TAKING LESSONS FROM THE LITURGY: THE RECEPTION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL IN THE RITES OF MARRIAGE

Jolly Vasupurathukaran◆

Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute, Haryana

Abstract

The Second Vatican Council, particularly *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, emphasised the need for the renewal of the Catholic Liturgy. Consequently, the post-Vatican II period is marked by a series of revisions and reformulations, marking a renewal of liturgy in general. The renewal of the rite of marriage was also a part of this phase of general liturgical renewal because SC 77 and 78 have particularly asked for the renewal of the rites of marriage. Driven by this invitation, the rites of marriage underwent a series of revisions and adaptations. Considering the significance of all these reforms, I find it legitimate and timely to raise and respond to the following questions: How did the rite of marriage in the Roman Catholic Church concretely respond to this exhortation for renewal? Did the post-Vatican II renewal of the Catholic rites of marriage embody a shift that underlines a new vision of marriage? To respond to these questions, this article looks at the Roman Catholic Rite of Marriage as a symbol of Western churches and tries to figure out what it means. This article tries to answer two questions by looking at the existing liturgical text of this liturgical tradition and seeing how it

---

◆ Jolly Vasupurathukaran, CHF, is presently the coordinator of Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute (FATRI), Gurugram, Haryana. In 2020 she obtained her PhD in theology and religious studies from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. Her specialization is in pastoral theology and undertook a comparative study of the sacrament of marriage in the Roman, Syro-Malabar, and Syro-Malankara rites. Email: chfjaya@gmail.com

responds to the principles and rules of the Council for renewal. (a) How is the reception of the Second Vatican Council reflected in the new rite of marriage of the Roman Church? (b) What are the major transitions in the theology of marriage unveiled in and through this new rite of marriage?

Key Words: Second Vatican Council, Marriage, Reception, Liturgy, Nuptial Blessing

In Catholic teaching, the sacrament of marriage marks the passage in human and Christian life whereby a man and a woman enter into a new stage of their lives, becoming spouses and forming a family of their own. In the liturgical celebration, a Catholic marriage is ritualised and its sacramental nature is revealed to the participants, which further enables them to participate in it and to experience the grace of the sacrament through prayers and liturgical actions. Along with its historical and theological evolutions, the liturgical structure of the marriage rite opens up an understanding of the sacrament and demands an active participation in the sacramental celebration. The post-Vatican II Council period is marked by a series of revisions and reformulations, marking a renewal of liturgy in general. Recognising that there are many Christian families that have also undertaken significant revisions to marriage rites in the past 50 years, this paper focuses on one stream within the Catholic tradition, namely, the Roman Rite, representative of the Western Church. By analysing the existing liturgical text of this tradition and exploring how this rite responded to the principles and stipulations of the Council for renewal, this essay focuses on the reception of the Second Vatican Council as reflected in the revised rite of marriage and how it ushered in a transition in the sacramental theology of marriage from a classical position to one with broader horizons and fresh insights.

1. The Liturgy of Marriage in the Roman Rite before the Second Vatican Council

The Council of Verona in 1184 declared that marriage was a sacrament. Later, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) emphasised the restriction of prohibitions on matrimony and the punishment of those who contract clandestine marriages. It was also pronounced that public announcement in the churches is to be done by priests when marriages are to be contracted. At the reunion Council of Lyons II in 1274, marriage was also included in the list of the seven sacraments as part of the profession of faith. The Council of Florence in 1439 again reemphasized that marriage is a sacrament.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) could be considered pivotal in the development of the sacramental theology of marriage with its impact on the renewal of the rite of marriage, both through its new theology of marriage and the recommendations it proposed for the valid rite of marriage. In the manner in which it had existed in those days, marriage was generally understood to be a private affair and lacked an ecclesial nature; the Church had no significant role in its celebration. Consequently, before the Council of Trent, there was a proliferation of irregularities and abuses in relation to marriage, and clandestine marriages were prominent.[1] In this context, the Council realised the urgent need to put a check on the existing situation, and serious steps were taken to avoid "the serious sins" effected by clandestine marriages.[2] Thus, the Council of Trent accepted the official regulations promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council[3] for the validity of the marriage but demanded a renewal.

