

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY

A Spiritual Paradigm-Shift

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IN THE FOREWORD TO HER 1994 BOOK, *Conjugal Spirituality*, Mary Anne Oliver tells us how her interest in the history of Christian spirituality grew while she was doing doctoral studies. She read the lives of the saints and their own writings; she became familiar with the standard works on spirituality; she talked to many monks and spiritual directors; and lived with various religious communities. As time went on, her picture of Christian spirituality broadened, but at the same time she also noticed a disturbance in herself. This was because the Christian tradition seemed almost completely to ignore a dimension of life which for her was very significant: married life, the relationship between a husband and a wife. She writes:

... I began to realise that from my perspective, spirituality as recorded in writing and as taught by the Churches and their representatives was lacking. It was the whole of spiritual history and theology that was warped—not untrue, but somehow slightly out of focus for me. It finally dawned on me that for thirty-odd years I had lived in one intimate partnership, a fact of tremendous significance to my being and to my spiritual life, yet the *couple* in tradition was virtually nonexistent as a theologically and spiritually significant unit. When mentioned at all, it was either quickly dissolved into its two constituent parts or assimilated into a familial or communal group. I finally came to the simple realisation that spirituality as written and taught is basically celibate and/or monastic, and I am not.¹

This rather disappointed realisation was the beginning of a quest, out of which came both Mary Anne Oliver's book and a specific

¹ Mary Anne McPherson Oliver, *Conjugal Spirituality: The Primacy of Mutual Love in Christian Tradition* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994), vi.

project to develop a marital spirituality. In her book, Oliver rather takes the tradition to task. If most Christians in history have been married, then surely, among the well-trodden spiritual paths arising from celibate experience, there must also be at least the odd trace of a spiritual ‘path for two together’:

And traces there were, here and there, enough to reconstitute a kind of hidden, underground current in the history of the Church, a kind of marginal, ill-defined movement which bubbles to the surface now and again

It was in the middle of the twentieth century that this current began to appear in a more regular and consistent form, to the point that we can now see ‘something of its shape and direction’.

It is likely that many Christians—especially married ones—will agree with this analysis and welcome Oliver’s project. Indeed, they may well have the sense that she is saying something that they themselves have long sensed, but have not had the courage or the resources to express. What follows is an attempt to sketch out what such an alternative, genuinely marital, spirituality would look like.

Model 1: Second-Class Devotion

If we go back to older terms such as ‘devotion’, ‘piety’, ‘asceticism’ and ‘mysticism’—nowadays we tend to use the word ‘spirituality’ to replace all of these—we can see that they referred to a list of religious attitudes and practices that were supposed to be binding on all (Catholic) Christians. Whether you were the Pope, a bishop, a priest, a monk, a religious sister or one of the ‘simple faithful’, you were meant to draw on this heritage of cultic practices and exercises of devotion for your spiritual life in a way that was suited to your possibilities and your situation in life. Moreover, there was also a clear distinction to be made: on the one hand, there were those who could, by virtue of a special vocation such as religious life or the priesthood, dedicate themselves to such practices intensively, professionally as it were; on the other hand, there was everyone else, the ‘simple faithful’ who had daily duties of another kind, and for whom therefore only a reduced form of the spiritual life was practicable. The greater number of Christians—and certainly the married—fell into this latter category.

Within such a framework, the most you could speak of was 'piety in the married life'; there was no such thing as a 'piety of marriage'. There obviously were, then as now, different sorts of piety, but what distinguished them from each other was either different kinds of foundational inspiration and style (Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian and so on), or particular theological stresses (eucharistic devotion, Marian devotion, or devotion to the Sacred Heart). But there was no scope for a specifically *marital* devotion. Married people were simply 'lay people' when it came to Christian devotion because of their state in life. As such, they were less competent in spiritual matters than the 'professionals' to be found in the churches and the convents. One construction of marital spirituality, one that is still present, at least in our folk-memory, involves this rather negative set of associations, this idea that married life is somehow second-class.

