

MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT

In the current scene both within and without the Catholic Church marriage constitutes one of the most popular topics of discussion. Admittedly in this, even in the case of discussions within the Catholic Church, it is only rarely that the discussion centres upon marriage as a sacrament. Here, however, it is precisely this question of dogmatic theology, however 'theoretical' and out of touch with current thought it may seem to be, that is to be treated of. This question and no other besides. For in fact that which has been forgotten, neglected and thrust into the background is still very far indeed from being less important than that which fills the columns of the newspapers and the Church's periodical literature, or even which has been made the subject of a papal commission. Perhaps it is not altogether useless from the 'practical' point of view too to enquire into what is, *precisely on a Christian understanding*, the heart and centre of marriage. What does it mean to say that married love is sanctified by God's grace? How does that which every marriage is in any case and of its very nature acquire new and deeper roots in virtue precisely of what takes place at the *sacramental* level? What part does marriage as understood in this sense play in the life of the Church at the level of theology and faith? Is it not necessary to view the institution of marriage once more in its theological and spiritual origins, seeing that at the deepest level it is on this basis alone that the concrete problems of life can be endured and solved? In the article which follows an attempt will be made to take a first step in this direction.

A valid marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament, one of the seven sacraments of the Church of Christ. In what follows we shall be exploring, to some extent, this straightforward statement which has been defined as part of the faith of the Catholic Church.¹ For in fact it [200] cannot be said that we have really understood this statement merely on the grounds that we 'know' about it in the sense that it strikes us as well-known and familiar, and to this extent is firmly rooted in the contents of our catechism, whether in its printed or unprinted form. The aim we have set ourselves is not directly or properly speaking to establish that this statement is contained in the 'sources' of revelation.² Nor shall we be defending it as a matter of theological controversy against the theology of the Reformation.³ Here we shall only be attempting simply and straightforwardly to understand precisely *what* this statement really means and says. It is inevitable in the very nature of the case that in this we will have to concern ourselves with questions which are both extremely difficult and extremely obscure.

I

¹ cf. D.S. 1001, 1801. For a more detailed treatment on this (with bibliography) P. Adnès, *Le Mariage = Le Mystère chrétien. Théologie sacramentaire* (Tournai 1963), pp. 100-104; H. Rondet, 'Introduction à l'Étude de la théologie du mariage' = *Théologie, Pastorale et Spiritualité. Recherches et Synthèses* 6 (Paris 1960), pp. 97 ff., 175 ff.; H. Volk, *Das Sakrament der Ehe* (Munster 1952); M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* IV/1 (Munich, 6th ed., 1964), pp. 767-828; E. Schillebeeckx, *Le Mariage* I (Paris 1967).

² cf. also the manuals of dogmatic theology, e.g. in P. Adnès, *Le Mariage, op. cit.*, pp. 135 ff.; M. Schmaus, *op. cit.*, pp. 781 ff.; cf. also J. Michl and H. Volk, 'Ehe', *L.T.K.* III (Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1959), 677-684; W. Molinski, 'Marriage', *Sacramentum Mundi*.

³ This is set forth in P. Adnès, *op. cit.*, pp. 95 ff. (with bibliography); cf. also P. Althaus, *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh 1965), pp. 88 ff.; O. Lähteenmäki, *Sexus und Ehe bei Luther = Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* (Turku, 1955).

We must begin by enquiring briefly into the nature of the *sacrament in general*. In doing so we are conscious of the fact that we are embarking upon a way which is, from the aspect of the history of dogma, as also from that of the methodology employed in this field, a dangerous one. For the general concept of ‘sacrament’ is – historically speaking and from the point of view of the subject matter itself – a subsequent abstraction which has emerged at a relatively late stage from those seven sacred realities which take place in the life of the Church, but which, when we compare them with one another, turn out to be of very different kinds. An ill-thought out application of this concept which has subsequently been abstracted from them, therefore, in which it is taken as an overall model which is capable only of secondary variations, can make it extremely difficult for us to perceive the real nature of the individual sacrament. However our only purpose in beginning with a consideration of sacrament in general is thereby to acquire an initial orientation. The significance [201] of it is that in a certain sense it makes sure that in our treatment of marriage as such certain definite aspects of it will not be able to escape our notice from the outset.⁴

The first point to be recognised about a sacrament is that it is essentially something that takes place in the *Church*, i.e. not merely something which the Church brings about, as it were, externally in the life of specific individuals, but an event in which the Church realizes her own nature and thereby ‘actualizes’ herself. A sacrament is something that takes place at that manifest level which belongs to the nature of the Church, not a ‘private treatment’ in which the Church merely collaborates in some way. This event has the force of a cultic manifestation, an objective symbol, a physical embodiment. It belongs palpably to the historical dimension of space and time, as well as to that of God’s self-bestowal in grace upon man.⁵ At the same time it also belongs to the nature of the Church which in Christ is the arch-sacrament, eschatologically victorious and indefectible, of precisely this same self-bestowal of God.⁶ And finally it is also the free act by which this gracious self-bestowal of God is accepted by him who allows the sacrament to take effect in him, and by his act plays his own part in constituting it as such. In accordance with this we have to distinguish in the sacrament between the sign and that which is signified, between the manifestation and that which is manifested and which has a message to proclaim in hidden form in the manifestation. In the order of the physical person endowed with freedom as he exists in space and time, and in the order of the incarnation, both elements have a connatural relationship to one another, yet are not identical with one [202] another.⁷ The sacramental sign proceeds from the will of God truly to save men, and from the nature of the Church as the arch-sacrament of the grace of God, eschatologically victorious and indefectible. And as rooted in these this sign always has an ‘exhibitive’ force as the effective and unconditional offering of

⁴ For more precise details on the emergence of the general concept of ‘sacrament’ see G. van Roo, *De Sacramentis in Genere* (Rome 1957), pp. 1-61; J. Finkenzyler, ‘Sakrament’ III, *L.T.K.* IX (Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1964), 220-225 (with bibliography). On the problem of the sacramentality of marriage in particular cf. P. Adnès, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 ff., 71 ff. (the Fathers), 89 ff. (the Middle Ages), 104 ff. (Post-Tridentine), 132 ff., 134 ff. (Systematic theology); H. Rondet, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff. (Middle Ages), 97 ff. (Trent), 145 ff., 153 ff. (Systematic theology); H. Volk, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-18; M. Schmaus, *op. cit.*, pp. 787 ff.

⁵ On this cf. K. Rahner, ‘The Word and the Eucharist’, *Theological Investigations* IV (London and Baltimore 1966), pp. 253-286. My reason for referring to my own works in the course of this article is to give the reader the opportunity to achieve a better understanding of unusual and difficult lines of thought in the context of the general theological system which I have worked out.