Furthermore, in the presence of a variety of challenges and problems that marriage encountered at that time, the Council of Trent eagerly wanted to attend to these issues and propose remedial measures. In its effort to intervene in the situation, the Council's discussions and decisions on marriage were driven by a two-fold motive: "to ensure its public celebration out of respect for the social character of marriage, and to secure its reverent celebration out of

---

[1] Clandestine marriages are secret marriages contracted with the free consent of the contracting parties. The main problem that arose from clandestine marriage was that, since it is a secret marriage, contracted *only* with the consent of bride and bridegroom it may gradually lead to a situation that "they have deserted a first wife married in secrecy and have publicly contracted marriage with another woman and live with her in a permanent state of adultery." Council of Trent. "Canons on the Reform of Marriage, Session 24, 11 November 1563." In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 755.

[2] Council of Trent, "Canons on the Reform of Marriage, Session 24, 11 November 1563," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 755. See also, Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 179.

[3] The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) is one of the important Ecumenical Councils with regard to the rite of marriage, as it deals with the "restriction of prohibitions to matrimony" and "the punishment of those who contract clandestine marriages." It also announced that "when marriages are to be contracted, they shall be publicly announced in the churches by priests." See, on this, Lateran Council IV, "On the Punishments of Those Who Contract Clandestine Marriages," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), § 51.

respect for its sacramental character."[4] Motivated by these goals, the Council stipulated a series of prescriptions concerning the publication of banns, marriage before the Church in the presence of the priest, the ascertaining of the couple's consent to the marriage, and the exchange of vows in the presence of the priest. Among them, the insistence on the need for the presence of a priest was the most striking change enacted by the Council. While this had been strongly urged prior to Trent, Kristi Thomas notes, it "was not necessary in Catholic weddings until 1563."[5] With the Council of Trent categorically emphasising the mandatory presence of the priest for the ratification of the marriage, the Church officially put an end to the situation that arose from the understanding that it was only the mutual consent of the couple that validated the marriage.

The Council enforced a specific form of marriage and declared "the celebration of the marriage must then take place in open Church, during which the parish priest will, by questioning the man and woman, make sure of their consent and then say, "*I join you together in marriage, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, or use other words according to the accepted rite of each province" (§ 755). Thereby, the Council offered a new form for the expression of consent and, at the same time, recognised various forms of celebration that existed in different cultures. By prescribing the public announcement of marriage before its celebration and the presence of the priest during the marriage, the Council expressed its view of marriage as a sacrament and a social contract. However, the rite of marriage introduced in this new Missal was not really innovative because it was almost identical to the local missals of that time, but relatively "simple and sober." As a result, in 1614, a revised rite for marriage was promulgated. Antonio summarised the rite of marriage according to the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 in the following manner:

> The marriage celebration, except in cases of mixed marriage, takes place normally within the mass, before the altar. It begins with the exchange of consent and the blessing of the couple (with their hands joined) by the priest with the formula, *Ego coniungo vos in Matrimonium*. The blessing and giving of the wedding ring follow. The priest then recites some psalm verses and a short concluding prayer. The mass continues as usual, but immediately after the Lord's Prayer and before the embolism *Liberanos…*,

---

[4] Mark Searle and Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 184.

[5] Kirsti S. Thomas, "Medieval and Renaissance Marriage: Theory and Customs" http://celyn.drizzlehosting.com/ mrwp/mrwed.html (accessed 30 November 2014).

the spouses receive the nuptial blessing. A final blessing patterned upon that which is found in the Book of Tobit (7:15) concludes the rite.[6]

Through these prescriptive procedures, the Council hoped to rectify the irregularities that had become part of the celebration of marriage when it was considered a private domestic affair with no place for the active role of the Church. In such a context, the mandatory need for the priest to ratify marriage through a formula like "I join you together in matrimony" ensured that the Church would have a commanding and regulating role. By prescribing banns and the presence of the priest, the Council expressed its view of marriage as a sacrament and a social contract. However, these insistent measures taken by the Council to ensure its social and sacramental character were not completely meritorious for the marriage. Speaking on the practical consequences of the undue insistence on the prescriptive procedures that the consent of the couple must be made before a priest, Antonio laments that "the role of the couple appeared to be secondary to that of the priest."[7] Even though the chaotic situation that arose from the exclusive emphasis on the mutual consent of the couple was put to an end, the emphasis on "I join you" said by the priest was criticised because the role of the couples in the marriage was only secondary to that of the priest and the rite did not underline the active responsibility of the couple.

