship, and how important it was that God had called us together to do this thing.” After attending Marriage Encounter, the Open-Home Couple started a marriage-enrichment program in their parish. They also continued to be active in their parish religious education classes for youth and family life for the next decade.

Twenty years into the marriage, and after three years of her coaxing him to attend, they went to a Cursillo⁴⁴ weekend retreat. It too strengthened their marriage as a holy commitment, and it further strengthened their commitment to community service. They raised their own children, sponsored the education of disadvantaged children in the community, and served in parish and community leadership roles.

⁴³ Newman Centers are Catholic student unions close to a college campus. The name Newman Center is generic on college campuses nationwide.

⁴⁴ As described in Chapter 3, Cursillo is a Catholic renewal movement that starts with a same-sex weekend retreat. It promotes a program of piety, study, and action, as well as ongoing community involvement.

Nearing forty years of marriage, the Open-Home Couple continue to hold marriage as a priority and to demonstrate that priority to others. Once a month, their home is inundated with young adult Cursillo and parish members. Over a hundred young adults seem to be drawn by an invisible force into the home for spiritual conversation and dinner. He described the couple's allure to young adults as follows:

I am convinced that one reason why we get this big crowd up here is that we're alive and well and still married, and these kids are seeing something that they've missed somewhere along the way. They might see it in their own parents, they might not, but we open our home and we're here to share and to listen. And, we keep God in the picture.

The Young Love, True Love Couple

This couple met when they were 15 and 16, dated each other exclusively in high school, and married when she was 19 and he was 20. Both families objected to their exclusive dating and to marriage at such a young age. The parents had reason to fear because the newlyweds established a pattern of obsessive work and anxiety. "I don't want to overstate it, but the first years of marriage were open combat," the husband softly said in one interview; "anger, jealousy, and competition was what our marriage was about."

The wife worked full-time as a drive-up bank teller while the husband went to school. After four years, he graduated as a licensed civil engineer, and they had their first of three children. She stayed home from that time on with the children, and he began a compulsive work pattern.

I was just going to work. Six, sometimes seven days a week I worked. I wasn't with the kids; [my wife] raised the kids. Me? I was high-tension, high-frustration,

and trying to grab money, cars, a vacation home. I thought if I could just earn enough money, someone else would cut the grass and everything would be great.

The marriage settled into a routine. The husband worked constantly and the wife worked just as hard in the home. They had a scheduled break from work each week for the Sunday evening Mass. "I went to Mass to avoid hell [when I died], but even being there for the wrong reason, the Church always sustained me," he recalled and then corrected himself: "Actually, the Eucharist sustained me. I was at Mass in blind obedience, but the time after Communion was always peaceful."

His anxiety extended into the music ministry they practiced together. "I would get there early, set up the equipment, never have to talk to anybody. Announce a few songs during Mass, stay late, take down the equipment and still never talk to anybody." was how he described it. She was prayerful, but also worked hard at her own tasks.

His parents had attended a Cursillo retreat and had urged the anxious couple to go for over a dozen years. Finally, the couple set a weekend aside and attended the Cursillo program. It changed their lives. The wife remembered: "We finally found something that made sense." After the Cursillo retreat, he practiced the Cursillo method of daily introspection and changed his compulsive work habits. "Cursillo started to open me up," he said:

My heart changed and I could feel, I could see. I became more aware. I knew that God loves me, and I started to know myself. We came to know ourselves [indicating his wife]. I started to relax and to be more loving. The first person it landed on was my wife. My love finally answered her love.

Ten years after they first attended Cursillo, he was ordained into the permanent deaconate. Now, they continue their music ministry together, and he preaches on Sunday. He has a passion about sacramental marriage:

I want to spread the Gospel. I want to raise people's awareness of the paschal mystery. I want couples to see their marriage as the paschal mystery repeated every day. All the stress, the stuff with kids, work and spouse; I want married couples to understand their marriage as Christ. Each day, a marriage, a family suffers. Each day, it has to die to something. Each day, it rises up again.

The Pragmatic Couple

The Pragmatic Couple met on a post-WWII blind date in Los Angeles. She was visiting from the East with a girlfriend; she recalled, "California was so beautiful, with big wide streets and palm trees." He was 23 and had been on his own since he was 16. He had "been out there [in the world] ... seeing all the crazy things that people want to do." He added: "I knew that wasn't my lifestyle."

Originally, she did not want to go on the date. She explained: "I was 19 but still sort of afraid of my own shadow." He, on the other hand, "was very clear on what ... [he] was looking for in a girlfriend, in a wife." By the end of their first date, he was ready for courtship. He said,

Before the night was over, I was imagining three or four years from now and how we would be married. And so when we met that evening, before the evening was over, about four or five hours into it, I really knew that I had met somebody that God and I had been talking about. But now, once you've found the person, how are you going to change all the things to fit? And date for nine months?

A highly pragmatic approach to life was a theme in the Pragmatic Couple's stories. Each time there was an issue or a problem in their life, they approached it with a hands-on practicality and a faith that God would see them through it. Be it her unexpected labor and the birth of a child in the basement of their house or the unexpected death of a father-in-law, the Pragmatic Couple moved forward in faith and by relying upon each other. She added the following tagline to her recounting of one difficult situation: "It was all spiritual growth. It was something we got through."

The couple went to a Cursillo weekend after the movement's introduction within their diocese. He was an extremely hard-charging business person, and he recalled that the impact of the Cursillo experience "didn't hit...[him] right away." For her, the impact of Cursillo was more immediate. "I went from being a cocoon to a butterfly," she fondly remembered. She continued to develop a special devotion to Blessed Mary. His devotion to the Blessed Mother had been established years before; in his teenage years in fact, he had "prayed to the Blessed Mother for a wife that would fulfill ... [his] life."⁴⁵

After Cursillo, their faith practices became, in the couple's words, "more open." They would often gather their eight children and say a rosary⁴⁶ with a candle on the coffee table in the living room. She confided that although their "kids were brought up that way [in the Catholic faith] ... [they] only have two practicing Catholic kids now." He responded, "But we have eight strong Christians." That comment exemplified the pragmatic/practical approach that characterized the couple's approach to faith and life in general.

The Pragmatic Couple had over thirty grandchildren from their initial eight

⁴⁵ In the study, three of the eight couples spoke of special devotions to Mary.

⁴⁶ The rosary is a prayer technique devoted to Mary and organized around a series of sacred mysteries.

offspring. In addition to family successes, they also did well in business and in real estate development. However, their financial and material success did not dilute their practical approach to life, nor did financial success diminish their spiritual focus. Prior to each interview for this study, the Pragmatic Couple had gone to Morning Mass and completed their daily spiritual reading and reflection. Their outside activities included building houses for, dispensing medicine to, and feeding children of the poor in the United States and abroad. Rather than diluting their efforts by working through large organizations, this husband and wife targets their ministries to places and people they are in personal contact with and, whenever possible, where measurable outcomes can be observed. This couple is, indeed, practical.

The Service Couple

The Service Couple began a lifelong love at the ages of 14 and 12. "In high school," she remembered, "I already had a sense and a feeling that this person was going to be my life." However, there were long-standing animosities between the two families. She recalled, "Even though our families knew each other, there was a division. It was a Hatfield and McCoy-type thing." Nonetheless, they met secretly away from their families, and he remembered that the "body chemistry and the spirit of who...[they] were just connected, and, at that point, [they]...were engaged."

He was drafted around that time. He spent a year in an Air Force technical school on the East Coast, where he excelled in his studies. Graduating first in his class, he was given a choice of duty stations around the world. He chose the desert in Arizona rather than a fancy European posting because he had decided it was time for him and his fiancée to get married. He explained, "About thirty days before the wedding, I called her up and

said, 'Look, I negotiated a three-day pass. Let's get married.'" And they did. They were "laughing up there at the altar and just having a good time." Shortly thereafter, he shipped out to Vietnam.