⁶ On this K. Rahner, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I (Freiburg 1964), pp. 118 f., 121 ff., 132 ff. See also below, p.202, n. 7, 210, n. 20, p. 211, n. 21, n. 22 cf. in addition E. Schillebeeckx, *Christus Sakrament der Gottbegegnung* (Mainz 1960), pp. 17-95.

⁷ Apart from the treatments mentioned in nn. 5, 6 with references, cf. on this also K. Rahner, ‘The Church and the Sacraments’, *Studies in Modern Theology* (Freiburg/ London 1965), pp. 206-215; *idem*, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I, pp. 323 ff.

salvation by Christ and the Church. In this sense, then, the sacramental sign is *opus operatum*.⁸ But since grace is only the event of salvation as brought about when it is accepted in freedom, and since this free acceptance can precisely be withheld by man, the sacramental manifestation of grace remains radically indeterminate *precisely from the human aspect*. It can remain an ‘empty’ manifestation. It can be an invalid or ineffective sacrament, or alternatively it can have the force of really being that ‘exhibitive’ word which carries what it expresses within itself, the word in which and through which that which it signifies takes place in very truth. Certainly this is far from being an exhaustive description of the nature of the sacrament in general.⁹ But nevertheless certain aspects of it have been indicated to which we have to pay due heed in any consideration of marriage as a sacrament.

Marriage is a *sign*. It possesses this character prior to any theological consideration and prior to its bearing upon the relationship between Christ and the Church, because in itself it has a physical and social dimension of reality. Here we have the incarnation, as it were, the real symbol, the manifestation, the ‘space-time’ dimension, the expression of the most interior and most personal union in love of two individuals at the very roots of their being as orientated in freedom to God. Already here, then, we can perceive that difference and that unity in the elements which go to make up this sacrament inasmuch as this too is the sign at the physical and social level of a personal faith and love manifested in the appropriation of the grace of God as addressed to the individual in the sacrament. Considered purely in itself marriage already constitutes such a unity, in which the two elements remain distinct, of personal love, on the one hand, and its sign at the physical and social level on the other.¹⁰

[203] This sign, therefore, is both the ‘other factor’ in which and through which the personal love expresses itself, declares itself and makes itself manifest, and also, under certain circumstances, the *mere* sign which remains ‘empty’, deprived of its true basis, in which case it precisely does *not* carry with it what it signifies. Obviously this applies to marriage considered both as the sealing of a covenant and as the ‘concluding of a contract’ (as the canonists put it), and it also applies to married life as such. In both respects we can speak of the unity and the difference which exist between the sign and the reality signified.

II

For the present we shall still be remaining in this dimension of marriage in itself, without explicitly adverting to the precise *sacramental* significance of this sign. The question for us is, therefore, in view of what has been said, precisely *what* is made manifest in marriage in the dimension of the physical, of space and time, and of social living? Up to this point we have concluded that it is the most intimate and personal unity in love between two individuals (of different sexes). We must now see a little more deeply into what this statement signifies. Admittedly this could be achieved in various ways and at various levels. For instance that personal love which forges the most intimate possible unity between two human individuals would have to be considered in its own distinctive nature. Every word of this definition is capable of yielding the deepest insight into the meaning of marriage. Here three further specific aspects are particularly to be brought out: how this love relates to God, the process

⁸ cf. K. Rahner, ‘Personal and Sacramental Piety’, *Theological Investigations* II (London and Baltimore 1963), pp. 109-133; *idem*, *Kirche und Sakramente*, pp. 22 ff.

⁹ cf. G. van Roo, *op. cit.*, pp. 62 ff., 82 ff., K. Rahner, ‘Sakrament’ IV, *L.T.K.* IX (Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1964), 225-230.

¹⁰ This is precisely what we mean when we use the term ‘real symbol’, cf. K. Rahner, ‘The Theology of the Symbol’, *Theological Investigations* IV (London and Baltimore 1966), pp. 221-252.

by which this personal love acquires fresh roots through that which we call grace, personal love as uniting us with the whole community of men.

1. We would have to begin by saying something about how this personal and unifying love relates to God. To do this we would have to give an account of the entire theological problem of the unity which exists between love of God and love of neighbour, of the relationship which we bear to God, and of our intercommunication among ourselves. And of course this is not possible here.¹¹ Love of God and love of [204] neighbour *mutually* condition one another, even if at first we do not explicitly reflect upon the fresh roots which both acquire through grace. Love of neighbour is not merely a moral task and a duty which is demanded by love of God. More than this, it is the means without which love of God, a right knowledge of God and of our true and total commitment to him, is quite impossible. The transcendental reference which man bears to God can only be realised to the full, can only be experienced for what it truly is and as such freely entered into, in the experience which we have through love of our neighbour. For the 'world' in and through which, according to Christian philosophy and theology, God can be 'recognized' is precisely in its ultimate depths, not merely our material environment, but first and last the world of personal interrelationships. Only one who has encountered this world as a matter of concrete experience, has accepted it in love and freely committed himself to it, can make real to himself and freely accept that transcendental orientation of the spirit in terms of knowledge and freedom, the ultimate basis and absolute goal of which is that Mystery upholding all and upheld by none which we call 'God'. It is this that makes it possible to realise what it is to be so orientated. In this context it is a question of secondary importance (in the light of what is ultimate) how far we succeed in arriving at a free and loving commitment to the world of personal interrelationships such that this involves, at least as something included in it, an experience of our own transcendence, and in this of God also. The question, in other words, of how we succeed in objectifying in conceptual and thematic terms, and setting out in propositional form, that orientation to God which we realise and accept as something that is included in our personal relationships. Even the atheist who truly loves makes experience in his love (provided only that it is what it must be) of God, whether or not he can express this to himself in his conscious thoughts or words.¹² Even in his case the absolute quality of personal love for the 'thou' of his fellow man utters a silent 'yes' to God. It has that quality of self-surrender which is achieved, and necessarily must be achieved, in love, and which can only take place provided that its basic origin and its ultimate goal consist in that which we call God. Or, to put the matter in another way, a love of this kind between human beings is based in its ultimate and connatural depths precisely upon this orientation to God. These ultimate and connatural depths of love consist in its power to attain to the other at the very deepest [205] and most ultimate levels of his personhood and his uniqueness. Thus there is a hope of the two beings as they actually exist arriving at what is ultimate and definitive in the existence of them both, and in a love of this kind this hope is positively affirmed. This too has its basis in the ultimate orientation to God as also has the basic faithfulness which such love involves.

2. Now this personal love, which creates the state of marriage as the mode in which to manifest itself, is in fact¹³ in the present order of salvation sustained by the grace of God

¹¹ cf. K. Rahner, 'Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God', *Theological Investigations* VI (London and Baltimore 1969), pp. 231-249; *idem*, *Der eine Mittler und die Vielfalt der Vermittlungen = Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz. Vorträge Nr. 47* (Wiesbaden 1967), also Vol. IX of this series, pp. 169-184.