2. The Second Vatican Council and the Renewal of the Rite of Marriage

Complying with the motto to renew the Church, *aggiornamento*, the Second Vatican Council made clear recommendations and proposed practical guidelines for the revision and renewal of liturgy. The first paragraph of Article 77 of SC clearly emphasises the need for the revision and enrichment of the rite of marriage and affirms that "the rite of celebrating marriage in the Roman book is to be revised and made richer." Referring to the existing rite, it is observed that it "did not express quite adequately the grace of the sacrament and the obligation of the spouses."[8] Evaluating the Roman Rite of 1614, with its adaptations and modifications in the course of history, Anscar Chupungco comments that the concern of the rite of marriage prevailing at the time of Second Vatican II "seems to be juridical, that is, to obtain the valid

---

[6] David William Antonio, "The 1991 Typical Edition of the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*," *The ICST Journal* 3 (2001), 27.

[7] David William Antonio, *An Inculturation Model of the Catholic Marriage Ritual* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 3.

[8] Antonio, "The 1991 Typical Edition of the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*," 26.

consent of the contracting parties" and he adds that "its celebration was too short and too sober to have an impact or leave a lasting impression."[9] Further he retraces that the council fathers recognised "the brevity and ritual poverty of the Roman rite."[10] Indeed, this deficiency invited the serious attention of the Council fathers. Realising, thus, the need for a renewed version of the rite of marriage, the Second Vatican Council undoubtedly asked for the revision and enrichment of the rite of marriage. The Council clearly demanded a renewal of the rite that would rightly express the sacramental character of marriage and the responsibilities of the spouses.[11]

Like the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council approved and endorsed the use of local customs that have contextual and cultural relevance to the particular rites of marriage. The impact of this openness had far-reaching consequences for the Church, "because it opened up many liberties that include structure as well as content."[12] Moreover, the Council authorised competent ecclesiastical authorities of the local church to draw up their own rites, recognising the possibilities for adaptation and providing an opportunity for the use of vernacular language in the administration of sacraments and sacramentals. Amidst this great liberty, the only prerequisite demanded by the Council was that "the priest assisting at the marriage must ask for and obtain the consent of the contracting parties" (*SC*, §77). This condition was seen as indispensable and a necessary element for the juridical validity of the marriage. Consequently, these guidelines offer great possibilities for the renewal of the rite of marriage with due respect to the contextual and local customs of the parties involved.

The Second Vatican Council stipulated some practical guidelines which are to be implemented in order to effect concretely the renewal

---

[9] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 118.

[10] Chupungco, *The Liturgies of the Future*, 118. In this context, the observation of Kenneth Stevenson is remarkable: "Given the extreme sparseness of the service provided in the Ritual, what we have here is less a nuptial liturgy than a formula for ensuring that all the conditions for a clearly valid marriage are met." Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 184.

[11] Second Vatican Council, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), §77. Hereafter abbreviated as *SC*.

[12] Kenneth W. Stevenson, *To Join Together: The Rite of Marriage* (New York: Pueblo, 1987), 139.

and the revision of the rite of marriage.[13] Antonio describes these guidelines as "operational principles."[14] The first operational principle of the Council was its proposal to place the celebration of marriage within the Eucharist. However, it also gave options for celebrating the sacrament of marriage without the Eucharist. This operational principle really brings about a major transition in the evolution of the rite of marriage. In the early phase of its development, marriage was only a family affair, and later it was connected to the Church premises – in *facie ecclesiae.* Now, it is placed within the celebration of the Eucharist. The celebration of marriage essentially became an ecclesial celebration and part of the liturgical life of the Christian community.[15] In such a move, I think, one can detect the seminal form of the great iconic statement of *Lumen Gentium* that the Eucharist is "the source and the culmination of all Christian life" (LG § 11).[16] Further, the insertion of the sacrament of marriage into the sacrament of the Eucharist also accentuates the close relationship between the two sacraments by recognising the Eucharist as the 'source and summit' of the wedding celebration. Added to these, this new perspective has implications for the sacramental life of a Christian, as it rightly points to the interrelatedness of all sacraments. Finding in it an added significance, Anscar Chupungco observes that "marriage as the sacrament of covenant between man and woman has its source and finds meaning in the covenant sacrifice which the Church celebrates in the Eucharist."[17] Based on this understanding, one can also infer that the

---

[13] "Matrimony is normally to be celebrated within the Mass, after the reading of the gospel and the homily, and before "the prayer of the faithful." The prayer for the bride, duly amended to remind both spouses of their equal obligation to remain faithful to each other, may be said in the mother tongue" (*SC*, § 78).