A year in Vietnam and seven years in the military taught the couple how to depend upon their faith and each other. He remembered, "She had to stay home while I was at war. She learned to have trust. She learned to have hope and faith. I did too. And so, together, we fought in Vietnam."

He returned to San Diego and went to nursing school. They lived next door to her father and tended to him as he died from brain cancer. During this time, Vietnam lingered in his mind in what he called "flashbacks." The marriage was suffering. She was going to church with the children, but he was not. He explained, "I just wasn't a churchgoer, but it didn't mean I wasn't praying then."

She recalled that they had a few challenges in the first twelve years of marriage. Then, after two years of asking, she persuaded him that they should attend a Cursillo retreat. The weekend brought him back to active Catholic practice, and the two of them became involved with the Cursillo movement in their diocese and parish. Within a few years, they both held leadership positions in Cursillo. They were so involved in community faith events that someone suggested that they look into the diaconate.

Now, thirty years after attending Cursillo and twenty years after being ordained a deacon, their two children are grown, and the Service couple is helping to raise grandchildren. He has retired from a long career with the public schools. He continues as a deacon, and specializes in marriage and family issues. The two of them continue to prepare newly engaged couples for marriage, both at their parish and in their own home.

The Heart and Mind Couple

The Heart and Mind Couple met in their college dormitory where he was a slightly older dorm monitor and she was a somewhat younger intellectual who captured his attention. When they tell their stories, he colors memory with both emotion and intellectual analysis and she immediately matches and enlarges the stories he tells. The talk goes back and forth as their stories reveal a couple equally matched in professions, spiritual enthusiasm and quick verbal skills. They were both Catholics ("About as into it as you could be in the '70s," he recalled), and they participated in occasional dorm conversations about spirituality and religion.

He went away to medical school for three years while she finished college. She remembered, whimsically, "All of the years that we spent apart we wrote letters daily. Many, many, many letters." When he finished medical school, they got married. Life moved very fast, and soon there were two children, and two medical careers.

In the early part of their marriage, she indicated that their "faith life took a back seat" to other concerns. She explained: "I mean, it [their faith] was barely hanging in there. We were a young couple very focused on ourselves." What started them participating in more Catholic activities was the arrival of children and a longing for community. The first step in the journey back was attending Mass regularly, then it was participating in small church communities,⁴⁷ and gradually, as he remembered with enthusiasm, "We started making friends, and it was another step along the way of opening ourselves up to other people."

After twenty years of marriage, successful careers and two well-adjusted children,

⁴⁷ "Small church communities" is a Catholic program where parish members meet in small groups to study the faith and to socialize.

the Heart and Mind Couple attended Cursillo. She remembers that “Jesus finally seemed very real, it was incredible. It reintroduced Jesus in his mystical self.” They both became more studious in their Christian formation, and they shared this individual growth with each other.

When he retired from the Navy, the two of them spent five years in deaconate training. It was a strain for them, particularly for her, because of the timing: high-school children, a medical practice, and her health. She was in acute physical pain due to a neck and shoulder misalignment, but indicated that she only grumbled a little to her husband, who was busy training to be a deacon. Her self-discipline kept her going through the four years of classes and retreats. Then, she told me, “Once he was ordained, I was happy as a clam.” She added: “It was like us getting married. It was like it was supposed to be.”

The Cross-Cultural Couple

The Cross-Cultural Couple met thirty years ago during a summer holiday each had taken to Europe. They met by happenstance in Rome and again in London. He swears it was divine intervention. “You can tell by my journal,” he emphatically states. “The minute I met her, it all started to change. She completely rotated my life.” A year later, they were married.

The Cross-Cultural Couple settled into careers in sales and education, had two children, and lived in upscale suburbs near the ocean. Their married and family life was always organized around prayer and faith. They found that their values matched, even though they were raised in different cultures and in different regions of the country. He explained:

Her parents are Irish Catholic. And I’m Mexican Catholic. And yet we were

raised almost identically. From having to polish our shoes on Friday and then going to Confession on Saturday—whatever things we did in California they did in Philadelphia.

After attending Cursillo, about twenty years into their marriage, the personal-faith journeys of this husband and wife became more individualized. They continued to attend Mass together, but their individual styles of practice became more distinct from each other. She is a reserved and prayerful person with a keen devotion to the Blessed Mother, and She refers to her spiritual practice as “instinct driven and mostly between God and...[her].” He, on the other hand, needs more ritual and public activity, even as he shares his wife’s devotion to the Blessed Mother. In their yard, there is a large concrete statue of Mary in a place of honor. Under the traditional image are notes of petition thankfulness that have been placed there over the years by each of them.

The Covenant Couple

The Covenant Couple met during their college years, although she was a few years younger than he. They were not practicing Catholics during college, but they did attend Pre-Cana and Engaged Encounter⁴⁸ in preparation for marriage. As newlyweds, they lived out the roles of young, upwardly mobile professionals.

The Covenant Couple soon had their first child and bought their first house. When the children were still little, she recalled that they taught catechism at the local parish “to be ready for...[their own] kids [reaching the age of the students in the catechism class].”

⁴⁸ Pre-Cana is a day-long workshop for engaged couples that the diocese sponsors. Engaged Encounter is a nationally syndicated weekend retreat for engaged couples that is independent of the diocese but offered under diocesan authority.

They went into this education ministry without preparation. "We were winging it even as God gave us what to do," he reminisced. "Sure we were Catholic, but not *that* Catholic," she added.

The first dozen years of marriage went smoothly, with successful careers and two healthy children. However, in their twelfth or thirteenth year, he felt a need for something more in his religious life. "I don't know what it was," he said, "I just needed something, and I heard about Cursillo. I went looking and that's what I found." The couple attended the Cursillo weekend and now, ten years later, he characterized the Cursillo experience using the language of his two professions, accounting and engineering, as "the catalyst of our shifting goals and priorities. It restructured our outlook on what our marriage was and what life was about."

After their Cursillo weekend, they both started to gather with other Cursillo men and women for an hour or so of conversation on a weekly basis. This is called "grouping" in the Cursillo movement. Men and women gather in separate groups and at separate times to share their week. The groups are ideally made up of between six and eight people, and each person talks for a few minutes about his or her life and how the Cursillo method of piety, study, and action was practiced in the last week.

At the time, they were developing their Cursillo-oriented spiritual life, and the Covenant Couple had been searching for answers about their third child, who acted differently than their other two children. When the third child was almost three, he was diagnosed as autistic. Now a young teenager, the child's mental and emotional behavior "hovers around a six year old," the husband reported, "although there is a wide range of, say, from four years old to maybe even thirteen."

Having an autistic child hit the Covenant Couple hard. Over the years, they saw other couples fall victim to the eighty-percent divorce rate of parents with autistic children.⁴⁹ He looked at me with serious eyes and said,

With autism, all grey in the marriage turns to black and white. There is no extra space and most marriages don't handle it. It's about commitment, unbreakable commitment, and the more I give, the more I get back.

Summary of the Eight Short Stories

The study condensed the data from the guided conversations into short stories and pseudonyms representative of each couple. The stories were organized around a plot of sacramental marriage, and answered the research questions in narrative form.

Part II: Answering the Research Questions

In addition to engaging in what Polkinghorne (1995) called narrative analysis and reconstructing the data, as in the stories presented above, the interview transcripts and the additional data were coded into categories following the analysis of narrative procedures detailed by Polkinghorne (1995), Sykes (1998), and Patton (2002). (See Chapter 3: Methodology, for a more detailed discussion of research procedures.) Here, the categories developed from the participants' narratives are utilized to answer the three research questions.

⁴⁹ The statistic was provided by the wife.

Question One:

How do the participants describe their marriage and what do they say, if anything, about sacramental marriage and visible signs of God over time?