Model 2: Spirituality within Marriage

During the twentieth century, we progressed beyond this image. We shifted from 'devotional life' to 'spirituality', and our underlying conception of the spiritual life also changed. Vatican II broke with the idea of a two-tier Church. It abandoned any sense of an absolute contrast between office-holders and the faithful at large, any idea that the spiritual life was the preserve or special competence of one group within the Church. Instead it worked with the biblical idea that there is one people of God, and clearly stressed that there are no specialists when it comes to the life of faith; rather, all the baptized are called equally to lead a life of holiness.²

This shift was grounded in a changed way of thinking about the Church itself, and a consequent reconfiguration of the relationship between the Church and the world. If you regard 'the world' not as a profane realm marked off from the sphere of the sacred but rather as the place where most Christians live and act, then you are saying that *all* human ways of life and fields of action can become places of salvation. The Council fathers explicitly warned against setting up a divide between the sacred and the secular. Faith was inextricably bound up with the world of work and with life in society. There was a

² See, for example, *Lumen gentium*, nn. 11, 39-42.

great deal more to religion and spirituality than liturgical observance and keeping a few moral norms.³

Such talk represented a decisive turning away from ideals of piety according to which religion was something primarily interior, a matter of subjective experience and of individuals keeping the moral rules. For the Council, spirituality amounted to a way of life in which faith gave shape and direction to human life as a whole, and it was therefore something more than explicitly religious practice. It was everyday life—personal, professional, social, political, cultural—which became the place where Christian faith, and therefore also Christian spirituality, had to be practised and observed.

‘Marital spirituality’ in this context means ‘the practice of the faith within the framework of marriage’. This represents a decisive move beyond the first model we looked at, informed by the Council’s enriched understanding of Christian marriage. This way of thinking has become common, and it is exemplified in the following text that was distributed recently in a German diocese:

What makes a marriage Christian finds expression not only at the altar rails on the wedding day, but also—and much more so—in how the partners shape their life together on the basis of faith in God and of a life shared with the Church For a Christian marriage, therefore, there needs to be a consciously and jointly willed cultivation of the faith; there has to be formation and regular practice. This religious depth is also one of the places where the creativity proper to love manifests itself as it enriches the partners’ life together. All this occurs most easily where both partners are at home with a shared faith in God within the same Church. When wives and husbands pray together, for example, or with their children or their friends, this is far more than a mere exercise of devotion. When a married couple celebrate the Church’s year with its feasts and liturgies, and observe Sunday as ‘the Lord’s day’, this is a means through which parents and children grow together in faith. A shared way of life becomes a shared path of faith; the partners share also this religious side of their lives, the hope they have, the sources from which they draw

³ See, for example, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 43.

strength. The family, the marriage, becomes a domestic Church, where Jesus Christ is present amid everyday routine.⁴

The phrase used here, 'a consciously and jointly willed cultivation of the faith', could well count as a brief definition of marital spirituality, and it reflects the advances that have been made. In the first place, faith is being linked to the life-situation of the couple: formation and practice should generate a culture of faith appropriate to their particular circumstances. Secondly—and this is something new—the personal faith of each of the partners is something that can be shared with the other, with the result that the path of faith becomes something that they can undertake as a couple. All this represents something of an innovation in the history of Christian spirituality. Perhaps there is some precedent for it in what is called 'spiritual friendship', but it is only in connection with sexual relationships that it finally enters official church theology.

But does even this account of the matter fully meet the criticisms raised by Mary Anne Oliver? This way of thinking still simply presupposes traditional church practice, and tells married couples to integrate existing religious forms and practices into their family lives together. But these practices come from life-contexts that are quite different from those of contemporary marriages and families; it may be unrealistic to expect them to work easily in such circumstances. In the end, does this standard post-Conciliar rhetoric allow any room for saying that marriage in its own right generates a distinctive form of Christian practice, and therefore has a distinctive spiritual significance of its own? We need to move beyond even this renewed understanding that has become standard in the post-Conciliar period, and develop a third model, one which conceives the relationship between faith and marriage in a fundamentally different way.

Model 3: A Marital Faith

At least in outline it should be clear enough how this new model needs to be different. The previous model started by saying that faith of a conventional ecclesial kind should shape and inform married life just

⁴ Bishop Joachim Wanke, in a pamphlet produced by the diocese of Erfurt in 2003: *Ehe wagen: Ein Plädoyer für das Ehesakrament*, 18-19.



as much as it does every other sort of Christian life. What we need to do now is to show that there is a distinctive Christian spirituality generated by the experience of the marital relationship. Married life gives rise to a particular style of faith, of the quest for God, of encounter with God, and of the sense of salvation. Married people and celibates experience these realities in different ways; moreover, these differences affect what the practice of faith amounts to.