[14] Antonio, *An Inculturation Model*, 3.

[15] Kenneth W. Stevenson, *To Join Together: The Rite of Marriage* (New York: Pueblo, 1987), 125. See also Josef Andreas Jungmann, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches.*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: The Crossroad, 1989), 78.

[16] For a detailed vision of the nuptial character of Eucharist see also Pope Benedict XVI, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission, *Sacramentum Caritatis,*" Libreria editrice Vaticana http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/ hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html#The_Eucharist_and_the_ Sacraments (accessed 14 January 2015). § 27–29.

[17] Chupungco, *The Liturgies of the Future*, 121. In relation to the sacramental celebration of marriage along with the nuptial Eucharist, Kevin Irwin underscores that "[t]his Eucharistic celebration says a great deal about the sacramentality of marriage

sacramental dimension of the sacrament of marriage is affirmed by the insertion of the rite of marriage into the Eucharist.

The second one was the introduction of the blessing of both the bride and bridegroom. The significance of this decisive step by the Council becomes clear only when it is understood against the existing custom of only blessing only of the bride.[18] Through this operational principle, the Council solemnly affirmed the equality or reciprocity between husband and wife as well as the obligation of mutual fidelity. When the Council permitted that this blessing "may be said in the mother tongue," it expressed the mind of the Council that the couples must fully understand the meaning and significance of the rite. The third operational principle endorsed the irreplaceable role of the liturgy of the Word in the rite of marriage and explicitly stated that even on occasions where marriage is celebrated outside the mass, the epistle and the gospel of the nuptial mass should be read at the beginning of the ceremony. Hence, SC clearly makes the point that, whatever the nature of the celebration of the marriage, it should begin with the liturgy of the Word. With this emphasis, the Council perceived the renewal of the rite of marriage in the light of the Word of God and wanted it to be implemented by making the liturgy of the Word a constituent part of the rite. The fourth and final operational principle stressed the obligatory character of the nuptial blessing. In the rite for the celebration of marriage existing before the Second Vatican Council, the nuptial blessing was not given when the rite was celebrated without the mass. The Council desired that "the blessing *should* always be given to the couple." This insistence not only underlines the "rich doctrinal content of this liturgical formulary" but

---

in the first place, which needs to be developed for a liturgical theology, as opposed to a focus on the couple's consent only." Irwin, *Context and Text*, 271–272.

[18] When we look into the history of the *bridal blessing,* we can retrace an evolution. Edward Schillebeeckx presents the historical shift of marriage blessing to bridal blessing in a systematic manner. According to him, there was a veiling ceremony in the Roman rite of marriage which includes the veiling of both the bride and the bridegroom. By referring to Paulinus of Nola and Ambrose, he emphasized that "veiling and blessing" was an irreplaceable liturgical action for the sanctification of marriage. However, he argues that there emerged a tendency to propose a centralized position to bride in marriage which further leads to the replacement of "marriage blessing" with "a blessing of the bride alone." He further claims that in the *Liber Ordinum* a shift of focus is underscored. "In this book," he points out, "a first blessing, pronounced over the bride and bridegroom, and thus a blessing of the marriage, is followed by a second blessing pronounced over the bride alone." Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 304.

also ensures "the juridical character of the marriage contract."[19] These operational principles thus reveal that the Council paid detailed attention to the doctrinal and juridical dimensions in its proposal for the renewal of the rite of marriage.

3. The General Structure of the Liturgy of Marriage in the Roman Rite

The Revised *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium* (ROCM)[20] of the Roman Rite promulgated in 1991 has four chapters: The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass, The Order of Celebrating Marriage without Mass, the Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian, and Various Texts to Be Used in the Rite of Marriage and in the Mass for the Celebration of Marriage. The Second edition of the ROCM in Latin includes a chapter that details how a layperson presides in the absence of a priest or a deacon.