The findings from this study suggest emic definitions and descriptions of sacramental marriage that are complimentary to the Catechism (1997), Code of Canon Law (1983), and other ecclesiastical sources. In addition to being complimentary, the emic descriptions are also much more personal, phenomenological and “thicker” (Geertz, 1973). The study used open-ended interview questions such as “Tell me about your marriage? What makes it special?” to gather emic descriptions of marriage generated in open conversations rather than in a question / response format. Excerpts from some of the participants’ emic descriptions of their marriages are included in Table 4.2. An implied description of sacramental marriage follows and is organized around the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Descriptions of Sacramental Marriage

Emic Descriptions. Each couple spoke of their marriage as a holy commitment, as a sacred activity. Even though I was careful not to prompt the participants with the term “sacramental,” half of the descriptions, four out of eight respondents employed the term sacramental immediately to describe their marriage. Eventually, all eight of the couples used the term sacrament at some point in our conversations. *Sacrament* was not an abstract term for the couples, and the sacramental signs of their marriage, as self-reported, included such things as children, marriage vocation, and a sense of journey.

Figure 4.2 Emic Descriptions of Sacramental Marriage

Quest Couple

She: Inviting the Lord to be part of our relationship made it sacramental and a covenant.

Open-Home Couple

She: Marriage is something more than just you and your husband. The fact that it is sacramental ... it's holy.

Heart and Mind Couple

She: In terms of what our marriage is ... it's really a spiritual vehicle ... it truly is a vocation to holiness. It is who I am.

He: If you think of marriage as a sacrament and a sacrament is something divine, something of God's presence on Earth. I think that we look at each other as a sign of Christ's presence in our lives.

Service Couple

He: It's a sacred thing for us that we have a family together and that we shared in our relationship as the mother/father, as the husband/wife, as the spiritual leader of the family.

Young Love, True Love Couple

He: [We] really care for each other and really act as the body of Christ. So our spirituality as a couple deepened as we went along ... I think that our relationship is a sign for other people of the love that God has for [all of] us and all that our marriage is, in that respect, is sacramental.

Covenant Couple

She: [Marriage] is an incredible feeling ... the sense of this person is going to be with you and a part of you and you know that the Lord has placed that in your heart.

Implied Descriptions of Sacramental Marriage. In addition to the emic descriptions of sacramental marriage presented in Figure 4.2, the participants provided additional answers for research question one by describing their marriage in ways that evoked the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.⁴⁹ As an example, the Young Love, True Love Wife summarized God's presence in her sacramental marriage this way: "God was the source of hope, and the continuing love that we poured out [to each other] and ... faith, hope and love, all three of them are right here." What the couples said about each of these descriptors of their marriage is discussed below.

Faith. Each of the eight couples in this study had positioned their marriage within an enormous reservoir of faith. Faith, as summarized by the Catechism (1997), is a theological virtue that is "both a gift of God and a human act" (p. 878). The gift from God is his revelation of himself to us. The necessary human act is our response: moving deeper into faith, that is, to trust God and God's plan for us and to act as children within the family of God. (Catechism 1997)

Faith is prevalent in most of the data collected in this study. Faith was such an overriding category in fact, that it is presented as an additional finding at the end of this chapter. This section is restricted to the presentation of two examples of how faith contributed to the perception of indissolubility within the marriages.

Faith and Indissolubility. Faith contributed to the Open-House Wife's description of her marriage as indissoluble. For her, as for other participants, her marriage was to last

⁴⁹ The theological virtues are gifts from God that "pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being" (Catechism 1994, p.446).

a lifetime, and there was no questioning that reality. Significantly, faith in the indissolubility of her marriage was based on a faith and trust in God's plan, and not on any of the rules in the Catechism (1997) or the Code of Canon Law (1983). For the Open-Home Wife, any problems in the marriage were part of God's plan to help the marriage mature.

I can think of the worst time when we were just horrible with each other. I can remember thinking this is where we're supposed to be right now. This is part of God's plan for us. This is what this marriage is supposed to go through. And I never thought, never have thought to divorce, because why would you ever think of that?

The Service Couple Husband spoke of the importance of his faith and the indissolvability of his marriage during a time of marital stress. Following his episode with cancer, a series of personal difficulties had shaken his forty-year marriage.⁵¹ However, he and his spouse both had faith in God's plan and in God's ability to heal their relationship. Even in a time of acute stress between them, the marriage relationship had firmness and fidelity. Instead of being defeated, the Service Couple viewed the latest difficulties as an opportunity for further transformation. He summarized the situation:

I mean, with all the crap that's happened in the last three or four years here, look, we're smiling and laughing and we're planning a month-long trip together to enjoy ourselves. And we're just excited about being together, even though we know that we have things

⁵¹ These difficulties are too personal to be mentioned in this study.

that we have to settle. But they will be settled. We know that God heals in time and that this is transformation. That God comes with surprises and so does marriage.

Hope. The data indicated that each of the marriages in this study could be described as marriages of hope.⁵² Hope is an important and central part of daily Christian living, and the stories shared by the couples described situations where hope was particularly evident.⁵³

Five of the couples — more than half of the sample — had recent or present episodes of cancer in one of the spouses. In two households, the diagnosis of cancer was very recent. The discovery of cancer still held its secrecy, the news too intimate to share openly. In those two cases, the guided conversation did not linger on the topic. It was obvious that both couples had handed the trouble of cancer to God, and that God would intervene in some way.

The Service Couple had gone through the diagnosis and treatment of cancer for the husband. For the time being, the cancer was in remission, and the couple now viewed cancer as an opportunity. They had survived cancer together, and the experience gave them hope to overcome future problems. “We learned that we really didn’t have much control. ...God set us up with cancer to bring us closer together,” was how the Service Couple Husband described the experience.

⁵² Hope is the virtue of both desiring and expecting something from God. (Catechism 1997)

⁵³ Additional examples of hope describing the marriage are found in the section on Prayer as a response to Challenges.

The wife of the Open-Home Couple relied upon hope to contend with both physical and marital issues that confronted her marriage for a time. She described her dark night of the soul as reliant upon a larger hope. She explained:

Spiritually, I just clung on stronger and stronger. I hung in there, although during a time like that, you don't feel as rewarded. For instance, the practice of Mass. You feel empty. I was drawn to being there but it was the dark night of the soul or whatever...you're just falling apart. But again, you know that better times are coming. And this too shall pass. And you just keep at it in hope of a better tomorrow.

Love. The theological virtue of love, or charity, is the gift "by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God" (Catechism, 1994, p. 870).⁵⁴ Mackin (1987) and Lawler (1993) both emphasize the second portion, "love our neighbor as ourselves" as a central requirement for a sacramental marriage. In the study, an example of this type of love was found in the description the Cross-Cultural Wife gave of her sacramental marriage. For her, the intimacy and friendship of her spiritual journey with her husband centered on and around the kitchen table. She said:

I mean, above and beyond anything physical, when he and I sit at either side of this table ... I'm on one side, he's on the other, and we just have a

⁵⁴ The Catechism definition was presented more simply by Jesus as the Greatest Commandment: Love God, Love neighbor as self.

conversation about our spirituality, our journey, where we're going [in life]. That is our deepest love.

The love of neighbor in a sacramental marriage is conjugal love. This type of love is described in the Catechism (1997) as "the image of God's love, indissoluble and faithful by its very nature... [and], ordered to procreation and unity" (p.819).

The Heart and Mind Wife expressed the indissoluble and faithful nature of conjugal love when she said, "As the years go by, our love just grows. It just becomes bigger and richer and deeper and so I supposed I'll love him more when I'm 70 and 80 and up."

Summary of the couples' descriptions of sacramental marriage

All of the eight couples used the term sacrament or sacramental when speaking of their marriage.⁵⁵ The awareness and commitment to a sacramental model was evident in all of the narratives. The couples' spoke of their marriage as "sacramental," "holy," "divine." It was described as being both "a sign of Christ," and as "the body of Christ." Sacramental marriage was, in the words of the participants, both "an incredible feeling," and "a spiritual vehicle."

