

Third International INTAMS Summer Seminar 2002

A Time for Us: Tracing Time's Textures in Marriage

Theme

Our culture is concerned about time. With our clocks, agendas, alarms, and organizers we try to structure time to best suit our purposes. Yet different times intervene. Work time can be productive time or simply a waste of time. Time with loved ones is not real time unless it is “quality time”. Our organization of time includes the month, the year, or perhaps the five-year plan. We move along throughout a lifetime, knowing that we do not remain the same from year to year. There are special moments that seem to take us out of time, when we say that “time flies”. Marriage fundamentally structures our time. Our spouse becomes part of our relationship to time: time together, time apart, time with others. Productive time competes with loving time. Special moments that bind us as a couple stand in stark contrast to the ordinary pace of life. Marriage reaches into the past, our own relationship patterned by those who have married before us as well as by our religious and cultural traditions. It is immersed in the present, developing as our own lives develop, enduring through good times and bad. It reaches into the future, structuring our life until death claims the end of our time. As Christians, we see in marriage an extension into eternity—in the love we share as a couple we come to know the love of our God for us. By attending to time, we can uncover a spiritual dimension, a window on eternity, in marriage’s daily ordinariness. In the course we will draw upon the insights of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and theology in order to explore the temporal texture of marriage. In this way we take the time to allow a spirituality of marriage to emerge from within this conversation.

Faculty

- **Günter Burkart** (*Sociology*)

Professor of Sociology at the University of Lüneburg, Germany

- **William Desmond** (*Philosophy*)

Professor of Philosophy and Director of the International Program in Philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium

- **Enda McDonagh** (*Theology*)

Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the Pontifical University, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland

- **Patrick Moore, FSC** (*Spirituality*)

Vice-President of the South East Institute for Theological Education in London, UK

- **Alfons Vansteenwegen** (*Psychology*)

Professor of Systems and Communication Therapy and Sexology and President of the Institute of Family and Sexuality Studies at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium

Report

INTAMS third Summer Course in 2002 has focussed on the relation between marriage and time. David Dawson Vásquez, organizer of the course and assistant editor of INTAMS review, reports on two weeks of intense reflection and discussion.

Each year the Summer Course approaches a particular dimension of married life by bringing together experts from different academic fields and organizing the lectures in such a way that they are allowed to interact with one other. This year's course, held between 25 August – 7 September 2002, was entitled *A Time for Us: Tracing Time's Textures in Marriage*. It focused on the issues of time in marriage and brought together professors from the disciplines of sociology, philosophy, theology, psychology, and spirituality. We were happy to welcome 15 students who came from 9 different countries: Belgium, Canada, China, England, India, Italy, Scotland, Taiwan, and Ukraine. Six of the students are actively engaged in postgraduate study and the rest work professionally with married couples. Each student was asked to engage in a research project during the course of the two weeks, and they presented the results to the group on the last day. Each of the five professors presented lectures in their field of specialization and there was time each day for discussion, with special sessions for interdisciplinary dialogue scheduled throughout the course.

The course explored the various textures that time weaves into marriage and married couples' desire to create "a time for us" within these textures. Because our personal, social, and religious selves are constituted in and by time, it forms an integral dimension of married life. Time passes at different rates depending on the different activities in which we are engaged. Further, the course of a life through time also operates within different temporal frames. Marriage exists within all of these aspects of time and couples come to terms with them together. Marriage flourishes in time, but also seeks to endure through time. Personal time becomes couple time and family time. Work time is woven into the fabric as well. Time can be a threat, its inexorable passing straining the bonds of marriage, or it can be a friend, the promise of more happy time together: a time for us. Our task in the course was to come to a deeper understanding of these textures, particularly as they affect marriage. We faced the philosophical issues involved, looked carefully at the sociological dimensions of marriage and time, examined the psychological dimensions, and we were led to see what theology and spirituality have to tell us about living marriage in time. A short description of the various perspectives follows.

Professor Burkart drew out the understanding of time as a social phenomenon. From the sociological point of view, he said, time is seen as a tool for the coordination of events in society and as an mechanism of control to create social harmony. In modern society, time is divided into different qualities of time: work time and family time. In the past half-century, a myth of idyllic family time has guided the arrangement of our home life. This desire is often at odds with the current nature of home time, as personal time and time with family are the first to be sacrificed when work or social demands require more time than expected. In some cases the division between home time and work time is qualitatively unstable. The workplace can begin to take on the emotional satisfaction and need for leisure that one thinks of as home time, and the home can be seen as a place of time-oriented tasks that one often thinks of as

work time. Our lifetimes are organized differently in the modern world, as well. The increase in lifespan and the changing nature of modern life creates a situation in which marriage is a limited project within the lifespan. Rather than the crowning moment of one's life-project, the entering into which marks the security of one's future life, marriage today is often undertaken for a number of years, to be followed by a single life and perhaps future marriages. Sociology shows us that our married life is inseparable from the life of society. Our time is given to us by our culture. Society establishes the nature of work time and we inherit from our families and from others our attitude toward family time. Various factors contribute to the way in which we organize our lifetime. Sociology suggests that temporal patterns are inseparable from the kind of society that we live in and that the idea of a natural pace of time is mere illusion. Time is what society makes of it. At the same time, sociology shows us that any idea that we can live our lifetime as we freely choose is also illusion. Much of our temporal existence is given; our choices are also given us by the society around us.

