

MARRIAGE: TWO VIEWS

POPULAR CULTURE

Marriage is a **CONTRACTUAL BOND**

The marriage license secures equal share of property, liabilities, financial responsibilities, etc. In some cases, there may be prenuptial agreements that lay the details of such a contract.

The bond is **LEGAL**

The marriage license is a mechanical, legal bond issued by the State, with benefits for both parties involved. The State is not involved in the everyday wedded life of the couple.

The bond is **BREAKABLE**

As with legal contracts, marriage can be dissolved by the State's granting a divorce. While the process can be complex, it is, nonetheless, a merely legal process one goes through to reverse a marriage bond.

The **COUPLE** says yes to the marriage

Unless there are circumstances (e.g., a preexisting marriage), the couple gives the "go ahead" to the wedding (and, conversely, the "go ahead" to end the marriage). There is no overseer within the State whose position it is to say "this couple is ready to be married."

CATHOLIC CULTURE

Marriage is a **COVENANTAL BOND**

The marriage vows bind husband and wife for the good of each other, in mutual fidelity, with rights, responsibilities, and blessings for both. It is a complete sharing of *all* aspects of life.

The bond is **SACRAMENTAL**

The consent of marriage is the action of God, who inspires the couple to marry, and is the bond itself between husband and wife. The bond is the way God brings the Holy Spirit into the relationship. In the sacrament of marriage, the couple is united to the Parish/Church community in a unique way.

The bond is **UNBREAKABLE**

A marriage witnessed by the Church, in the presence of two witnesses, in a church building, with the free consent of the couple made before God and with proper sacramental preparation is intended to be a bond "until death," through sickness and health, good times and bad. Husband and wife are both expected to nurture this unbreakable bond of love.

If a couple should separate and be legally divorced, they are, nonetheless, *still married* in the eyes of God and the Church. This is why divorced Catholics **who remarry without an annulment** are *necessarily* considered to be in an adulterous relationship (i.e., they are "with" another person while still married to another). A legal divorce *has no effect whatever* on the unbreakable sacramental bond of marriage.

An annulment is formal recognition by the Church (after a time of investigation) that there *never was* a sacramental bond of marriage to begin with; hence, a divorced Catholic with an annulment is free to marry (because s/he wasn't married in the first place).

The **CHURCH** says yes to the marriage

While a bride and groom obviously have to say yes to each other, the Church (as the "guardian" of the sacraments, and the "mother" and "nurturer" of the faithful) must see that the couple is *prepared* (spiritually, emotionally, interpersonally, etc.) to enter married life. If a couple is not ready for marriage, the Church has the right and responsibility to delay the sacrament, and help the couple to become ready. The Church's interest is the well-being of the couple and the long-term health of the marriage.

The marriage and wedding are governed by **CIVIL LAW, POPULAR LAW, & HUMAN WILL**

Marriage is defined by **THE STATE**

From time immemorial until June 2015, marriage had been commonly understood to be the union of male and female. But the U.S. Supreme Court altered the conception in the popular mind that the definition of marriage is changeable. This goes beyond the State's legitimate right and responsibility to uphold marriage and its laws.

The wedding is **DESIGNED**

There is no single way to celebrate the wedding ceremony. It can be as simple as standing before a judge in the civil courts, or as elaborate as you can imagine. The husband and wife (informed by popular culture) "design" the wedding ceremony; as such, there is no correct or incorrect way to do it.

The wedding is about **EXTERNALS**

The love of husband and wife is foremost in peoples' minds. To celebrate this, a lot of attention is given to the decorations, the externals of the wedding celebration: the dress, the flowers, the food, the venue, the wedding party, invitations, etc. It is a celebration of love.

The wedding is **SENTIMENTAL**

The people as **AUDIENCE/SPECTATORS**

The marriage and wedding are governed by **CANON LAW, NATURAL LAW, & CIVIL LAW**

Marriage is defined by **GOD**

Marriage as between male and female is understood to be built into the very nature of human beings. This is not a matter of faith, but a matter of science and readily observable natural laws of creation. The definition of marriage is unchangeable by human efforts, since no human created the prior natural law of male and female.

The wedding belongs to a **TRADITION**

The Rite of Marriage in the Catholic Church is a mix: much of the ritual is fixed, but a good part of it also needs the input of the couple. This is because the rite is part of what it means to be "married in the Church." The "Church" is a living community of faith, which both *receives* what its ancestors have passed along, and *adapts* that tradition appropriately. There *is* a correct and incorrect way to celebrate a Catholic wedding, because the rite of marriage belongs, first, to the Church, and second, to the couple using the rite.

The wedding is about **INTERNALS**

The love of husband and wife is foremost in peoples' mind. To celebrate this, a lot of attention is given to God who is Love; God who dwells in the souls of the couple and makes them one. It is a celebration of a trinity of love: the husband, the wife, and God who brings them together and keeps them together.

The wedding is **RITUALISTIC**

The people as **ASSEMBLED FAITHFUL**