Additionally, the marriages were described as being part of God's plan, that God was working along side the couple, and that the marriage was indissoluble because of

⁵⁵ Four of the eight couples used the term during initial conversations, and prior to any prompting by my guided conversation. All of the couples used the term at some time of the study to describe their marriage.

this close relationship between the three participants. The stories, told in retrospect, told of examples of divine intervention both in commonplace events, and in times of crisis, and finally, the sacramental marriages included signs of the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Question Two:

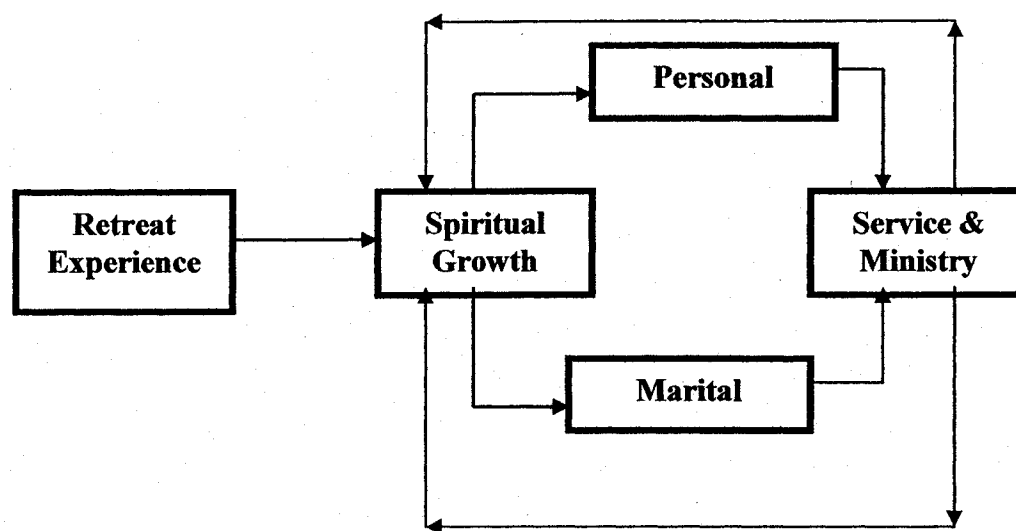
Over the years, how have personal, marital, family, and community spiritual experiences influenced one another, and how do these levels of spirituality influence marital dynamics?

Positive, Sustainable Dynamic

The study found a positive, sustainable dynamic that began with the influence of a Cursillo or a Marriage Encounter retreat. The retreat pushed the couples into a positive dynamic where spiritual growth advanced both personal and marital objectives that, eventually, extended into community service and ministry. The actions of service and ministry then returned as a positive influence to spiritual growth, and the system repeated itself in a sustainable circle. Figure 4.3 represents this positive, sustainable dynamic between spiritual growth, service, and marital objectives.

Please turn the page.

Figure 4.3 Two-Way Positive Influence: Spiritual Growth and Social Dynamics



The study found that 14 out of 16 participants self-reported that an increase in spirituality over the years was followed by an increase in service within family, parish, and community environments. Importantly, the 14 out of 16 participants also reported that service and ministry increased their perceptions of spiritual growth and sense of spiritual wellbeing. This was true for both men and women, and for both Church and lay ministries. The two participants who reported themselves as unenthusiastic about public professions of faith none-the-less engaged in parish and community service over long periods of time. A Cursillo or a Marriage Encounter event precipitated a long-term and sustainable dynamic.

Cursillo or Marriage Encounter Retreat

The experience of a Cursillo or a Marriage Encounter religious retreat influenced both personal and marital spiritualities. The Pragmatic Wife, for instance, remembered vividly, that “[she]...went in there to Cursillo like a wallflower and ... [she] came out a

burst of Jesus' love."

Similarly, the retreat program at Marriage Encounter had an important effect on the Heart and Mind Wife. She recalled, "It really enlivened our marriage. It re-centered us on each other and on the sacredness of our relationship, and [on] how important it was that God had called us together to do this thing."

Spiritual Growth

The study found that the effects of a Cursillo or a Marriage Encounter retreat on the couples were sustainable. At the time of the conversations for this study, although the initial spiritual experience had been between 12 and 30 years earlier, spiritual growth was still a priority. Spiritual growth influenced marital friendship, personal growth, and eventually led to additional service and ministry in the larger community.

The marital friendship of the Cross-Cultural Wife included her fondness to sit and talk with her husband. Prayer, faith, and journey were components of the marital friendship she described:

Well, whenever we've been in any kind of crisis, we always talked it over and part of that journey was prayer, too. And we talk about our faith a lot. And I feel it's been some of the most satisfying moments in our friendship.

Personal growth was important for the Young Love, True Love Wife. She described her marriage as a tool for each spouse to help the other improve. In one conversation, she mentioned, "One of the good things about our relationship ... I bring out good things in him and he brings out good things in me."

Personal growth was also important to the husband of the Heart and Mind Couple. After 30 years of marriage, and 15 years after his Cursillo experience, the husband expanded on the topic of personal growth, and connected his wife, his own self-improvement, and the ultimate goal of salvation into one continuous dynamic. He described it in this way. "I look at [her] as a gift that God has given to me to help make me a better person and lead me on towards salvation⁵⁶."

Increased Service and Ministry

The spiritual growth of the participants eventually resulted in an expanding service and ministry network. An example was the Heart and Mind couple, who became involved in parish-based activities as their children attended religious education programs. The wife of Heart and Mind recalled that external service served to improve the marital friendship as well:

Through our involvement with the church, through our involvement with our faith, we've continued to be blessed by grace in a lot of different forms, from our families and from our friends and from interactions that we've had with our church and that has served to deepen what was a pretty compatible and friendly relationship from the beginning.

The time devoted to service activities and to parish ministries expanded significantly over the years after a Cursillo or Marriage Encounter retreat, and supported Martos' (2001) description of this long-term effect of the retreats. The expansion was not

⁵⁶ ⁵⁶ This was the one reference to salvation in all of the conversations. The speaker here was confirmed a Deacon two years prior to the study.

immediate but occurred, in most cases, over a period of years. The types of ministry and service practiced by the couples are listed in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Types of Ministry

<i>Type of Role</i>	<i>Number in the Role</i>
Religious Education: child, youth, adult	5 couples
Social Justice: unborn, housing for poor, prison, educational scholarships, physically and mentally challenged	6 couples
Parish: Deaconate service, finance, governance, community, prayer groups	3 deacons 4 individuals in lay service
Diocese: Cursillo, Evenings for the Engaged, Marriage Encounter, Marriage Co-validation, other marriage and family life programs	4 couples

Ministry Influences Marital Spirituality

The positive influence of active ministry on the couples' marital spirituality was a repeated theme in each of the eight marriages. The wife of the Quest Couple, the couple who chose ministry over career advancement early in their marriage, summarized the benefits: "Oh, over time [40 years of ministry] we've done a little of this and a little of that, and it [ministry] has always graced our marriage. God has always helped us out."

The Open-Home Couple recognized ministry as having helped their own marriage in a time of stress. In one interview, the wife described parish service as a lifeline to her

marriage during a tough time.

Even when things were difficult and we seemed apart, we had that connection [dual ministry] and we were able to get out of ourselves in helping others. He would always get up and go help [at the parish].

The Cross-Cultural Wife recognized the rewards of her husband's ministry, even though she did not participate in it. In one conversation, she confided that she would rather have more time with her husband, but that his ministry away from the family was beneficial. "I don't really like the time he spends off with the prison stuff but I see how it makes him a better person and us a happier house."

The practice of ministry, either as a couple or by one spouse, benefited both spouses. This included the ordained deacons. The deacon in the Young Love, True Love Couple said: "The grace of ordination covers us both. If I'm up there [in front of the church], she's up there with me. We both get the grace, it's a spiritual reality of marriage."

The ministries of the six couples who were not in the deaconate reported the same benefits from ministry. As the husband of the Open-Home Couple told me: "This God stuff is about happiness and joy and it's also about strength to get through the tough times. If we don't share that, who will?"

Summary of the Positive, Sustainable Dynamic

The study found a positive, sustainable dynamic where spiritual growth advanced both personal and marital objectives that, eventually, extended into community service and ministry. The actions of service and ministry then returned as a positive influence to

advance spiritual growth, and the system repeated itself in a sustainable circle. In this study, each participant indicated that a Cursillo or a Marriage Encounter retreat had set this dynamic in motion.