Professor Desmond led us to reflect upon the philosophical understanding of time as it relates to the Christian understanding of marriage. While the Greek philosophical tradition stressed the eternal as the more true, the Christian tradition places the emphasis on the essential enduring truthfulness of the singular. If creation is good, then the particular creature has something to say about God. The Christian perspective on marriage suggests that it is the subjective undertaking of time that is the most pertinent. Time, on a personal level, is saturated with value; it is not homogeneous but changes according to the way in which we participate in it. Further, the very physicality of married life points to the idea that the material has value. Linked with the Christian idea of incarnation, this means that human self-transcending stems from bodiliness itself and is always involved in the erotic movement of the human body. Marriage shows that erotic yearning can bear fruit in love and communion with another. It is important to remember that our being is never fully self-determined. Our being is always given to us by another. Our existence is given to us by our parents. Our self-development is a long process of being given who we are by others, within the network of relationships that make up our life. Our freedom is in fact given to us in relationship; freedom is thus a matter of the discovery of the other in their otherness. This is especially true as one moves from the parental home to new relationships, marked by a combination of intimacy and strangeness, trust and distrust. The will that creates the marriage is a projection into the future. The uniqueness of the marriage commitment is that it is an unconditional promise. The promise of fidelity changes the couple's entry into time and their living of time together. There is time to allow the beloved to be stranger and to move back and forth between the stranger and the friend. The constancy of the commitment through time sets itself against the threat of betrayal.

Professor McDonagh situated marriage within the creative act of God. Creation, he stated, must always be conceived as a dual movement of creation and reconciliation in which the initiation of diversity in the very act of creation is followed on God's part by the continual drawing of creation into union with divinity. The reconciling movement does not do away with diversity, but rather draws each aspect of creation in its uniqueness, even as it draws all creation into a profound unity. This dynamic is at work in marriage in an exemplary manner. The couple work out, within society, the act of union in diversity to which all are called in the Church. The life of

the couple never exists apart from society, but, in Christian terms at least, is meant to be a sign of the life in the Spirit celebrated in the Christian community. The creative unity that can be achieved in marriage exists within the cosmic movement of the death and resurrection of Christ in which all forms of false division and separation are destroyed so that a true communion in the divine life may emerge.

The progress of married life through time is a continual acceptance of the giftedness of love that is divine, allowing it to overcome the threats to communion that arise from both within and without the couple. Prof. McDonagh suggested a link between married life and the Sabbath. Perhaps marriage is a type of the resting with the Lord that is the Sabbath. He further indicated that the temporal nature of married life has not been taken account of in the canonical understanding of the sacrament. Canon law, and the theology that is based upon it, developed into a description of Christian life rooted in the modern understanding of law. This law cannot account for the temporal development and temporal vagaries of married life, but prefers to locate the fullness of the sacrament in the initial contract, ratified by consummation. A fuller understanding of the sacrament that takes account of the development that occurs as the couples grow in marriage is necessary to do justice to the human, temporal nature of marriage.

Professor Vansteenwegen presented a thorough description of the psychological dimensions of the couple's existence in time. He began with an analysis of falling in love and deciding to get married (explored in detail in an article elsewhere in this issue). The discovery of the other person in the first stages of the relationship, continuing into the first years of marriage, is a dialogue between our image of who we want the other person to be and the actual, daily reality of that person. Time, in this case, is the sobering factor that brings us into contact with our spouse as a real person, not the person of our infatuated fantasies. It is, in this case, the condition for a true relationship because it is only through the daily time of marriage that we begin to discover the day-to-day person we are married to and can thus begin to relate to them.

This discussion led into the temporal dimensions of marital union and intimacy. Intimacy has its basis in communication and thus in time. My bond with my spouse is built by our life together, through the variety of non-verbal communications that life involves. To be a true psychological union, words are necessary. Our feelings must be communicated so that they become shared feelings. It takes time to put one's feelings into words, however. From a psychological perspective the two persons become one couple only through the slow time of common communication. Prof. Vansteenwegen concluded his lectures by presenting the different ways that couples experience time. It is important that each partner recognize these different experiences of time and different values placed upon time. Otherwise arguments arise about time in which each presumes a very different understanding of time.

Professor Moore led the students to reflect upon two basic experiences and dimensions of time: the time that is organized, managed, and measured and the time that is fleeting, immeasurable, and intimately personal. The first can be designated by the Greek word *chronos* and the second by the Greek word *kairos*. *Kairos* provides the key to understanding leisure. It is the time in which our selves, spent in the rigor of daily time, are re-created in the

contemplative dwelling in personal time that we call recreation. Leisure, and thus kairos, allows us to befriend chronological time. It gives us the energy to engage in the life projects that inhabit chronos. Without leisure, without kairos, ordinary time becomes emptied of meaning, the lifeless continuation of industrialized life.

Professor Moore argued that married life is especially marked by this duality of time. It is in the times of kairos that a marital union comes into being. Without time for each other, time that is distanced from the time of utility, the partners in a marriage do not discover one another, do not establish a common identity with one another, do not allow the spiritual dimension of the marriage bond to develop. Professor Moore suggested that this dimension of kairos is necessary for marriage because it is in these times that the married couple comes to know the divine. This divine encounter is a discovery of their relationship to God, the discovery of their marital relationship as existing in and given by the divine. Through times of kairos, marital time is discovered as a time of revelation.

We are grateful to our professors and students and especially thankful for the continued collaboration of Boston College, the Pontificia Università Gregoriana, and the Theology Department of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, who grant academic credit for our course to their students who participate. Next year's course is scheduled to take place from Monday, 25 August to Friday, 5 September. Its topic will be Building Block or Stumbling Block? Exploring the Place of Marriage in Society. We are looking forward to another stimulating course.