INTAMS Symposium 1994

Christian Marriage Today

The opening paper of this symposium is given by the moral theologian Klaus Demmer. A co-initiator and member of the Board of Trustees of INTAMS, he lectures in the Gregoriana in Rome. In "The Origin of an Idea" he reflects on the initial concepts, concerns, and development of INTAMS.

Jörg Splett, a philosophical anthropologist from Sankt Georgen in Germany, brings forward the Christian understanding of man and woman as human beings who themselves are searching for meaning for their existence. Personal love preserves the distance and the duality of I and Thou for the sake of the unity of love and togetherness of a mutual I-am-Yours. This distinction between I and Thou is the task of modest respecting the partner's mystery. It is the only way in which freedom can really be free.

Michel Rouche, a historian from the Sorbonne in Paris, describes the manifold concepts of marriage and family throughout European history. He starts with the Roman Empire, continues through the settlement of the Germanic tribes in the West up to the reign of Charlemagne. Rouche then describes the influence of Christianity, especially of the monks' views on marriage and the Church authorities who began to create a new language of respect and esteem for the love between man and woman. Finally he comments on the understanding of marriage during the Renaissance and briefly considers the period after the Council of Trent up to our century.

Ladislas Örsy, well-known professor of canon law in the United States, speaks of the sacrament of marriage as a sign with a special vocation. Man and woman in union reveal the image of their Creator more perfectly together than one of them could alone. Is God the initiator in this dramatic event? What does God think about marriage, and how is He present throughout their lives, when husband and wife promise life-long fidelity? How does He assist married life, and what is the practical outcome for marriage in spirituality, in liturgy, and for the church law?

Carlo Rocchetta is professor of dogmatical theology in Florence and in this article follows Vatican II's terminological shift from marriage as a "contract" to marriage as a "covenant." He traces three main guidelines for a new theological conceptualization of marriage as a sacrament. With the conception of sacramental matrimony in terms of vocation, consecration, and communion, the marital covenant is understood consequently as a "real symbol" of an ecclesial gesture and as a sign in history of the irrevocable love of God towards humankind.