Question Three:

What are the rewards and challenges of a sacramental marriage and how do couples react to these challenges?

Research question three focused on marital challenges, strategies for dealing with challenges, and perceived rewards associated with living a sacramental marriage.

Challenges

The eight marriages reported challenges that included creating a marital spiritual life, raising children, and dealing with life-threatening episodes of cancer.

Creating a Marital Spiritual Life. In six marriages, the husband and wife had been born and raised as Roman Catholics. However, there were differences in what type of Catholic belief and practice each person had prior to marriage. Some participants were fervent in their Catholicism, and other participants were barely practicing their faith. Some participants came from a liberal interpretation of Catholicism, and other participants were closely aligned with orthodox Roman teachings. In short, the transformation from a personal to a marital spirituality was a challenge for many of the couples, even when both of the spouses were raised as Catholics.

As an example, the Open-Home Couple were both serious Catholics when they

were married, but they came from different Catholic backgrounds. It took some years for them to develop a marital equilibrium with their spirituality. The Open-Home Couple remembered the process:

She: Yes, I mean, he was a Jesuit-educated Catholic. So, he was a different kind of Catholic than I was Catholic. And we grew and learned a lot from each other, during those early years. We had arguments over religion.

He: Spirituality was something we discussed. It was a major chunk of our lives. It didn't always mesh together but eventually we combined [spiritualities].

She: Yes. Marriage Encounter and Cursillo helped to round us out together.

The study found that a shared marital spirituality could still include personal and individual practices. An example of this was how the Heart and Mind Couple negotiated prayer time. The couple discussed their prayer practice this way:

He: We can pray together but we don't a lot.

She: It's one of things that we could improve. And even try more, we've said to each other, "Well, now we should pray together."

He: Yeah, because our best prayer is with her in that room and me in this room.

She: And we're not sure why that is. We pray at the same time, but in different rooms. [They both laugh, and point to the two rooms at each end of the house. It strikes them as very funny, and the laughter continues.]

He: [Laughing] She has her routine and way of doing things and I have my routine and way of doing things.

She: [Laughing] Yeah, it's hard enough to have a prayer life, let alone coordinate it with another person.

The Cross-Cultural Couple were very close on their devotion to Blessed Mary but differed significantly on the public practice of their spirituality. The conversation occurred around the family dinner table with the room extension that "should have been done years ago" (husband) providing a view of Blessed Mary in the backyard garden. The couple is talking with humor:

He: I need these little public activities. I talk to people at airports, bus stops, corners, it doesn't matter where. I'm willing to sit there and say, "Hey, buddy. Come to Jesus."

She: I'm not like that. It doesn't make sense to me. You're supposed to be doing this, and we've always done this. So why are we spending all this time talking about it?

He: But she's never once made me think that it's a problem. She does say funny things about it at times.

She: There's no way I'm going to hold him back. I call it his religious stuff.

The blending of personal spiritualities into a marital spirituality was a different type of challenge for the two couples with Catholic and non-Catholic members. In both cases, the non-Catholic spouse decided to become Catholic, but the transition was not immediate. The Quest Couple Husband recalled: "I found it [i.e., conversion to

Catholicism] a transition. It didn't just happen overnight. It was a process of practicing the faith."

The Pragmatic Couple started to integrate their religious practices by chance. The wife recalled one particular Christmas Day:

I went to Methodist church, but not a lot, though I loved the Bible. On Christmas, I wanted to go to a Methodist church and he took me to a Methodist church in Los Angeles. The church was closed, no one was there. I said, "What? No one here at church on Christmas?" So, that set me to going to Catholic Church and then I took instructions and his mother was my Confirmation sponsor, which was very nice. From then on, I loved the Catholic religion and faith. I love it.

Raising Children. Raising children was a common challenge for all of the couples. There were 27 children raised by the eight couples in the study. Two families had adopted infants into the home.⁵⁷ At the time of the study, six out of eight couples currently had adult children. Three couples had grandchildren and one, the Pragmatic Couple, had over thirty grandchildren. Each couple had experienced challenges with their children. Figure 4.5 lists the ages of the participants' children.

⁵⁷ The adoption of children by two out of eight families indirectly points to the importance of children in the Catholic culture.

Table 4.5 Ages of the Participants' Children

Children's ages	<15	16-21	22-30	>30
Number of Children	1	4	6	16

The challenges with children were of many types and durations. Two couples had children with lifelong physical or learning disabilities, three couples had children with episodes of drug and alcohol dependence, two couples had children who divorced, and two couples had children who had gone to prison.

The wife of the Heart and Mind Couple commented on the continuous challenge of parenting, and what they did about the challenge:

She: It's funny, each stage of life your child is a new challenge.

He: I think we pray a lot for them.

She: Yes, we pray a lot for them.

Physical and Mental Health. The study found either physical or mental health to be a major challenge at some time in the marriage for six out of eight couples. Cancer challenged five out of eight couples. The husband of the Service Couple summarized: "Cancer brought a whole new meaning as to who we are and what our marriage was about, and it humbled us."

Other physical and mental health challenges reported by the couples included depression, acute skeletal pain and muscle paralysis, and, common to half of the males, the mental and emotional health concerns of over-work and over-obsession with work.

The challenges that the eight couples of the study experienced in their marriage

were similar to the challenges faced by any married couple. Although the couples approached their marriages as sacramental, the difficulties and challenges of life and marriage were not unique. However, the strategies and responses to the challenges of marriage were unique as the couples grew in spiritual purpose and action.

Strategies and Responses to Challenges. The study found challenges faced by the couples that were not unique to sacramental marriage but are experienced by many couples, regardless of how they approached their marriage. However, the study found a common spiritual response to challenges practiced by the eight couples. The study found common responses of faith, prayer, and an openness to change in all of the stories. There was variation in the self-reported depths of faith, types of prayer, and degrees of openness to change, but each of the life stories evidenced such a response to challenges.

Faith as a Response to Challenges. The presence of faith was established in each person before their marriage. Faith continued as a major theme throughout the stories of the couples. Faith was the most wide-spread category, and undergirds the answers to all three research questions. It is presented as an Additional Finding in a later section of Chapter 4.

Prayer as a Response to Challenges. Eight out of eight couples in the study resorted to prayer when confronted with the challenges of marriage and life. A particularly intense story about the use of prayer was told by a mother faced with the drug conviction and prison sentence of her grown son.⁵⁸ Her story demonstrated her full

⁵⁸ ⁵⁸ In the interest of anonymity, pseudonyms were omitted here.

reliance upon God, and her expectation that God would intercede. The mother described the situation for me.

It was a terrible situation and he was incarcerated, in fact. Even though we were married a long time then, it was a tough thing on our marriage. I said, "He needs to be stopped," but my husband wanted to rescue the boy. He's a take-charge man. But I kept thinking, "I feel this is how God intended it. This is God's way of stopping him." No one else could stop him. I mean, all the love that his children and wife gave him. I said, "I'm sure that love can't do it." Well, we prayed a lot for him. We said a lot of prayers.

[The story continues with the mother praying in the courtroom.]

I was really getting provoked with the prosecutor, thinking, "Oh, God. This woman is so mean." I felt like tripping her as she walked out. Finally, I said, "Oh, Lord. I've got to pray for her." That's exactly how I felt. I've got to pray for her because this is killing me ... so I did. And it was so beautiful. He could have gotten ten years; he got five and served two and a half for good behavior. But anyway, she [the Prosecutor] got so quiet and she backed down ... God's grace was there. In the courtroom, I have no doubt about it.

The Cross-Cultural Couple also spoke of prayer for their adult children. This example of prayer was for their children's life in general, and not specific to a crisis or special need.

He: I pray for my children. I don't pray that they be wealthy, healthy and wise, I pray that God embraces them. That He touches them as He's touched me. And [they] get that channel of communication with God going, period. Because as a parent, I know that if that happens, I don't have to worry. That's it.