Only by adopting such a model will we arrive at the kind of understanding of marital spirituality that Oliver and others have in mind when they criticize conventional spiritual concepts and practices as inappropriate for married couples. We need to see married life as genuinely a place where people can experience ‘a life generated by and filled with the Spirit’, and thus recognise its proper place of honour in the Church.⁵

Again we have a shift that we could not envisage were it not for leads given by Vatican II. Vatican II broke with a tradition of seeing marriage primarily in juridical terms, as a contract aimed at begetting children, and instead presented marriage as centred on the partners’ mutual love.⁶ In so doing, it opened the way for a fruitful twofold renewal of the theology of marriage. Firstly, the relationship between the partners came to be the centre of attention, and to be invested with a theological significance unimaginable previously. Secondly, the deeply rooted reserve within the Church regarding sexuality, which in the conventional mindset had closed off any access married people might have had to a true spiritual life, became less powerful. Thus, for

⁵ For a further example of the literature calling for such a change, see *Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy—A New Catholic Guide for Marriage*, edited by Charles A. Gallagher and others (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 2002). For the implicit definition of spirituality as ‘a life generated by and filled with the Spirit’, see Gisbert Greshake, ‘L’unique Éspirit et les multiples spiritualités; que signifie dans ce contexte la spiritualité de mariage?’, *INTAMS Review*, 2 (1996), 142-150.

⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 47-52.

example, Karl Rahner could argue that the loving union between marriage partners is a true mystagogy leading to an experience of God. Sacramental theologians began to claim that the sacramental sign of God's saving action lies not in just the marriage ceremony but in the marital relationship as it is lived out over time. Moral theologians began talking of marriage as a genuine vocation.⁷

But the question arises as to whether these developments in theology alone are enough to justify the claim that a real move forward has been made from our second model. If we say that the marriage relationship is the basis out of which faith develops, is this anything more than the simple converse of the idea that faith should inform married life? Are we really saying anything substantially different?

The fact that there is indeed something new here only becomes clear when you place what is being said within the context of the history of Christian spirituality. It is not simply that married people are being regarded as bearers of a genuine Christian spirituality in a way that Roman Catholics, at least, have never imagined before; it is also that this spirituality is quite different from that of the monk or the celibate because it comes out of the married way of life, which is rooted in a relationship with a partner. Perhaps history does give us some precedents, but nevertheless something different is happening when we regard a marital relationship as a legitimate and adequate basis for a distinctive way of living out Christianity.

Features of a Christian Marital Spirituality

The next step is to sketch out in some detail how a spirituality rooted in marriage differs from the models of spirituality we have inherited. The marriage relationship involves areas of human life ignored in the average history of Christian spirituality. Indeed, these areas have often been seen as trials or hindrances in the spiritual life. Let us look at three examples.

⁷ Karl Rahner, 'Marriage as a Sacrament (1967)', in *Theological Investigations*, volume 10, translated by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973); Joseph Ratzinger, 'Zur Theologie der Ehe', *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 149 (1969), 53-74; Klaus Demmer, 'Die Ehe als Berufung leben', *INTAMS Review*, 2 (1996), 39-57, 120-137.

Relationship and Solitude

Christian spirituality has been decisively shaped by two specific ways of life: that of the so-called Desert Fathers, the hermits who withdrew from ordinary human civilisation in the third century; and that of monks living in stable communities, as their way of life developed first in the East, and then—from the early medieval period onwards—in the West, with major consequences for culture more generally. Initially, these two forms of life may appear to be opposites: one is solitary; the other is communal. Nevertheless, their origins and their development have been closely related: monasticism in community developed historically out of the eremitical form, and, as the tradition developed, its candidates were allowed to embrace the eremitical state only after a long period of testing in a community setting.

Both these forms are marked by a fundamental orientation that has become typical of Christian spirituality. Both are about the individual person seeking God and following Christ in and through the subordination of their own ego to the divine command. One version involves renunciation and asceticism; the other centres on obedience to the Abbot and on due consideration for other members of the community. But not even the communal version sees the interpersonal relationships between the monks in community as itself of any special spiritual significance.

