

## INTAMS Colloquium 2009

### "More Than Just Being Together" Sacred and Secular Symbols of Marriage

On 13 and 14 March 2008, the INTAMS Chair for the Study of Marriage & Spirituality at the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven organised a colloquium under the title "More than Just Being Together: Sacred and Secular Symbols of Marriage".

#### Speakers

Lisette Blanchet Ball, Provider for Marriage & Family Life, South London, UK, and  
Keith Chappell, Adviser for Marriage & Family Life, Portsmouth, UK:  
*Testimonies from Practice: What Do "Marginal" and "Committed" Christians Expect from a Church Wedding?*

Sylvain De Bleeckere  
Visiting Professor, Department of Humanities, University of Hasselt, Belgium:  
*The Image of Marriage as a Postmodern Drama in the Media*

Ottmar Fuchs  
Professor of Practical Theology, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Tübingen, Germany:  
*The Spiritual and Pastoral Meaning of the Marital Rite*

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi  
INTAMS Chair for the Study of Marriage and Spirituality, Faculty of Theology, K.U. Leuven,  
Belgium:  
*Religious Symbolism of Marriage in the Christian Tradition and Its Usefulness for Today*

Aat C. Liefbroer  
Head of Social Demography Department, The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic  
Institute (NIDI), The Hague, The Netherlands:  
*Marriage in Contemporary Europe: Who Marries and Why?*

Ann Verlinden  
Sociologist of religion, founder of the first office for personal rituals in Flanders (hét Moment.)  
Antwerp, Belgium:  
*Rites of Passage in an Individualised Society: Personal Wedding Rituals in Flanders*

#### Theme

"Marriage isn't all that important anymore." People often say this to convey the sense that marriage's practical significance and its normative function within the individual biography,

have declined over the past decades. Nonetheless, a vast majority of young adults still holds on both to the ideal and the practice of matrimony. For them, marriage is not perceived as “just a piece of paper” that does not add anything to an existing commitment. It means “more than just being together”. What is it that makes lasting marital commitment such a prestigious, although not necessarily attainable, goal in life?

While family scholars suggest that couples may regard marriage as a powerful symbolic way of elevating their relationships above others, ministers in the Christian congregations have long attested to the longing for a ritual practice that adequately expresses the feelings and expectations of those ready to get married. The Christian tradition does indeed preserve a rich repertoire of symbolic meanings of marriage. These range from a “holy estate”, and a manifestation of God’s covenant with humankind, to a sacramental sign of divine loving. But is the emerging symbolic significance that couples attach to marriage, in any way tributary to Christian marital symbolism or is it a secular derivation from it? Do couples simply long for a consolidation and social recognition of their union or do they have a sense of something more transcendent that might fulfil their deepest aspirations? Taking into consideration the polyvalent nature of symbols, the colloquium invites scholars and practitioners alike to explore the sacred and secular symbolism of contemporary marriage and to confront it with the religious traditions.

The contributions are published in Vol. 15/1 (Spring 2009).