¹² For more exact details on this cf. the author's recent work, 'Atheismus und implizites Christentum', *Handbuch des Atheismus*, J. Girardi ed. (Munich 1967), also Vol. IX of this series, pp. 145-164.

¹³ The character of this grace as unmerited is not destroyed by the fact that this *de facto* situation is inescapable. Nor can this be presented as a 'demand' arising from human nature as such at the purely natural level. On this

which *always* imbues this love with its salvific power, exalts it and opens it to the immediacy of God himself. Now this can take place even before this love encounters the message of the gospel proclaimed and made known as such in explicit words.

We cannot here set out the special reasons for holding this. Instead we shall assume it as an application of a more general theological principle.¹⁴ This can be formulated in the following terms: *in the present order of salvation a moral act that is truly positive ('actus honestus') is in fact also a salvific act ('actus salutaris') in the proper sense in virtue of the grace which always exalts it and which is offered always to every man by the universal salvific will of God.* This more general principle is, it is true, not universally accepted in Catholic theology. Nevertheless in different forms it has already been maintained in it for a long time, for instance by Vasquez and Ripalda,¹⁵ and materially speaking should certainly be accorded recognition as a prolongation of what the Second Vatican Council teaches with regard to the possibility of salvation for the non-Christian and the inculpable atheist.¹⁶ Doubts have been cast upon, or opposition offered to this principle hitherto by theologians only because they were incapable of rightly appreciating how it is possible, outside the sphere of the *explicit* preaching of the gospel, for that true faith to exist which is necessary for salvation, and also for a salvific act in the true [206] sense to be posited. But if, for reasons which cannot be treated of here and now,¹⁷ we accept the fact that revelation, and therefore faith too, can also be granted to him who has not been touched in any direct sense by the historical message of the Old or New Testaments, then neither the general principle already mentioned nor its particular application to the special question we are considering here continue to constitute any insuperable difficulty. In other words we can say: in the order of salvation as it *de facto* exists there are no merely 'natural' moral acts on man's part. These acts are *de facto*, when they are posited at all, also upheld by grace and supernaturally orientated to God in his direct act of self-bestowal, and indeed are already in themselves acts which have been made possible by this self-bestowal even though this has not become objectified or explicitated in terms of man's own conscious awareness.

The situation as set forth above applies primarily to the love between human beings where this is made real in the form of a personal and selfless union between two individuals. But this means: *genuine love is de facto always that theological virtue of caritas which is sustained by God himself through his grace.* In this virtue love is extended to both God and man both in a mutual interrelationship and according to their respective conditions *in such a way that in this relationship the lover achieves his salvation in the event of justification. In this salvation of his he wills salvation for the other also, and in both God is attained to immediately as this salvation in person.* The human love of which we are speaking here, therefore, 'intends' God not merely as a transcendental (not explicitly objectified) origin and goal in his infinite remoteness, but rather attains to God in that absolute proximity in which he imparts his own self – and not in the form of any merely creaturely gift – as the innermost mystery and life of man. In virtue of the fact that it is *caritas*, therefore, this love is also the event of the loving self-bestowal of God upon us which alone empowers us to love God and man. *Caritas*, therefore, is the event of the love of God for us and of our love for God taken

cf. the author's article, 'Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace', *Theological Investigations I* (London and Baltimore 2nd ed. 1965), pp. 297-317; 'Nature and Grace', *Theological Investigations IV* (London and Baltimore 1966), pp. 165-188, cf. also p. 219 n. 37.

¹⁴ On this cf. K. Rahner, *Zur Theologie des Todes = Quaestiones Disputatae 2* (Freiburg⁵ 1965), pp. 79 ff., 85 ff.

¹⁵ On this cf. Patres Societatis Jesu in Hispania professores, *Sacrae Theologiae Summa III* (Matriiti, 3rd ed., 1956), pp. 516-512 (bibliography).

¹⁶ More precise details are provided in the study referred to on p. 204, n. 12.

¹⁷ Apart from the article referred to on p. 204, n. 12 cf. K. Rahner (with J. Ratzinger), *Revelation and Tradition = Quaestiones Disputatae* (London 1965), pp. 9-25; *idem*, *Zur Theologie des Todes*, pp. 80 ff.

as a unity. Unfortunately here we must forego the attempt to translate this statement, which has been made in very abstract terms and on the basis of theological data, as it were into phenomenological terms and to express it as an existential and ontological fact. In this way, and on the basis of the experience of this radical love in itself, we could show that these theological implications of the nature of [207] love are actually present in it, or at least we could demonstrate the possibility of this.

3. But this love signifies at the same time a unity with mankind as a whole also. This needs to be shown from various aspects. We are accustomed to attribute to married love the character of a special intimacy and exclusiveness in relation to others outside the married partnership itself. We actually go so far as to regard these qualities as constituting what is special in married love as opposed to other forms of love such as love of neighbour in general, comradeship, friendship etc.

Now we do not for a moment intend to deny that married love has this character. Certainly it is consonant with the nature of married love. Nevertheless we ought to ask ourselves precisely *whence* the character of this somewhat startling exclusiveness derives. Is it based upon the ultimate nature of this personal love or are there *also* less basic reasons for it which have to do, rather, with the concrete physical forms and manifestations of this love as these are limited by space and time? Or can it even be that still further determining factors in this exclusiveness are the cultural, social and sociological factors of human living? In other words are some of the factors which go to determine this exclusiveness susceptible of alteration?¹⁸

But in any case it must be of service to point this out, if only because of the fact that it would be false if we sought to understand married love from the outset as an act of withdrawing behind closed doors where the two partners are isolated from the rest, for this would be, at basis, an egoistical state. Marriage is not the act in which two individuals come together to form a 'we', a relationship in which they set themselves apart from the 'all' and close themselves against this. Rather it is the act in which a 'we' is constituted which opens itself lovingly precisely to *all*. This aspect of the basic essence of such love 'appears' already in the very fact that those united by married love themselves already come from a community. In their love they do not abandon this – indeed they must not abandon it. And their love becomes fruitful in the child that they produce, which for its part in turn must not become enclosed within the 'we' relationship, but must be set free to enter into the wider community of the [208] 'all'. Married love, therefore, is, even in respect of its concrete physical forms, a source of, and an initiation into a wider community, and must therefore itself also intend this right from the outset.