She: I pray that they are aware of His presence in their life. Because He is touching them, He is. I pray that they are aware of that someday.

Prayer as a response to marital and family challenges is associated with patience and acceptance. The husband of the Best and the Brightest Couple summarized this and offered the following advice to young married couples:

If you pray and hang in there long enough, it will get better. That's a problem with youth marriages. They don't trust in the actions of God. Let God have the problem. God's working on you, just like a therapist does; it may take him two years to get your head squared away. But when you get there, have your moment of inspiration. You say, "Oh, now I get it" and you can see in a different way ... I think, give it two years. You think about a long-term marriage, two years isn't a big deal. If you're thinking, "Well, I'm going to stay married as long as it's fun," then two years is torture. I say, "Give it two years." Whatever is bothering you today won't bother you two years from now.

Openness to Change as a Response to Challenges. A third response to challenges of life and marriage was to change. Four out of eight, half of the couples sampled, stated that marriage required an openness to change. Although it was not explicitly stated by the other four couples in the sample, an openness to change was observable in the collected

stories they told of their marriage. The stories of all eight of the couples suggested an openness to change as a response to challenges. The Open-Home Husband spoke of change in one conversation. He said:

Heck, it is a sign of sharing God's life just to let go being the most important. To accept problems as part of the whole deal, to not try and solve everything. We look for blessings in difficulties and we need to be open to change.

The husband of the Pragmatic Couple stated it this way: "I had to do a lot of changing. I did a lot of modifications. Well, I still do. A marriage of fifty-two years of changing is still changing every day."

The Rewards of Sacramental Marriage

The last aspect of marriage focused on by research question three was the rewards, or lack of rewards, perceived in a sacramental marriage. The study found that most of the rewards of sacramental marriage were similar to the rewards of any good marriage,⁵⁹ be it secular or spiritual. The common rewards included friendship, intimacy and physical love, children, and a sense of generativity.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Gottman (1999) for descriptive characteristics of "good marriages".

⁶⁰ Generativity is a sense of accomplishment, of completion. To be generative is to nurture the next generation, independent of biological connections.

Friendship. The reward of friendship was apparent in the way the stories were told in the extended conversations. The stories unfolded with each spouse talking until the story was full and complete. The participants paid attention to each other, added their own ideas, and shaped a consensus idea together. The physical posture and motions of the couples indicated a deep comfort with each other. As described by the Covenant Wife:

What an incredible feeling ... that the sense of this person is going to be with you and a part of you and you know that the Lord has placed that in your heart. To me, it's an awesome feeling.

Intimacy and physical love. The study did not include sexuality as a research topic. However, interview data indicated intimacy and physical love as a reward. The Open-Home Wife provided an emic, or insider, description of the reward of intimacy.

I've come to understand, that for a Christian marriage, sex is a sign of the unity. It is a blessing from God, but it's also frosting on a cake. The cake is having a relationship where you love the person, you respect the person, you share values together, and the values are there. That's the case, and it's good, even without the frosting. But with the frosting, it's better.

Children. Children and the education of children were also primary rewards in the marriage stories collected for this study. The wife of the Open-Home Couple reported in one conversation, "The reward is that God brought you together, God has blessed you with these children. Raising children brings experiences of thankfulness, spiritual experiences."

The husband of the Service Couple spoke of children and family as a sacred trust. He and his spouse had raised their children, and now had active roles in raising their

grandchildren. He commented: "It's a sacred thing for us that we have a family together and that we share in our relationship as the mother/father, as the husband/wife, as the spiritual leaders of the family—children and grandchildren."

Generativity. The study found a perception of generativity in each of the eight marital stories. The stories of the couples included children, families, parishes, and many communities. Each couple and each participant had given their time, talents, and financial resources to help others. Each couple had nurtured not only their own children, but many other people. Each couple was comfortable with how their life had evolved, and where their life was in the present. They enjoyed telling stories of how they arrived there. The couples were comfortable with the changes that had occurred over the years, and with the prospect of future change. Generativity indicated a sense of completeness to the marriage.

The husband of the Cross-Cultural Couple provided one example of generativity when he looked back upon the years of marriage and family, and viewed the outcome with contentment.

When someone says, "Hey, you got grey hair," I say, "You know what, I've earned every single one of them, I'm proud of every single one of them. I'm not going to color them." You know, it's my walk, our walk. I would say that our marriage has evolved and grown, but I know we had some major bumps. But those bumps are like the grey hair, we got through them. They're part of why we are where we are now.

Ministry. The study found one reward that may be unique to a spiritually-oriented model of marriage, such as the sacramental marriage model. In this study, five of the eight couples reported that ministry was a reward of their married life. Three couples had

followed their ministries into the five-year deaconate formation process, and were presently serving as deacons. The deaconate ministry was a reward for both of the spouses. As the Young Love, True Love Deacon confided:

The oneness of the sacrament [of marriage] is more powerful than we know. When I'm ministering the sick or dying, my wife is there [in me]. The ministry is us and the grace of ordination covers us both. I may have the public role but the ministry is us as one. The blessings affect me and ... [my wife].

The Quest Couple Husband, a layman and not a deacon, also spoke of ministry as a reward. He had moved his career away from a series of fast-track promotions, and, together with his wife, had emphasized ministry over a span of forty years. He summarized the rewards of ministry in this way:

The reward of our marriage was to hear the call of the Gospel to go out and bring the good news, of the sacrament of matrimony, of family, bring it out to the world. That's what we're called [to do], not to be focused and all concerned about our little family. But to focus outward. God took care of our little family, as we went out [and ministered in the world].

Summary

The challenges that the couples faced in their marriages were generic to the challenges faced by many married couples. Raising children, and maintaining health are some of the challenges mentioned. However, the study did find that the responses to the challenges may be unique to a sacramental, or, minimally, a sacred model of marriage.

The study found a spiritual response to challenges as being common to each of the couples. There was a common response of faith, prayer, and an openness to change.

Part III: Additional Findings

Faith

The analysis of narrative methodology (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998; Patton, 2002) directed the study to find emic themes and categories. The categories were then organized around the three research questions using what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as the analysis of narrative approach to organizing data. However, one category was too broad, and too prevalent in the data to assign to a single research question.

The category “faith” appeared in every story of every couple. When asked to describe their marriage, or to name something unique in their marriage, the couples repeatedly described the importance of faith.⁶¹ The couples’ faith paradigm influenced their marriages, life histories, and future prospects. When asked to describe their marriage, each couple began its story in retrospect with a narrative of faith, and each couple concluded its story with an indication of their faith in the future. The wife of the Open-Home Couple remarked in one conversation, “God was the source...[of] faith,

⁶¹ Faith is a theological virtue that is “both a gift of God and a human act” (Catechism, 1994, p. 878). The gift from God is his revelation of himself to us. The necessary human act is our response: moving deeper into faith, to trust God and God’s plan for us and to act as children within the family of God.

hope, and love, all three of them are right here. Marriage is faith, hope, and love, and that means God is right here.”

In all the stories, Christian faith was present before the couples met. Each person (n=16) had a degree of faith in God and a religious practice before marriage. The degree of faith and the religious practices varied, but there was one common denominator with each person, and that was faith. All eight couples were married in a Catholic church. Some had a Mass as part of the ceremony, and others did not. Some stood with the priests, and others stood outside of the altar railing as a requirement imposed on two-faith or mixed marriage ceremonies. Only two couples out of eight had attended a Catholic marriage preparation program, and half of the couples had little or no conversation with a priest prior to the wedding ceremony.

An interesting example of faith was the story of the Quest Couple, who wanted to include physical proof of God’s presence in their wedding ceremony. When they joined their faith together at the wedding ceremony, they wanted to include God along side the two of them. She described the occasion to me with this story:

We thought it was so important to have a real sign of God in our relationship, that after the Mass, we asked the photographer to stay. We took a picture of ... [my husband] and I looking towards the Tabernacle. As a symbol, that we knew God had to be in our relationship right from the beginning ... I [later] saw that as a grace that we had the insight at that young of age ... that our relationship wasn’t going to be complete without the Lord.