The rite of marriage within the Eucharistic celebration in the ROCM begins with the introductory rite by welcoming the couple and the assembly into the celebration of marriage (nos. 45–54).[21] It includes the procession of the couple with their parents and congregation to the aisle, where the priest welcomes them with joy. He invites them to the celebration of the rite of marriage with the words given in the text or words similar to them. After this, the Eucharistic celebration continues from the Gloria through the Liturgy of the Word of God. Three readings are proclaimed, probably from the given texts, and a homily is recommended explaining the meaning, purpose, and significance of marriage (nos. 55–77).

The rite proper to the celebration of marriage begins with the scrutiny before consent, followed by the declaration of consent by the couple and the reception of their consent by the priest (nos. 58–68). A comparative study of the three questions of scrutiny show a remarkable shift in one of the traditional teachings concerning the goods of marriage. According to Augustine, there are three goods of marriage: in the case of individual "men", the goods of marriage

---

[19] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 121. See also Pope Paul VI, *Instructions on the Revised Roman Rites, Inter Oecumenici* (Glasgow: Collins, 1979), 205; David William Antonio, "The 1991 Typical Edition of the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium," *The ICST Journal* 3, (2001), 28; David William Antonio, *An Inculturation Model of the Catholic Marriage Ritual* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 3.

[20] Henceforth Revised *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium* will be abbreviated as ROCM.

[21] The number within the bracket signifies the number of the article of the text of the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*.

include "the cause of generation and in the fidelity of chastity," and "in the case of the people of God … the good is also in the sanctity of the sacrament."[22] The *Code of Canon Law* of 1917 teaches a hierarchical gradation in the ends or purposes of marriage, stating that "the primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children; its secondary end is mutual help and the allaying of concupiscence."[23] Departing considerably from this view, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that conjugal love "involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity" in a way that "far excels mere erotic inclination."[24] Restructuring the hierarchical approach developed in the 1917 Code, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* endorses: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring" (CIC, can. 1055 §1). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) also takes up this canon and teaches that in the matrimonial covenant, bride and bridegroom establish a lifelong partnership, ordered toward their good, and open to love and life (CCC §1601). As reflected in the scrutiny of the consent, the reordering of the hierarchy of the goods of marriage underscores that the two ends—good of the spouses and the procreation and education of the children—are complementary goods of marriage. The question regarding the acceptance of children as the fruits of marriage is eliminated when marriage is conducted among elderly couples. This also suggests that procreation is not the sole or primary end of marriage.

After the scrutiny, the priest invites the couple to join their right hands and declare their consent before God and before the ecclesial community. The joining of hands during the liturgy of marriage signifies the love and commitment demanded of the couples.[25] When consent is declared by the couples and received by the priest, the congregation praises God, and there follows the blessing and exchange

---

[22] Aurelius Augustine, "The Good of Marriage," in *St. Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 48.

[23] T. Lincoln Bouscaren and Adam C. Ellis, *Canon Law of 1917: A Text and Commentary* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1951), §1013.

[24] Second Vatican Council, "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium Et Spes*, 7 December 1965," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), § 49. Hereafter it will be abbreviated as *GS*.

[25] Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 2.

of rings. In the Tridentine rite of marriage, the exchange of rings follows immediately after the *Introduction* by the priest. It provided an option for the conferral of just one ring, to be given by the bridegroom to the bride, or two rings, in a mutual exchange. It could be *singular*, the bridegroom giving the ring to the bride, or *plural*, in that sense, they mutually exchange the rings. Depending on the number of rings, there were different blessings over the rings. Both the OCM and ROCM incorporate this symbolic action into the rite of marriage, but both simplify the 1614 Roman Ritual. Consequently, the rite of rings has been made into a "simple ceremony, consisting of the blessing, the giving, and the interpreting words said by each partner."[26] According to ROCM, immediately after the reception of the consent, the blessing and the exchange of rings take place. This liturgical action could be viewed as a symbol of "the confirmation and visible sign of consent."[27] According to the revised version of the text, after the exchange of rings, an option for the blessing and exchange of *arras* (coins) is added. A prayer is recited where the priest asks the Lord to bless the *arras* that the spouses exchange between them and to "pour over [the couples] the abundance of [God's] good gifts" which is repeated by the bridegroom and bride while they exchange the coins (no. 67B). A blessing and placing of the veil before the nuptial blessing are also integrated.