Throughout the centuries, Christian mysticism has offered many variations on a fundamental theme: the encounter with God involving



a retreat, a leading into the soul's interiority. Teresa of Avila compares the soul vividly with an 'interior castle': the human person has to progress through its various rooms before becoming united with the Triune God in the most central chamber. For John of the Cross, too, the enlightenment which God gives to the soul is found only in the darkness of one's own interiority, in a state where one has attained complete detachment.

For Francis of Sales, the daily surrender to God, the loving union with His will, takes place in the 'apex of the soul', where the heart finds the inner peace it needs for prayer.

Today, too, this fundamental pattern is very familiar to us. It depends on the assumption that the individual is most likely to find God in an interior experience of prayer or meditation, or else when communing with nature. The experience is a solitary one: it can, at most, be shared subsequently with a spiritual director. A community of like-minded people may provide some favourable conditions for such an experience, but never the fundamental material through which God is encountered.

It seems natural to suppose that a genuinely marital spirituality requires us to attribute an essentially different value to relationship as such. This is not to say that the monastic ideal is based on a tendency or desire to run away from interpersonal relationships—to say that would be false and exaggerated. And, obviously, successful relationships require autonomous individuals who can bring their individual faith-history into the relationship and continue also to have their interior experiences of God in solitude. Nevertheless, a spirituality suited to couples must work from the assumption that there is a Christian experience of faith nourished specifically by the experience of relationship. The relationship as such can have spiritual significance.

The US theologian Richard Gaillardetz sees a fundamental feature of Christian spirituality in the instinctive desire human beings have to be with each other and live together.⁸ Indeed, nothing of what is being said here should seem strange, given that Christianity presents God as a being in relationship, a being whose essence is communication. If God's self-gift to humanity, culminating in Jesus Christ, extends to our relational lives, then one can 'quite justifiably regard the question about how love is to be cultivated as the central question of Christian spirituality'.⁹ But to say this suggests that any approach to marital spirituality conceived according to the monastic ideal has now become quite unviable, in that it removes a significant part of married people's

⁸ Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise*, 23-24.

⁹ Matthias Scharer, *Sich nicht aus dem Herzen verlieren: von der spirituellen Kraft der Beziehung* (Munich: Kösel, 2003), 38.

experience from the realm of spirituality and represses its spiritual significance.

Sex and Virginty

Since its beginnings, the Church has operated with a contrast—not always a happy one—between celibacy and marriage. A recent dictionary of spirituality sums up the background well:

Marriage appears more as a test than a creative means towards salvation. Admittedly it is presented as essentially good, but in the form in which it is lived out historically it is has been corrupted by sin. In comparison with celibacy, it is a less Christian way of life. Married life and the marriage act have no intrinsic value: they can be excused by invoking the 'goods of marriage' (children, fidelity, indissolubility of the bond), and justified only in terms of the 'purposes of marriage' (the begetting of children, control of the fleshly desires which arise when sexuality is lived in an uncontrolled way, the fulfilment of marital duty).¹⁰

In the renewed theology of marriage that has developed since Vatican II, this view has been corrected in a way that no one now



disputes. Sexual love is now seen as something having a religious and spiritual significance, and Pope John Paul II stressed in his official teachings that the mutual self-giving of husband and wife is expressed also in their sexual relations. Nevertheless, celibacy 'for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 19:11) is still presented in comparative terms as the more radical and hence the higher form of Christian life. An indication of this is a quotation from John Chrysostom that appears not only in John Paul II's *Familiaris*

¹⁰ Hans-Jakob Weinz, 'Ehe und Familie', in *Praktisches Lexikon der Spiritualität*, edited by Christian Schütz (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 254-262, here 255-256.

consortio but also in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a text which may affirm marriage, but which regards celibacy as something higher.¹¹

Sexuality and *eros* are at the basis of the marital relationship, both physically and psychologically, and have their inalienable place there. Christianity has spent much time naming and denouncing the destructive powers opposed to God that can make use of our sexuality. To some extent, it has been following the Old Testament in this respect, with its rejection of the cultures surrounding Israel that developed sexual cults conflating the sexual with the divine. But, at the same time, it has neglected another aspect of the biblical testimony, according to which sexuality is a gift of God, one that—at least for the second creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b-25)—opens human beings up to relationship and in so doing makes them fully human for the first time. We need to hope that a renewed spirituality of marriage can help us find a realistic, but nevertheless fundamentally positive, way of relating to sexuality.