This idea needs to be still further deepened. Married love cannot be so intimate and exclusive that it ceases to be love at all. Now of its very nature it is love only when it does not exclude, but rather opens itself to and includes, when it really commits itself ever anew to that which is strange in the other even before it has explored and seen into it; when it trusts itself without condition to accept that which is really 'other' in the beloved as its own (which, in fact, must also constantly be taking place in the intimate partnership of the marriage itself). In the *specific* love for the *concrete* individual man must precisely *experience* what 'love' is in general. He must experience that this is possible really as love and not as flattery, behind which, contrary to all appearances, only egoism and self-assertion lie concealed, in order that he may be able to trust himself in his relationship with the other. But then when he has achieved this his love must not be smothered by both the married partners becoming egoistical to all others. They must not seek to use their mutual love so as to justify a position

¹⁸ From this point of view we would have to concern ourselves with certain aspects of the 'crisis' in marriage as this is defined principally by sociologists. It is only by ridding our minds of certain specific patterns of marriage which have arisen in the course of social history that the true essence of Christian marriage can be established in its pristine force.

in which they precisely do *not* love others. They must maintain an openness to all, however much their finite powers and possibilities may in fact impose limitations upon them in this.

Married love too is a readiness, an exercise, a promise and a task, to *love* man *in himself* – something which is more than merely ‘respecting’ him, merely giving him ‘his due’ instead of being ready again and again to trust him with one’s *self*, to commit one’s self to him ‘with one’s whole heart and with all one’s resources’. We are always in debt to all, often, perhaps to those most remote from us even more than to those who are closest. Marriage is the concrete state in which we begin to pay this endless debt, not a dispensation from this endless task which can only be fulfilled by God’s help.

A further aspect must now be added to what has just been said. That grace which, as we have seen, sustains married love and renders it open to God in his radical immediacy is the grace of a covenant, which constitutes the innermost dynamism of the world and of the history of mankind in its unity. It is a grace which establishes the one dominion of God over all. So individual a grace, which, in its ultimate depths, is God himself, is directed to the individual in his uniqueness, and this is true however much it may also be the case that, while never ceasing to be this, it is at the same time an ‘universal concrete’, a unifying grace through which the individual is intended precisely as *belonging to* the *unity* of mankind, as having a place [209] in the people of God.¹⁹ This is not surprising. For the true uniqueness of the existence of each particular individual consists, if it is genuinely to be brought to its fulness and not to lead to an egoistical self-gratification of one’s own ‘personality’, in the unique singleness with which one actually *loves* all. If grace is in this sense the event in which God becomes, for the particular individual, *his* God, it is also, and precisely in virtue of this, the event in which grace not only breaks out of the bonds of egoism in a ‘moral’ sense and, so to say, at the external level of man’s life, but does so in such away that thereby man is *set free* to transcend the possibilities of his own nature and to attain to *that* infinitude of the freedom of God in which *all* are comprehended in love from the very roots of their existence, and in God can actually be loved in this way even by the creature.

Married love, therefore, is – in spite of, and in its intimacy or exclusiveness – of its very nature and on the basis of the grace of God which sustains it, a state in which we achieve union with mankind, impelled as it is by the selfsame grace. It follows, then, that right from its very origins married love, if its true nature is really attained to, also constitutes a relationship with God, an event of grace, a loving concord with that basic movement in which, through grace, mankind considered as the people of God arrives at the unity of the kingdom of God.

Marriage, as we have said at the outset (I), is the physical manifestation, the sign, the real symbol and the embodiment of this married love, which achieves reality through this manifestation of itself. Marriage – this is what we now have to conclude – is the sign of *that* love which is designed in God’s sight to be the event of grace and a love that is open to all. Yet even this insight is still only at the provisional stage in its development. The actual structure of ‘sign’ in itself has now to be examined more precisely, and that in its *sacramental* character. To accomplish this we shall first compare the sacramental structure of the Church and of marriage in general.

III

¹⁹ Attention has once more plainly been drawn to this aspect in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* (Chap. I-II).

What has just been said about marriage considered as a ‘real symbol’ of the love which has thus been specified can now also be asserted of the *Church*. Of course in drawing this parallel we have to maintain the force of the distinction which exists between the individual (or a few individuals) [210] and the community made up of all. But this distinction as applied to mankind is not *ipso facto* the same as that between a unity merely in the numerical sense and a numerical multitude. The mutual relationship which exists between the individual and mankind as a whole is different from this. In every individual man everything is present (*homo quodammodo omnia*), and the whole achieves a unique manifestation of itself in each particular individual. The community of mankind for its part is not the agglomeration of the many – all too many, but the unity in love of those, each of whom is unique in his own right, a love which sets each free for his own, which assembles all this and so once more unifies it. In the light of this it is not surprising that we can make the same assertion about the Church *and* about the individual, the more so seeing that even from the point of view of the individual it is a genuine community that is in question.

Allowing, therefore, for the general differences in the relationship which the individual bears to the community and that which the community of all taken together bears to the individual, we shall put forward the following proposition: the same ‘sign’ function which is found in marriage is also present in the Church. For the Church is, in Christ, the arch-sacrament, the basic sacrament: in him the love of God for mankind in his act of self-bestowal achieves its historical manifestation through grace in the loving unity of mankind.²⁰ In this parallelism which exists between the ‘sign’ function in marriage and in the Church respectively, one further particularly noteworthy element, as well as a difference which will be of importance in our later considerations, must be brought out. The special aspect in this parallelism is the following one. We have said that in marriage a difference exists between the sign and that which is signified, between the marriage as it exists at the physical and social level and married love. This difference can be so far-reaching that in the individual case the two entities – even though this is against the mutual relationship which is connatural to them – can actually be torn apart. The same is also true of the Church. Here too the sign (‘Church as basic sacrament’) and the reality signified are not simply identical. For what the Church points to is not herself. Rather as sign, i.e. as a socially organised community constituted by a common creed, a common cult and common works of charity, she is precisely the sign of that humanity, consecrated and united by grace (in interior faith and justification), the grace-given unity of which [211] extends far beyond the social organism of the Church.²¹ On the other hand a further and more essential distinction is to be found within this common difference: the ‘sign’ function in the case of a particular marriage can sinfully be degraded into a lie when that which it is intended to manifest and to render present is not present in itself, namely the love that is grace-given and unifying. In the Church as a whole the intrinsic connection between sign and reality signified can no longer radically be destroyed in virtue of the eschatological victory of grace in Christ. Nevertheless the basic parallelism between marriage and the Church continues to exist. The following proposition applies just as much to the Church as it does to marriage: she is the sign, at the palpable level of historical and social human life, of the fact that *that* love is being made effective and victorious throughout the whole of humanity which is the love of God for us and of us for God, the love which comprehends and unifies all so long as no-one sinfully denies it.