Then comes the prayer of the faithful and the proclamation of faith, the Creed, where it is required by the rubrics (no. 69), and then the celebration proceeds with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where the newlywed couple brings the bread and wine to the altar (nos. 70–71). The prayer, especially for the spouses, is inserted into the Eucharistic prayer. After that, the *Our Father* and the nuptial blessing take place, where the former bride-centred prayer is made a more spouse-centered one (nos. 72–74). The nuptial blessing is not an optional one but is "a needful part of the inner meaning of marriage."[28] The nuptial blessing also affirms that marriage is a great mystery through which the covenantal relationship of the bride and bridegroom takes part in the sacramental relationship between Christ and the Church.

---

[26] Stevenson, *To Join Together: The Rite of Marriage*, 222; Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 186–7.

[27] Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975*, trans., Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 704.

[28] Stevenson, *To Join Together: The Rite of Marriage*, 223; see also, Julie McCarty, "Nuptial Pentecost: Theological Reflections on the Presence and Action of the Holy spirit in Christian Marriage," *New Theology Review*, (February 2003), 59.

Moreover, the nuptial blessing affirms the role of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of marriage. The prayer "Lord Jesus Christ" is normally omitted, but the prayer for peace and exchange of peace takes place (nos.75–76). After the distribution of communion, the celebration of the marriage ends with a solemn blessing by the priest over the couple and the community (no.77). This general outline of the rite of marriage within the Eucharistic celebration affords a broad perspective of the structure of the rite of marriage as presented in the ROCM.

4. Reflections on the Reception of the Second Vatican Council in the Rite

Having completed the analysis of the rite of marriage in the Roman Catholic Church, this section will discuss how we see the reception of the Second Vatican Council in its revised liturgies.

4.1. Integration of the Nuptial Blessing and Emphasis on the Equality of Man and Woman

One of the prominent changes that appeared in the revised Roman rite of marriage was the introduction of the nuptial blessing as an integral part of the rite. The prayer for the nuptial blessing in the present text affirms that marriage is a great mystery of the covenantal relationship between the bride and bridegroom that reflects the sacramental relationship between Christ and the Church. The nuptial blessing, thus, emphasises the significance of the grace of God in establishing the sacrament of marriage, which alone will enable the couple to fulfil their marital responsibilities in a responsible manner.

Additionally, the new rite of marriage also responded to the Council's operational principle regarding the blessing of both the bride and bridegroom. This blessing of both partners, which replaced the earlier form of blessing given only to the bride, stresses the equal obligations and responsibilities of husband and wife. The creation of man and woman and their "*dialogic* nature"[29] are the basis for the equal partnership between them. Moreover, sharing *equal status*, man and woman "mutually bestow and accept each other," as emphasised by the Second Vatican Council (GS, §48). The created nature of human

---

[29] The expression "*dialogic* nature" in relation to the marriage is first used by Edward Schillebeeckx to explain the complementarity between man and woman. Underlining this dialogical nature of man and woman, Schillebeeckx presents "woman as complementary to man, woman as man's life companion—man was not complete without woman, and both complemented each other in their humanity." Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, 20.

beings as man and woman and their responsibilities, which they equally share because of their created status, is repeated again and again in different ways throughout the rite: "formed man and woman in [God's] own image," "the human race, created by the gift of your goodness," and "male and female, you created them." All of these allusions affirm that the celebration of marriage unites the polarity of two sexes, masculine and feminine, but equal in status, and makes them *one in love and flesh*.

This expressed accent on the equality of man and woman is easily recognisable in various liturgical actions of the rite of marriage. As is evident from the preceding analysis, an ecclesial procession took the place of the bridal procession, and a mutual exchange of rings between the spouses replaced the Tridentine option for the blessing over a single ring of the bride. This new gesture again underscores the equality between the bride and bridegroom and the equal rights and responsibilities they share to preserve their marital love and indissoluble unity. In these ways, the liturgy of marriage in the post-Vatican II period is characterised by a shift of focus from bride-centred rituals to couple-centred rituals, which focus on the union of two persons accepting the uniqueness of each person and complementing one another.