Each couple, eight out of eight, faithfully described their marriage as God’s plan

for them. God had ordered their lives and called the couple to be together. Two of the eight men attributed the initial meeting of their wives as an act of divine intervention. One man, the Pragmatic Husband, was certain of this immediately.

And so, when we met that evening, I knew that I'd met somebody that I had been praying about between myself and God. ... I was very clear on what I was looking for in a wife and prayed about it. Prayed to God, I prayed through Mary....But now, once you've found the person, how are you going to change all the things to fit?

The Pragmatic Wife, in a different conversation, also credited God with the plan that evolved as her 52-year marriage, as of the time of this study. She explained to me:

How would I expect to end up like this? [The wife waves a hand around in the air. Hanging on the wall are pictures of grown children, and grand children. We sit in a large country house with extensive grounds.] So, did I ever think, "Oh, well I want to have a big house and many children?" I never thought of it that way. God brought us along and people helped.

Faith in God's plan for the marriage was not limited to good experiences. Cancer had tested the faith of five of the eight marriages. One couple, the Service Couple, was a few years past the diagnosis, treatment, and regression of cancer. The husband and wife had reached a point where the cancer now seemed to have been an opportunity. They had survived cancer together, and he now saw cancer as part of God's plan for his marriage. He commented:

Cancer brought a whole new meaning as to who we are and what our marriage was about and it humbled us and it brought us even closer. Our spirituality just zoomed with it and we learned that we really didn't have much control. So in a sense you could say it's a blessing. And the reason I say that is because of the things that have occurred after the cancer surgery. God set us up with cancer to bring us closer together. He brought us closer together so that we could stand some of the things that we were going to get hit with right after that time.

Summary of the Findings

The transcripts from the multiple guided conversations provided a major portion of the data for this study. The transcripts were subjected to two types of analysis: narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sykes, 1998) The names of the methods sound similar but each provided a distinct methodology that produced distinct presentations of the findings. Narrative analysis led the study to eight short stories with implicit answers to the research questions. The second method, analysis of narrative, led the study to explicit quotations, emic narratives that were organized as categories. The categories were then matched with the research questions. Some categories did not survive the reevaluation and editing interpretative process, and do not appear in this study. One category, the category faith, was present in each of the three research questions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study reported on marriage as a sacred activity from the perspective of eight “information rich” (Patton, 2002) couples to add an emic, or insider, perspective of sacramental marriage to the Catholic literature. The study was guided by three research questions: (a) How do the participants describe their marriage and what do they say, if anything, about sacramental marriage and visible signs of God over time? (b) Over the years, how have personal, marital, family, and community spiritual experiences influenced one another, and how do these levels of spirituality influence marital dynamics? (c) What are the rewards and challenges of a sacramental marriage and how do couples react to these challenges?

A brief summary of the findings will be organized around the three research questions, and will include emic descriptions of sacramental marriage; the finding of positive correlations between spiritual growth and social dynamics, including ministries; and the finding of a common pattern of response to challenges that included: faith, prayer, and an openness to change.

Emic Descriptions of Sacramental Marriage

In response to the first research question, the study found that all eight couples used the term “sacrament” to describe their marriage at some time during the extended conversations. In addition to the term “sacrament,” other emic descriptions of their personal marriage included: “an incredible feeling,” “covenant,” “holy,” “spiritual,” “sacred, body of Christ,” “divine plan,” “vocation to holiness,” and “a spiritual vehicle.”

Two participants, both ordained deacons, described their marriage with traditional Church descriptions. These descriptions were “a visible sign of an invisible reality,” and “a sign of Christ’s presence in ... [their] lives.”

The study found that each couple, eight out of eight, perceived their marriage as a holy commitment, as a sacred activity. Each couple spoke of God as present in the marriage, and expected God to be a working spouse, along with their husband or wife, on a constant basis. The Young Love, True Love husband summarized his marriage this way:

So our spirituality as a couple deepened as we went along ... I think that our relationship is a sign for other people of the love that God has for [all of] us.

Spiritual Growth and Social Dynamics

In answer to research question two, the study found a positive two-way influence between spirituality and the social dynamics of marriage, family, and community. The Cursillo or Marriage Encounter⁶² retreat precipitated a spiritual experience for each of the study’s participants, and a sustainable change in their spiritual activities. In the years after the Cursillo or Marriage Encounter retreat, the couples each expanded the time and attention they gave to their spiritual formation⁶³, and they each volunteered in wider and wider areas of service. In eight of the eight couples, this led to ministry commitments. Three of the eight couples joined the permanent diaconate of the Diocese of San Diego.

⁶² In two cases, the couples attended Marriage Encounter prior to attending Cursillo.

⁶³ Examples included reading the Bible, reading good books, and increased time at prayer.

The ministry activities returned a positive benefit to the couples. An increase in ministry benefited the couples marital spirituality. The five laity and three deaconate couples all reported that service and ministry benefited their marriage. The benefit was reported by couples who were engaged in ministry together, by couples engaged in separate ministries, and by a couple with only one spouse engaged in ministry. As the husband of the Open-Home couple told me:

This God stuff is about happiness and joy and it's also about strength to get through the tough times. If we don't share that, who will?

Challenges and Responses: A Unique Finding

In response to research question three, the study found that the challenges that confronted the couples were generic to married life⁶⁴, and not specific to sacramental marriage. However, the study found that the response to challenge was similar in all eight marriages, and may be insightful of sacramental marriage. The response to challenges followed an order of faith, prayer, and openness to change.

The study found the virtue of faith imbedded in all of the stories told by the couples, and in all of the narrative themes later attached to the research questions. The marriage stories started with episodes of faith, the timelines of the life histories pinpointed times of deep faith and reliance on God, and the couples all concluded their stories with indications of faith in the future. Faith was the worldview, the ultimate paradigm by which all 16 participants organized their lives.

⁶⁴ Challenges included physically and mentally challenged children, and episodes of cancer.

The study found that prayer, in different styles and variations, was used by each couple each day, and particularly in response to challenges. Visual examples of prayer included Mass, other sacraments, devotions to the Eucharist and to Mary, and prayers at dinner and family occasions. In telling stories of cancer, prison, and other worries, the participants demonstrated a deep reliance on prayer, and a faith that God would act on their specific request.

The study found an openness to change as a common response to challenges. Six of the eight couples mentioned “change” as a constant of their marriage. An openness to change allowed the couples’ marriages to move along, to not get stuck, as in a committed and expectant journey.

Confirmation and Expansion of Catholic Literature

The study found no conflicts between the participants’ description of sacramental marriage, and the descriptions of Catholic doctrine and tradition. Rather, the stories added a human context to the otherwise abstract descriptions of marriage in the literature. The study found the classic Catholic concepts of *covenant*, *consortium*, and *sacramentum* embellished in each of the couples’ stories and descriptions.

*Covenant*⁶⁵

The study found that each couple included God as a personal and constant member of the marital relationship. God was present in each of the stories told by the couples. The inclusion of God in their marital relationship followed biblical and Church descriptions of covenant.

A marital covenant is a trinity composed of the two spouses and God. It is where husband, wife, and God are weaved together as three cords to make one strong rope.

From Ecclesiastes 4:12, the advice is given:

Though one may be overpowered,

two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

The stories recorded in this study evidenced such a covenant. God was included in each marriage relationship. In all cases, God was present in the minutia of each marriage, as well as in the major episodes. This covenant bestowed a firmness to the marriage, a fidelity. God provided a safe place for a spouse or a couple to go when challenges pressed in on the marriage. The covenant, an understanding much deeper than a contract, contained the promises and fidelity of God, along with the promises and fidelity of each spouse, as a source of stability and continuity to the marriage.

⁶⁵ *Covenant* is “a solemn agreement between human beings or between human beings and God involving mutual commitments and guarantees” (Catechism, 1997, p. 873).