²⁰ On this cf. J. Alfaro, ‘Cristo, Sacramento de Dios Padre. La Iglesia, Sacramento de Christo Glorificado’, *Gregorianum* 48 (1967), pp. 5-27; P. Smulders, ‘Die Kirche als Sakrament des Heils’, *De Ecclesia* I, G. Baraúna ed. (Freiburg 1966), pp. 289-312; *idem*, ‘Sacramenten en Kerk’, *Bijdragen* 17 (1956), pp. 391-418.

²¹ On this cf. K. Rahner, *Handbuch der Pastoral Theologie* I, pp. 121 ff., 132 ff.; *idem*, ‘The New Image of the Church’, pp. 3-43, esp. pp. 12-25 in this volume.

We cannot develop any further the doctrine of the Church as the basic sacrament of salvation (and therefore of that love which is salvation) at this point.²² Here we must be satisfied with what has already been said, since what we are concerned with is the parallelism between marriage and the Church. When we compare the Church with marriage we are thinking of the Church simply as she is, the Church who is what she is simply in virtue of the mutual love between her and Christ. But while Christ is in this sense included, at the same time it is not *merely* a summary description when we say simply ‘Church’. For she is also the basic sacrament of grace and of the love which unites us all precisely in virtue of the fact that in her a *social* unity of truth, hope and love is brought about among men in themselves. This aspect belongs just as much to her character as basic sacrament as her unity with Christ which she expresses in creed and cult, and which thereby constitutes the manifestation of her unity with Christ in the *pneuma*.

Indeed we can actually make bold to proceed a stage further: the unity of the Church which she presents as the model and basis for the unity of marriage – in the dimensions of the sign and of the reality signified alike – is, nevertheless, so far as that precise aspect is concerned which we are considering here, *de facto* constituted through the love of men in the Church and the manifestation of this at the level of social and communal [212] life. But this love is not something that belongs to another dimension altogether, but rather precisely that same love which unites married spouses - including all that deeper theological dimension which belongs to it. But in that case we can also say: *the love that unites married spouses contributes to the unity of the Church herself because it is one of the ways in which the unifying love of the Church is made actual. It is just as much formative of the Church as sustained by the Church.* The term ‘Church-house’, signifying the sort of local Church which is constituted by a family unit, is more than a mere pious image.²³

This correspondence and parallelism between Church and marriage, therefore, is not merely an external similarity between two entities each of which exists on its own and independently of the other. On the contrary the conformity between the two is due to the fact that both have a common root. For marriage as such is, taken as a whole, the manifestation which is creative of *that precise* love which, as the love of God and for God in the divine act of self-bestowal, is constitutive of the union of mankind with one another and with God, and constitutive too of the basic sacrament of this which is the Church. In this we must not overlook the fact that the Church and humanity as made manifest, sanctified and unified in her are in no sense mythical entities but precisely those concrete individuals in themselves who love God and love in God, and give their intrinsic unity a manifest expression in the dimension of history in the unifying society that is the Church.²⁴

Now let us see what happens when, on the basis of this fundamental conformity marriage takes place precisely in the sphere of the Church. It becomes precisely that which we are seeking to express when we explain that it is a ‘sacrament’. In the light of the principle we have laid down this statement acquires the force not merely of a principle which we already know and understand. Rather this principle only truly becomes intelligible to us in the truths which it itself is intended to express, so that it is no mere abstract concept of sacrament which is applied to the institution of marriage *ab externo*. We must now attempt to clarify this point.

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²² On this cf. the studies quoted on pp. 201, n.6 and 7 and p. 210, nn. 20, 21. In addition, K. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 193-201.

²³ On this cf. the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, No. 11. This passage deserves greater attention, and not merely in the context with which we are here concerned.

²⁴ On the concrete problem thereby entailed cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations VI* (London and Baltimore 1969), pp. 289 ff.

Two baptised individuals voluntarily bind themselves in marriage. In this something takes place in the Church too. Here we do not need to adopt the approach of canon law, or to ask what precise conditions are required by the divine or human law upheld by the Church and from the nature of the case in order that such a bond of marriage (let us not call it a ‘contract’!) may take place precisely *in* the Church and in the context of her life as a ‘visible society’. But at basis all this is already given in virtue of the fact that it is two baptised individuals that are involved, and a marriage between them, something which always has a social relevance. Because married love has the character of a pointer and a sign, marriage itself is never a mere ‘worldly affair’. For this love itself is no worldly affair, but rather the event of grace and love which unites God and men. When a marriage of *this* kind, therefore, takes place in the Church, it is an element in the process by which the Church fulfils her own nature as such, one which is brought into being by two baptised Christians who, through their baptism, have been empowered to play an active part in this self-realisation.²⁵ As baptised, therefore, they act in a manner which is precisely proper to the Church herself. They make manifest the sign of love in which *that* love is visibly expressed which unites God and men.

Now when the Church achieves the fulness of her own nature in this way precisely at this *essential* level, making it effective in the concrete and decisive living situation of a human individual, there we have a sacrament.²⁶ In that case there is no need for this purpose of any *explicit* words of institution uttered by Jesus (we could never establish as a matter of historical fact that he ever uttered such words, nor is it even probable that he did so), such as for instance are to be found in the case of the Eucharist.²⁷ The ‘word of institution’ in this case consists in two factors: on the one hand in the fact that the religious relevance of marriage is acknowledged and that it is recognised that this too is something that is achieved through the word and the deed of Jesus himself.²⁸ It also consists [214] in the fact that marriage has been instituted by the Church as an eschatological sign of salvation for the kingdom of God (considered as the absolute proximity of God to man) until the end of time.²⁹ On the other hand marriage itself and of itself carries with it its own profoundly significant theological dimension.

Those theologians who invoked the support of Eph 5 for the sacramental nature of marriage were unable to perceive this point clearly. And because of this there has always been a certain embarrassment about this theology which, ultimately speaking, proves to be utterly unnecessary. For the saying from Gen 2:24 which is quoted in Eph 5 appeared to raise marriage *in general* – not merely that between Christians – to a sign of the unity between Christ and the Church, and it was believed that this could not be conceded without difficulty. In reality this is perfectly possible if we think out exactly the full implications of what we have said with regard to the character of marriage as a sign referring to married love and the special theological dimensions belonging to this. In Christian theology, in fact, we certainly do not have to maintain that a sacramental marriage is related to a non-sacramental marriage

²⁵ On this cf. K. Rahner, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I, pp. 146 ff., 151 ff.; *idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 269-272, 289-294.

²⁶ cf. K. Rahner, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I, pp. 323-332; *idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 202 ff.

²⁷ On these problems cf. K. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 258-264, and M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* IV/1, pp. 75 ff.; E. Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, pp. 117 ff.