4.2. Active Participation of the Ecclesial Community

Another noticeable change in the new liturgy of marriage after the Second Vatican Council is the recognition of the role and active participation of the ecclesial community in the celebration. One major limitation that characterised the pre-Vatican II rite of marriage was that it did not recognise any significant role for the ecclesial assembly present, which in consequence made them spectators of an event. The revised liturgical ceremonies, as mentioned, begin with the ecclesial procession, which substitutes for the bridal procession of the previous rite. Thus, the ecclesial community physically accompanies the bride and the bridegroom, together with the priest, to the aisle. This gesture at the beginning thus reveals the ecclesial character of marriage; it is not a contract between two individuals, but takes place within the ecclesial community, having the community as its witness and a source of strength and support in the new life ahead.

Further, the community is recognised as an active witness to the matrimony, which is clearly attested by the constitutive role of two witnesses in the expression of consent by the couple. Together with the spouses, the community actively praises the Lord and recognises the

consent they have declared in the church. Moreover, in the Liturgy of the Word, the singing of hymns and prayers of the faithful, by which the whole community prays for the newlyweds, ensures, and expresses the active participation of the congregation. In this manner, the active presence and participation of the community assure the couple of the support of this community throughout their marital life. During the celebration itself, the priest reminds and exhorts the community of this responsibility to support the spouses with affection, friendship, and assistance at times of need (ROCM, no. 52). Thus, the recognition of the place of the ecclesial community in the rite of marriage announces that the new family that is born with the marriage is a constitutive unit of the Church.

4.3. Emphasis on the Inculturated Rites of Marriage

The second principle of the Second Vatican Council for the renewal of the rites of marriage retains the teaching of Trent with regard to the various customs and traditions: "If any regions follow other praiseworthy customs and ceremonies when celebrating the sacrament of marriage, the council earnestly desires that by all means these be retained" (SC, 77). The present rites of marriage retain some of the customs that were in existence before the Council, like the joining of the hands and the exchange of rings. The second edition of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (English translation according to the second typical edition) has integrated some of the early Christian customs: the exchange of *arras* (coins) and the placing of the *Lazo,* or veil in the celebration of marriage.[30]

Theological reflection and appropriate cultural analysis are needed to grasp the profundity and significance of liturgical symbols because "a renewed sensitivity for symbols is at stake."[31] Thus, one must be able to convey the message behind the signs and symbols through proper words and actions. For this purpose, the proper theology of each adapted element has to be incorporated into the liturgy either as prayers or as hymns. It will further help the worshipper to identify the theology behind the symbols and to differentiate them from the cultural elements.

---

[30] Anne McGowan, "Committed in Christ: A Historical Overview of Christian Marriage Rites," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary,* edited by Edward Foley (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgy Training Publications, 2019), 34.

[31] Joris Geldhof, "Liturgy Beyond Secular," in *Authentic Liturgical Renewal in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Uwe Michael Lang (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 91.

Conclusion

As already mentioned, the Second Vatican Council set out the guidelines and specified the operational principles for the reform of the rite of marriage. These principles, in responding to the signs of the time, underscored a progressive understanding of marriage in several ways. The analysis of the rite of marriage reveals how Roman liturgical tradition responded to the guidelines proposed by the Council in the renewal of the rite of marriage. By reflecting on the reception of the Council in the revision of the liturgies, we have emphasised that the renewed liturgies go far beyond the then existing rites of marriage by integrating the nuptial blessing into the rite of marriage, more firmly asserting a spouse-centred character of the sacrament of marriage, demanding the active participation of the ecclesial community, and emphasising the need for the inculturated elements in the liturgy of marriage. Consequently, the renewed liturgy largely testifies to its reception of the directives of the Council. Thus, a distinguishable transition is recognisable in the rite of marriage denoting the pre- and post-Second Vatican Council liturgy of marriage. Still, that does not mean the revised liturgies are finished works. Taking into account the prescription of the Council that authorised competent ecclesiastical authorities draw up their own rite, various language groups have created marriage rites for themselves.[32] Consequently, liturgical renewal is an on-going process responding to the faith experiences of the people and theological developments in the Church.

---

[32] Edward Foley and Richard N. Fragomeni, "The Marriage Rites: An International Perspective," in *Catholic Marriage: A Pastoral and Liturgical Commentary*, edited by Edward Foley (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgy Training Publications, 2019), 61–85.