Sacral Spaces and an Everyday Holism

Conventionally, Christian spirituality is marked by a withdrawal into private interiority, which is taken to be its proper sphere—an interiority contrasting with what happens in everyday life. Hence we imagine that the spiritual life in the proper sense requires its own consecrated space, so that our relationship with God can have its distinctive place. Something similar occurs when it comes to time: we have a liturgical year and times set aside for daily prayer; we demarcate privileged moments from the general flow.¹² But this kind of demarcation cannot happen at all easily within the life of marriage and the family, in which everyday reality makes constant demands.

Any truly contemporary spirituality, especially a marital spirituality, will need to engage with everyday reality more intensively than has been customary hitherto, and to discover precisely there its sphere of operation. It has become common for both scholarly and more popular

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *De virginitate*, 10:1; see *Familiaris consortio*, n.16, *Catechism*, n.1620: 'Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be particularly good. It is something better than what is admitted to be good that is the most excellent good.'

¹² One influential scholar categorizes spiritualities in terms of their *Sitz im Leben*, of their fundamental material, and of the ways in which they organize space and time: Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002 [2000]), 11-17.

writers on spirituality to speak of 'the spirituality of everyday life'.¹³ It is now quite standard for works on spirituality to discuss how we shape our lives, how we take our decisions, how we function in our jobs and how we relate to other people, notably our spouses. And there are plenty of resources for developing such a vision in biblical and church tradition, such as the Ignatian 'finding God in all things', or Vatican II's encouragement towards a secular piety.

But closely related to this point is something else, which we might describe by using the trendy word 'holism'. There are tendencies in modern society towards an ever greater compartmentalisation of the different spheres of life. The call to holism is a call to move beyond mere acquiescence in this fragmentation, and instead to develop a self-understanding which recognises that it is one person who lives in all these spheres, and which honours the connections between them.

In a recent US study of young adults, 94% claimed that their first criterion for choosing a marriage partner was that the person in question should be a 'soul mate'—someone on the same wavelength, someone with whom there was an affinity of soul. The researchers speak of a yearning for a 'spiritual' quality in relationships.¹⁴ There are problems here, no doubt: such expectations regarding marriage are too high given the trends at work in modern society. But nevertheless it is significant that human relationships appear as fundamental when these young people are thinking about how to cope with life and its everyday pressures. A spirituality of marriage adequate to today's needs will need to connect the desire for a stimulating and life-giving relationship between soul mates with the reality of how relationships often work out from day to day.

Parameters for a Marital Spirituality

If what has been said so far is correct, it is a mistake to try to develop a marital spirituality simply drawing on the spiritualities developed by celibates in monastic contexts. We need rather to start from the rich potential for spirituality hidden in marital relationships as such. With this in mind, I would like to end by suggesting some parameters within

¹³ For a representative list, see Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 14, n. 14.

¹⁴ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, *Who Wants to Marry a Soul Mate? New Survey Findings on Young Adults' Attitudes about Love and Marriage* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001), <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2001.htm>.

which the quest for an authentic marital spirituality should be conducted.

Closeness to Experience

It is unrealistic to expect that marriage partners will just take over the role in Christian spirituality hitherto assigned to religious and to celibate priests. A spirituality proper to lay people, and especially to married people, will be growing in a different soil and will therefore bring forth different fruits. The soil is the whole range of what the couple experience together: daily routine, moments of intimate exchange, the taking of decisions about the life they will be leading together. There is no need for anyone to go in quest of this reality; in each marital relationship it is immediately there to be seen. The only question is how it can be developed so that it becomes something significant for faith and for the spiritual life. Or, to put it another way: how can the Spirit be discovered within this reality, the Spirit who makes the couple co-workers and friends with God?