²⁸ On this cf. the brief survey by J. Michl, ‘Ehe’, *L.T.K.* III (Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1959), 677-680 (bibliography); P. Adnès, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-42; M. Schmaus, *op. cit.* pp. 781 ff.; J. Dupont, *Mariage et divorce* (Bruges 1959); P. Grelot, *Le couple humain dans l’Ecriture* (Paris, 2nd ed., 1964); cf. also pp. 210, nn. 34 and 35.

²⁹ On this cf. K. Rahner, ‘The Church and the Parousia of Christ’, *Theological Investigations* VI (London and Baltimore, 1969), pp. 295-312.

as a sacrament to a purely secular human activity. On the contrary both are related to one another as the *opus operatum* to an *opus operantis*, and this latter too is wholly an event of grace.³⁰ The order in which the one stands to the other here is similar, for instance, to that relationship which a sacramental forgiveness of sins bears to a non-sacramental one achieved merely through repentance. For this too takes place as the outcome of grace and in grace.³¹ Marriage does not become an *event of grace* only at that stage at which it acquires the status of a ‘sacrament’. On the contrary the event of grace in marriage becomes a *sacramental* event of grace as *opus operatum* in those cases in which it takes [215] place between two baptised individuals in the Church. The case here is exactly as with the faith which justifies of itself even *prior* to baptism, and which then becomes *opus operatum* in baptism.³² Up to the present, if I am not mistaken, there has been a strange naiveté among theologians in their approach to marriage in that that distinction and that unity which is familiar to every theologian in the case of faith – baptism, penance - sacrament of penance has not consciously been worked out and applied here. In the two former cases the grace-given event of justification is initiated not merely at the moment when the sacrament as such is conferred, but already prior to this at the stage of faith and repentance. *On the other hand* in the dimension of historical manifestation as such this sign only acquires the character of an *unconditional* pledge of grace from God, in other words that of an *opus operatum* and so of a ‘sacrament’, when it takes place in the Church and takes its place in the concrete in the context in which such a pledge acquires its historical manifestation. This is the Church herself considered as basic sacrament. When a marriage takes place between baptised people in the Church it constitutes an element in the Church’s role as basic sacrament, so that the parties actively share in and contribute to the Church’s role as basic sacrament, for both give manifest expression to the unifying love of the grace of God, and a marriage of this kind between them achieves this precisely *as* an element in the social unity of the Church herself. Now because of this the marriage as an event of grace gives rise to a ‘sacramental’ event of grace in which this sign actively contributes to the irrevocable manifestation of God’s pledge of grace to mankind, that pledge which is constantly in force and of which God himself never repents. And this manifestation is nothing else than the Church herself.

On the basis of this conception of the ‘institution’ of this sacrament we can now proceed more freely to evaluate the findings of dogmatic tradition with regard to the doctrine of marriage as a sacrament. We do not need to force the evidence here so as either to postulate or to construct for ourselves any explicit doctrine hypothetically supposed to have existed right from the outset, in which marriage would always have been considered as a ‘sacrament’ and as such subsumed under a general concept of sacrament. The less we make use of any such idea – so long as we still understand and experience the ‘sacramental’ nature of a sign of salvation in the Church – the better it will be. When, therefore, we find this also confirmed by the [216] dogmatic tradition we should regard this as neither surprising nor shocking.³³

³⁰ On this cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* II (London and Baltimore 1963), pp. 114-133; *idem*, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I, pp. 330 ff.; *idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 206-215 (supplement with A. Häussling); *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer = Quaestiones Disputatae* 31 (Freiburg² 1960), pp. 208-253.

³¹ On this cf. K. Rahner, ‘The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion’, *Theological Investigations* III (London and Baltimore 1967), pp. 177-189; *idem*, ‘Die Priesterbeichte’, *Knechte Christi. Meditationen zum Priestertum* (Freiburg 1967), pp. 208-253.

³² Apart from the studies already mentioned in n. 30 cf. K. Rahner, ‘The Word and the Eucharist’, *Theological Investigations* IV (London and Baltimore 1966), pp. 253-286; *idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 269-272.

³³ On the dogmatic tradition of the sacramentality of marriage cf. especially P. Adnès, *Le Mariage*, pp. 43 ff., 71 ff., 76-110; H. Rondet, ‘Introduction à l’étude de la théologie du mariage’, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-135; E. Schillebeeckx, *Le Mariage* I (Paris 1967). The principle we are stating here could also be taken as the starting-