Consortium

The study found that the perception of journey and change within each marriage underscored the Canon's (1983) description of marriage as a *consortium*. The concept of *consortium* originated with Roman marriages, and meant more than an intimate relationship, and more than a partnership. *Consortium* was a close association of two persons who shared "the same fortune, fate, and destiny" (Orsy, 1986, p. 51) over a long time, perhaps a lifetime.

The study found marriage described by the participants as a "journey" and as a "spiritual vehicle." The stories always moved forward with the letting go of careers, children, health, and presumptions about the future. The marriages moved forward through fortune, fate, and destiny, described by the couples as "God's plan," and "God's grace." Change, and being open change, was a theme voiced in six of the eight marriages. Marital life was a journey sustained by the *consortium* of the spouses.

Sacramentum

Augustine interpreted *sacramentum* in the third century as a visible sign of an invisible reality, and as such, the sign could not be broken (Martos, 2001). The Catholic doctrine of marital indissolubility finds its origins in this interpretation of *sacramentum*.

The study found that each couple viewed their marriage as indissoluble. Not one couple spoke of considering divorce, although four of the eight couples spoke of exceedingly difficult times in their marital relationship, including depression, isolation, and physical arguments. The study found that the inclusion of God as a personal participant in the marriage appeared to give each marriage resiliency. Just as in the application of *consortium*, where the presence of God gave the couple a safe ground, or a

sanctuary; in *sacramentum*, the presence of God appeared to give additional security to the marriage. From the couples' viewpoint, their marriage could not be broken because God was a part of the marriage. The Quest wife advised me:

God and a relationship with the Lord is the glue that holds your marriage together.

Implications of the Study

Policy and Pastoral Implications

Policy Implications

The study has implications for policy within Catholic parish and diocesan communities.

Marriage Encounter and Cursillo. Martos (2001) described Cursillo and Marriage Encounter as doors to the sacred, and the study confirmed this description. Each of the eight couples was influenced by a Marriage Encounter, a Cursillo retreat, or by both. The experience of the retreat led to a deeper personal and marital spirituality. This deeper spirituality was, in time, shared with the larger community, and included both parish and diocesan ministries.

From this finding, it is recommended that Cursillo and Marriage Encounter continue to publicize their programs and to encourage couples to attend. It is also recommended that parish and diocesan resources contribute to the expansion of these programs in order to develop deacons and lay people to fill the large need in the Diocese of San Diego, and elsewhere.

Domestic Church. Additionally, each couple had created a domestic church within their household. Each of the eight couples demonstrated the “traditional Catholic values,” listed by Cahill (2005) as, “commitment and monogamy, openness to procreation and parental responsibility, the cultivation of religious identity in the home, and the family’s dedication to service for the common good” (p.593). The Catholic Church was alive, well and prospering in each of these households. The participants’ domestic churches prospered, and there was an ecumenical spirit of collaboration with children who had moved to other faith traditions. The marked difference evident between the domestic and institutional versions of the Catholic Church was the ability of the domestic participants in this study to be open to change while also being committed to their Catholic tradition.

From this finding, it is recommended that the stories of couples living sacramental marriages and practicing as a domestic church be promoted and shared through the diocesan communication resources. This recommendation would not be limited to Marriage Encounter or Cursillo couples. Fewer Catholic couples are choosing a Catholic wedding, and stories and opportunities about the domestic church are needed along with the stories of the institutional church to further the mission of the Gospel.

Pastoral Implications

Faith, Prayer, and Openness to Change. The study reported on the participants’ descriptions of challenges, and on how they responded to challenges. The challenges of married life included children, careers, and cancer, to name a few. The challenges faced by the couples differed in severity and duration, but the response to the challenges was

systematic across all eight marriages. Faith, prayer, and an openness to change was the response the couples practiced to the challenges of life and marriage.

From this finding, it is recommended that the strategies of faith, prayer, and an openness to change be included in marriage preparation, and marriage enrichment curriculums as a spiritual strategy that evidenced positive life outcomes in this study.

An Educational Symbol of Sacramental Marriage. One objective of this study was to find signs or symbols of sacramental marriage. The signs in the couples' marriages included faith, hope, and love. However, these three theological virtues are abstractions to many couples in preparation for marriage, or when learning about marriage. There is a need for a graphic image to symbolize sacramental marriage in marriage preparation and other educational settings.

The study found the symbol of the *claddagh*, an Irish wedding ring, as a tangible learning tool. McBride (1994) took the entire contents of the Catholic Catechism (1997) on sacramental marriage, and summarized the extensive descriptions and teachings into the symbol of the *claddagh*.

From this finding, I recommend that pastoral marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programs utilize the *claddagh* with "two hands folded in prayer around a heart of love beneath a crown of fidelity" (McBride, 1994, p.151) as an educational symbol to describe the abstract concept of sacramental marriage. The study recommends that the findings of faith, prayer, and openness to change, as well as friendship, loyalty, acceptance, and generativity, be added to the symbol of the *claddagh* to give people a picture of sacramental marriage.

Figure 5.1 Claddagh representing Sacramental Marriage



Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Larger Sample Size

The study was conducted with eight couples for a total number of 16 participants ($n = 16$). The goal of the study was to add an emic voice to the Catholic literature from insiders who practiced sacramental marriage. It was not intended to be generalized, and the study selectively chose “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) participants. Nonetheless, additional studies with more participants that focus on the same or similar research questions would be of benefit to the Catholic literature on sacramental marriage.

Outside Cursillo

The study selected eight couples active in the Cursillo movement in the Diocese of San Diego. The research methodology called for a set of uniquely qualified participants to gain an expert, inside understanding of sacramental marriage. However, future study would benefit from expanding to non-Cursillo populations, or to participants who are no longer active in Cursillo.

Cross-Cultural Catholic Cursillo

This study was based on eight English-speaking couples. Future research with a cross-cultural application within the Diocese of San Diego could include Tagalog (Philippine), Vietnamese, and English speaking Catholic Cursillo groups. Non-Catholic Cursillo groups could also be included in additional studies.

Conclusions

The study interpreted the stories told by eight couples about their experience of sacramental marriage. The couples were selected as information rich sources to investigate an emic, or inside view, of sacramental marriage.

The study found emic descriptions of sacramental marriage that included a spiritual vehicle, a sacred feeling shaped directly by God, and a divine plan already known to God. The stories revealed that each participant had faith prior to marriage. Each couple had responded to a spiritual experience at a Catholic retreat by creating a wider network of service and ministry. These wider networks of faith were sustained over years, and were reported as beneficial to the marriage. Faith, prayer, and an openness to change were common strategies for dealing with the challenges of marriage and life. Each couple was generative to their spouse and to their own marriage, and to others in the family and community. Each couple lived their sacramental marriage as a gifted journey, as exemplified in the 10th century Celtic poem, *A Chrinoc, cubaid do cheol*.

Seeking the presence of elusive God
Wandering we stray but the way is found
Following the mighty melodies that with you
Throughout the pathways of the world resound.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Questions for Initial Interview of Couples Together

1. How long have you been married? Do you have children and what are their ages?
2. Tell me how the two of you met and what your courtship was like.
3. Tell me about your marriage preparation.
4. How would you describe your marriage and what it means to you?
5. How does your marriage differ from other types of marriage?
6. How does the practice of spirituality in your marriage affect family issues and relationships? (probe: examples)
7. How do you share your spirituality with each other? With your family?
(Probe: behaviors, rituals, prayers, teachings, traditions)
8. Can you see any signs of God in your marriage? (probe: examples)
9. How does the formal Church influence your marriage and family?
10. Is there something to add or something that we haven't talked about yet?

Grand Tour Question for Interview of Individual Spouses

Question 11. Tell me about your spiritual journey. Use this paper to draw a timeline of your life. Tell me about your relationship with God over the course of your life. Give me the long story, beginning with childhood and take us up to the present time. Mark on the timeline the significant events of your spiritual journey.

Question for Third Interview: Couples Together

Question 12: "Tell me how you see your personal, marital, family and community spirituality influencing each other over the years."