Closeness to the Church

If we are talking about a new form of spirituality, this does not mean a rupture with the Church's tradition of faith; it can only grow out of that tradition. One simple reason for this is that human experience always needs to be interpreted, to be set within a wider context, and must therefore draw on pre-existing categories. Those wishing to discover the spiritual significance of marital relationships will need to reach back into the Church's treasury of religious expressions and narratives—otherwise the religious dimension will remain inaccessible to them. Whatever marital experience suggests will need to be developed, shaped and evaluated with the help of resources from this tradition. Otherwise, we will all too easily create a marital spirituality in line with our own wishes and projections—something that will not deserve the name of 'Christian',



and in which we will be encountering our own idols rather than the living God.

Devotion in Everyday Married Life

Marital relationships are primarily human realities; their links with the divine are not self-evident. It is only if one learns to read and interpret them in a special way that their religious and spiritual significance becomes clear. Biblical narratives and church tradition give us many examples of how others have learnt to read their ongoing experience in a spiritual way, and of how this process has led them to significant conclusions. But this does not absolve us from the task of undertaking a similar search ourselves. We need to discover when, where and how that deeper meaning is emerging in our own relationships—a meaning that makes them not only sources of earthly happiness but also places where God is working our salvation.

One of the necessary conditions for a marital spirituality is a kind of openness in the partners that one might describe as attention, consideration, or even—to use a religious word—devotion or devotedness. We need to stop for a while and break off from our routine in order to become more aware of a relationship's deeper spiritual dimension. This kind of attention or devotion might occur in a number of ways.

Let us begin by thinking about *time*. Christian spirituality has traditionally observed a range of feast-days that cut across our everyday routine and are marked off as special. The Church's calendar specifies Sundays and some special Solemnities; in monastic life, there are fixed times of prayer that are part of the *opus Dei* and form the day's high points. In a marital relationship, however, special times are relatively infrequent—at least once the relationship has moved beyond the early stages. Everyday routine dominates, not just in external circumstances but in the relationship itself. If this is so, then there may well be a need for marital 'devotions'—practices that aim quite deliberately to cut across the routine passage of time at special points, to enable the partners to renew and confirm their relationship together. One might think of a nice meal together in a restaurant, or of having sex, or of holding a serious conversation in order to sort out a conflict. The New Testament speaks of a *kairos*: the rich opportunity, the right moment. For the Bible, a *kairos* is always a time when God's

dealings with humanity become visible as time passes. One might apply this idea to God's appearance within the relationship of two partners.

From time, we can move to *space*. The Christian spiritual tradition makes use not only of privileged times but also of privileged spaces: convents, churches and sanctuaries. The marital and family space, however, is the home, the place where life plays itself out in all its dimensions, including dimensions which do not seem all that holy. Vatican II did not hesitate to see an ecclesiological significance in the home and to speak of the 'domestic Church'.¹⁵ Considerable creativity and effort are needed if that formula is to correspond with reality. But the recognition of real family space as God's space cannot be a matter of setting up a dedicated prayer room in the home, for then it is no longer family space at all. What might be helpful would be to designate a particular place within the sitting room or the dining room—the dining table or a group of chairs—where the partners can occasionally sit with each other, and in this special space allow another dimension to make its way into their relationship.

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Then there are also *symbols and rituals*. In their regular routine, couples often use specific signs and rituals that remind them of the basis of their life together: the love they give each other. Greeting each other with a kiss, saying goodbye with a hug, eating together, sharing memories of a journey or of how they have coped with a difficult situation—such things, assuming that they remain genuine and have not degenerated into mere formalities, are not just relics of some previous happiness. Rather, they enable the partners to keep their love alive, as something with energy and sparkle. At such points something breaks into the monotony of our routine—something that reminds us, rather like the sacraments and rituals of official religion, of the deeper basis of our life together, and enables us to draw once again on this source.

These are just a few suggestions about what it might mean to speak of marital spirituality and about how it might flourish. Marital spirituality needs its 'devotions', just like conventional Christian spirituality. But married couples will need to find new forms if they are

¹⁵ *Lumen gentium*, n.11; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n.11, speaks of 'the domestic sanctuary of the Church'. See now Florence Caffrey Bour, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (Notre Dame, In: U. of Notre Dame P., 2004).

to develop further the spiritual tradition of which they are the bearers, and to discover in new ways the Spirit of God present in their relationships.

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