point for a new oecumenical approach. Many Protestant theologians maintain that marriage is not indeed a 'sacrament' but is, nevertheless, a *sanctum*. (Thus, for instance E. Brunner.) In view of this, and setting aside all polemical attacks against an alleged Romish 'sacramentalism' – which, however is based upon a wrong interpretation – the question has still to be raised whether a serious discussion, or even a mutual enlightenment is not possible on this point, to the extent that from the Catholic side we understand how rightly to interpret the sacramentality of marriage. In any case we should not simply apply to it a general and abstract concept of 'sacrament'. This procedure is adopted, for instance, by M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* IV/1, pp. 803 f., 806 f., and probably also by K. Mörsdorf, *Lehrbuch des Kirchenrechts* II (Paderborn, 10th ed., 1960), pp. 238-249; cf. also *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 9 (1958), pp. 241-256, esp. 248 f. These authors believe that they have to evaluate the function of the presiding priest in dogmatic terms, and so to treat of marriage in a way which is exactly parallel to the treatment appropriate to the other sacraments. K. Mörsdorf enters quite explicitly into the question with which we are concerned in his article 'Der ritus sacer in der ordentlichen Rechtsform der Eheschliessung', *Liturgie. Gestalt und Folzug. Festschrift für J. Pascher*, W. Dürig ed. (Munich 1963), pp. 252-266, esp. 265 f. Mörsdorf sees an intrinsic connection between the marriage liturgy and the juridical form of marriage, with the result that he posits the closest possible relationship between the solicitude to ensure the juridical validity of marriage, and the activity of the Church in her function as mediator of salvation. Mörsdorf regards the more recent history of the Church's practice in the case of mixed marriages (especially as a result of the decree *Ne temere* of 1907) as the expression of the Church more and more realising her own power with regard to the forms by which marriage is validly celebrated. In this, according to Mörsdorf's own interpretation, the fathers of the Tridentine Council were not yet able to attain to this realisation. The active assistance of the priest in the liturgical sense is raised to the function of the priest as an active contributor (*persona agens*), so that the 'collaboration of the priest presiding over the marriage is an essential element in the performance of the sacramental sign' (*op. cit.*, p. 266). Mörsdorf is followed in his views by his pupil, G. May, *Die kanonische Formpflicht beim Anschluss von Mischehen* (Paderborn 1963), p. 42. At this point we shall not undertake any investigation of the historical aspects of this problem, even though these continue to be of decisive importance (the function of the marriage customs and rituals in the early and main periods of the Middle Ages, the interpretation of the decree *Tametsi* etc.). Nor can we examine the ways in which Mörsdorf and May use the concepts of 'passive' and 'active' 'assistance'. Nor do we propose to challenge these authors on the question of whether, and to what extent, the Church has the right to decide (in part) the external signs or form of the sacraments. A more important point is the fact that there are phenomena or factors in the Church's theology and practice of marriage which it is hard to reconcile with this thesis: marriages of baptised non-Catholics are indeed not bound by the canonical form, but are rather valid and sacramental as *matrimonia rata* even without the priest playing any part in them. The marriages between persons of different confessions prior to 1918 in Germany were valid and sacramental even without any Catholic ceremony taking place. Finally reference may be made to canon 1098 (the possibility of concluding a marriage without any collaboration by the priest). When, therefore, Mörsdorf seeks to regard the active intervention of the priest as an 'essential element' in the sacramental act, then this term 'essential' cannot be taken in a strict sense. For with regard to a requirement that is essential in the *true* sense in the context of the sacraments, the Church has *no* power of dispensation. But if the priest has no constitutive function in the concluding of a sacramental marriage in the strict sense, then it is not immediately clear what is meant here by 'essential element', '*persona agens*', 'active contributor' etc., on whether this in fact demands any theological interpretation. In any case from the standpoint of a sacramental theology such an interpretation is quite unnecessary. With regard to those cases in which the priest plays no active part, or at any rate not an 'essential' one, it is not asserted that the Church has no mediating function at all, as is proved from the example of valid baptism by laymen. Even in historical terms it must be maintained that the introduction of the form made obligatory by the Council of Trent derives primarily from the Church's anxiety for the welfare of the Christian community (clandestine marriages), but in no sense has this anything directly to do with the progressive development of the Church's authority. On this cf. *C.T.* IX, 639 f., 682-685, 761-764, 668f. Precisely with regard to the problems which are raised today on the subject of mixed marriages, the acceptance of this theological interpretation of the essence of marriage would in practice raise a fresh difficulty which, from the point of view of dogmatics, is quite unnecessary. On this problem cf. also L. Hofmann, 'Formpflicht oder Formfreiheit der Mischehenschliessung', *Catholica* 18 (1964), pp. 241-257, esp. 245 f.; F. Böckle, 'Das Problem der Mischehe', *Lutherische Monatshefte* 5 (1966), p. 342 with n. 6; P. J. Kessler, *Die Entwicklung der Formvorschriften für die kanonische Eheschliessung* (Diss. iur. Bonn, 1934, Borna-Leipzig 1934); H. Portmann, *Wesen und Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe in der kirchlichen Wissenschaft und Gesetzgebung des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts* (Emsdetten/Westfalen 1938); R. Lettmann, *Die Diskussion über die klandestinen Ehen und die Einführung einer zur Gültigkeit verpflichtenden Eheschliessungsform auf dem Konzil von Trient = Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie* 31 (Munster 1967), pp. 166 ff. (Conclusion). Unfortunately even with regard to the historical aspects Lettmann does not adopt any position with regard to Mörsdorf's works (for his only remarks on this cf. p. 19, n. 21), and attaches himself without any discussion of other attempts at a

What has been said, however, still needs clarification to some extent in terms of what is familiar to us from the catechism as a formal statement of what constitutes marriage as a sacrament. It is customarily said that marriage is an image of the unity of Christ and the Church, and that it is a sacrament in virtue of this. On an initial reading of Eph 5:22-33³⁴ we may, perhaps, receive the impression that the vital common basis for the similarity between the relationship which Christ bears to the Church on the one hand and that involved in marriage on the other consists in the fact that the husband represents Christ while the wife represents the Church. In that case the unity of marriage as such would itself be a relatively secondary reflection of the unity between Christ and the Church, which in turn would be based on a reflection in which the married partners were regarded as separate from one another precisely in respect of the different roles they play. But surely we would still have to say that even for Paul himself this way of viewing the matter is secondary, conditioned perhaps by the parenetic context and more or less conditioned too by the sociological factors prevailing at the time. On this showing, then, it would not simply be the text quoted as a whole which would constitute a statement of central theological importance, but rather the particular passage of 5:29-33 that would have primary importance in it, for these particular verses bear upon the unity of love as such, as constituted in one flesh and body. The relationship of leadership and subordination as expressed in the love of solicitude and help on the one hand, and in obedience, submissiveness and 'fear' on the other, is not the objective factor that is decisive in this parallel.³⁵ If for our present purposes we can take this as [219] established, then all that needs to be clarified here is where, in more precise terms, Christ is to be fitted in in the basic conception put forward in this study. First in the case of Paul it is clear that he regards the order of creation depicted in Gen 2 as belonging to the order of grace and redemption,³⁶ so that right from the outset that order of creation, and so too of the

theological interpretation to the theses of Wilhelm Bertram, which are primarily influenced by factors of social philosophy. In reply to the more recent hypothesis of K. Mörsdorf I can only offer the present outline of a theology of marriage in general and in numerous points of detail as an alternative suggestion. This could then constitute a starting-point for a further attempt to solve the dogmatic problems entailed in the question of mixed marriages. Even on the interpretation of the form made obligatory by the Council of Trent the last word has not yet been said from the point of view of the history of canon law, a fact which is brought out strikingly in the inaugural address of P. J. M. Huizing, the official canonist for the diocese of Nijmegen, *De Trentse Huwelijksvorm* (Hilversum/Antwerp 1966).

³⁴ For the exegesis of this cf. especially H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, 2nd ed. 1958), pp. 252-280.

³⁵ In view of the number of studies a detailed exegetical cannot be undertaken here. On this cf. N. A. Dahl *et al.*, *Kurze Auslegung des Epheserbriefes* (Göttingen 1965), pp. 68-72; F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Michigan 1963), pp. 154-163; H. C. G. Moule, *Ephesian Studies* (Michigan, 2nd ed., 1955), pp. 281-296; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London 1961), pp. 114-120; J. N. Sanders, 'The Theology of the Church', *Studies in Ephesians*, F. L. Cross ed. (London 1956), pp. 64-75, esp. pp. 71 ff.; H. Schlier and V. Warnach, *Die Kirche im Epheserbrief* (Munster 1949), pp. 25 ff.; H. Conzelmann, *Die kleineren Briefe des Apostels Paulus = N.T.D. 8* (Göttingen, 9th ed., 1962), pp. 86-88; F. Mussner, *Christus, das All und die Kirche. Studien zur Theologie des Epheserbriefes = Trierer theolog. Studien 5* (Trier 1955), pp. 147-153; E. Kähler, *Die Frau in den paulinischen Briefen* (Zürich 1960), pp. 88 ff.; J. J. von Allmen, *Maris et femmes d'après Saint Paul = Cahiers théologiques* (Nauchâtel/Paris 1951), pp. 28 ff.; P. Grelot, *Le couple humain dans l'Écriture* (Paris, 2nd ed., 1964); P. Adnès, *Le Mariage*, pp. 39 ff.; H. Greeven, 'Zu den Aussagen des N.T. über die Ehe', *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 1 (1957), pp. 109-125, esp. 121 ff.; P. Colli, *La pericopa paolina ad Eph. V 32 nella interpretazione dei SS Padri e del Concilio di Trento* (Parma 1951). cf. also n. 36.

³⁶ On this cf. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, pp. 262 f., 276 ff. Most recently, especially R. Batey, 'The $\mu\iota/\alpha\ \sigma\alpha\&\rho\chi$ Union of Christ and the Church', *N.T.S.* 13 (1967), pp. 270-281; N. A. Dahl, 'Christ,

marriage of Adam, had the significance of pointing forwards to this order of grace. In our terms this is implicitly asserted – albeit on quite different theological principles – when we emphasise that every moral attitude on man’s part (and this includes also what is presupposed to such an attitude) is everywhere and in all cases sustained and subsumed by the bestowal of grace by God upon the creature. ‘Covenant’ is the more sublime and more ultimate factor which, by comparison with the creation considered as the positing of a creature still not determined in a specific direction, has in turn the character of unmerited grace.³⁷ But precisely because of this ‘covenant’ is the goal and the all-embracing factor which sustains and subsumes creation as the positing of the condition which makes covenant possible, since it provides the potential covenant partner. This means that objectively speaking everything that takes place in terms of human morality has a hidden relationship to Christ, in whose being and work precisely this imparting of grace finds its eschatological culmination and manifestation. Because he is the goal of it all he provides the basis for the whole dynamism of human history as imparted to it through grace, impelling it towards the immediacy of God.

We are speaking, then, of a unity in love between two human individuals. They are united in a love which consists not merely in the fact that both are aiming at a single common goal in this earthly dimension. This unity, rather, refers to the persons themselves in so far as their orientation to the last end has an eternal validity. And where the unity of love in this [220] sense is achieved, there we have the operation and manifestation of that grace which constitutes the unity of men in the truest and most proper sense. But the converse is also true. Precisely this same grace, considered as establishing a unity between God and man, is manifested in the unity between Christ and the Church, and that too in a manifestation which has an absolute and eschatological force, and which as goal provides the basis for all other graces and their function as establishing unity in the world. For this reason there exists not merely an external similarity between the unity in love of two human individuals on the one hand and the unity between Christ and the Church on the other, but also a relationship between the two unities such that they condition one another: the former exists *precisely because* the latter exists. Their mutual relationship of similarity is not subsequent to the two but is a genuine relationship of participation due to the fact that the unity between Christ and the Church is the ultimate cause and origin of the unity of marriage.

In the light of this we can also understand that the more precise quality of the relationship between Christ as the *directing and controlling head* on the one hand, and the Church as the *obedient* and submissive *bride* on the other is not simply projected in precisely the selfsame sense into the unity of those united in love through marriage. The unity between Christ and the Church is the basis for the unity between husband and wife prior to the question of whether, and to what extent this unity which is brought about also carries with it all the special attributes of the unity which brings it about. To the extent that the unity of Christ and the Church itself has its source in God’s gracious will to bestow himself, both *this unity and* the unity of marriage have their basis in the selfsame grace of God, which unites mankind to God and men among themselves. To the extent that the goals of this *one single* will to bestow grace are related to one another as ‘cause’ and ‘effect’, since precisely *in* the will by which God intended Christ and the Church everything else is willed, this one particular effect of this grace-giving will (namely married unity) is also brought about by the other effect (the unity of Christ and the Church).

Creation and the Church’, *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (Festschrift for C. H. Dodd), W. D. Davies and D. Daube edd. (Cambridge 1965), pp. 422-443, esp. 437.

³⁷ On this, in addition to the articles mentioned on p. 524, n. 13, cf. esp. K. Rahner, ‘Erlösungswirklichkeit in der Schöpfungswirklichkeit’, *Sendung und Gnade* (Innsbruck, 4th ed., 1966), pp. 51-87, esp. 52-75 = *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* II/2 (Freiburg 1966), pp. 203-228.

By reason of this mutual interrelationship of the two unities, the unity of marriage achieves its *full* manifestation precisely in the unity of Christ and the Church. And because of this much that would otherwise perhaps have remained obscure and unrecognised in the unity of married love can be deduced from the unity of Christ and the Church. And this remains true in spite of the caution which is necessary in adopting this approach. Thus with regard to the relationship of leadership and subordination between husband and wife in marriage Paul had already, and rightly, [221] perceived that the basis of this was the unity of Christ with the Church, even though it may be true that the relationship which he was seeking to justify in part belonged to *that period alone*, and to that extent cannot have been a *moral demand* in the same sense at all periods. But if we were to take the same principle as our starting-point we could recognise other and similar parallels too: the character of the Cross with which both are imprinted; the irrevocability of the covenant; the provisional nature of both measured by the final and eternal consummation for which the Church³⁸ and marriage³⁹ are still waiting. However we cannot delay any longer in this article in explaining and rounding off this point.

Marriage, therefore, reaches upwards into the mystery of God in a sense which is far more radical even than we could have guessed merely from the nature of human love as unconditioned. Certainly all still remains hidden under the veil of faith and hope, and all this may still not be lifted from the lowly circumstances of our everyday lives. There is no question that such a truth does not take place either at a level which is utterly beyond man, his freedom, and his interior assent. There is no doubt, therefore, that those united in married love experience this reality in the same measure as they open their hearts to it in faith and love. Surely it has become clear that such a theology of marriage cannot be understood in that sense in which we introvertedly make it our own 'private affair'. On the contrary genuine Christian marriage has at all times the force of a real representation of the unifying love of God in Christ for mankind. In marriage the Church is made present. It is really the smallest community, the smallest, but at the same time the true community of the redeemed and the sanctified, the unity among whom can still be built up on the same basis on which the unity of the Church is founded, in other words the smallest, but at the same time the genuine individual Church. If we were able to recognise⁴⁰ and to live out such a truth in its full significance then we could return somewhat more consoled and more bravely, in a spirit of truly Christian freedom, to our 'married problems', so urgent as they are, yet almost talked to death.

³⁸ cf. the Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, No. 48.

³⁹ cf. *ibid.*, No. 35.

⁴⁰ On this cf. K. Rahner, *Glaubend und liebend* (Munich 1957); *idem*, 'Vom Gottgeheimnis der Ehe', *Geist und Leben* 31 (1958), pp. 107-109 = K. Rahner, *Glaube der die Erde liebt* (Freiburg, 2nd ed., 1967), pp. 125-128.