

***What a Modern Catholic Believes about Marriage.* Eugene C. Kennedy. Chicago: Thomas More Association, 1972.**

Chapter ONE: We Have Always Been in Trouble

“Marriage is in trouble but that is nothing new; some trouble is better than other trouble, and the contemporary inquiry, rooted in a better understanding of man, is probably the best kind of trouble marriage has ever had.”

The trials of sustained intimacy in an unpredictable and cruel world are a severe and continuing test – “for the human heart shies away from hurt even as it longs for the loving presence of another in which it can bet unsheathed and unprotected.”

“Only face to face with each other do human beings learn the meaning of themselves or the lessons of the Gospel.”

“It is face to face in the shaded arc of their intimacy that man and woman work out their redemption together; here it is that they touch the mysteries of life in the Spirit to which they may be differentially responsive; here they ground themselves in the rhythm of incarnation, death, and resurrection which only the truly loving can sing; here is the fiery center of living in Christ in which man and woman can break away from self-love and truly touch each other as they give and nourish and enlarge life.”

“The thesis of this brief work is that we urgently need to help married people to deepen their awareness of the available mystery of their lives, that we must sharpen their consciousness of the reality of growing, dying, and rising in Christ that happens to be the substance of their lives.”

“Religion has to do with this world, with the struggle to root ourselves more deeply here, with the daily charge of affirming our humanity through the power of Christ radiating through our experience together.”

Chapter TWO: What Do We Learn When We Learn From Each Other?

“The relationship of a man and woman to each other, a mystery that falls, like a slow summer night, beautifully and completely across the world, is recognized as potentially the deepest and richest of all human relationships.

“Lovers reveal themselves to each other across a lifetime. But they learn more than just about each other. They discover that as another person reveals the truth of his or her personality to them, a powerful process opens them to learn more about themselves. The exchange is marked with mystery here, a force operating to edge us beyond the accumulation of facts and attitudes and into the territory of wisdom and the depths of personality.”

The action of grace takes place through the dynamics of human relationships.

“Marriage for the Christian is not a goal where he rests in exhaustion after the labors of courtship. It is more like a place in the foothills of life beyond which great mountain ranges rise up. Everything after marriage is uphill because it is all growth, all a straining pressure on the man and woman to give and share more of each other. This kind of dynamic and stressful marriage cannot be left to take care of itself. It demands an ever increasing awareness of one’s own capabilities and one’s own limitations as well as an intensified sensitivity to the partner of the marriage. This kind of relationship allows little rest because life itself never stops. The need of humans to understand and to reach out, the need to explore new feelings or areas of misunderstanding; these things endure. But they are the stuff which deepens life and reveals its true meaning to those who love enough to keep at it.”

Chapter THREE: Coming to Life

Whenever we learn anything, the most dramatic learning occurs early in the experience, with a long slow haul replacing the initial soaring improvement; this is likewise true in marriage.

“Springtime is only one of the seasons of growth and, while it is undeniably attractive, it describes only part of the year.”

Intimacy is a difficult challenge because it demands that we break through the shell of our self-concern and begin to reach out to others.

The Church has a deep, sacred responsibility to support and expand the human understanding of intimacy that supports married persons on the long, slightly inclined plateau of daily life.

Sexuality must be incorporated into one’s general understanding and explanation of the nature of human intimacy.

Mature acceptance of the responsibility of marriage requires adequate handling of the challenges of adolescence:

1. Having good grasp of one’s sexual identity.
2. Having dealt with the problem of authority.

“There can be no marriage without some feeling for the responsibility of increasing life which is at the heart of understanding authority.

“When a man senses his powers to break through to others he has graduated from adolescence and can move into the mystery of rebirth. This is the profound experience of spiritual rebirth.”

The intimacy of a man and woman is the paradigm for the Church’s work in making it possible for men to be born again.

“As individuals allow themselves to be known by each other they necessarily open themselves to the transforming spirit who levels their defenses and illumines their own understanding of themselves. It is in this process that we understand where and how revelation continues in history. Revelation occurs in a totally personal way in those experiences in which man’s openness to himself through relationship to others breaks the barriers that have locked him in his own world, the barriers that have kept him at a distance from the Spirit.”

Chapter FOUR: The Work of Intimacy

“Sexuality, powerfully and erotically edged with what seems like the residue of a thousand primitive urges, is shaped into human meaning only as a man and woman grow close to each other in a total relationship.”

Only in the environment of intimacy, the shifting ground on which two persons learn about each other, do we find operational definitions of commitment, trust, and fidelity which are the blood and breath of Christian love.

Effective intimacy requires these factors:

- ◆ Genuineness;
- ◆ Capacity for accurate empathy;
- ◆ Non-possessive warmth.

- Genuineness – a person who is faithful to himself, whose word has indeed become flesh in our presence, and who offers us substance because he offers us himself.

“We can tolerate a great many faults and imperfections in persons who are realistic about themselves and who share their truth, however flawed, with us.”

“When a person does not rely on defenses in relationship to us, we are forced to put our own aside.”

There is a common human temptation to fall in love with the idea we project out to the other.

“It is only through understanding the vital presence of another person who is unafraid to reveal himself that we begin to perceive the psychological fibers of faith. Faith is not belief in imaginary things nor an intellectual exercise by which we assent to certain truths. It is a pervasive human process that is only recognized in the lives of persons who give themselves honestly and fully to each other. Without genuineness there can be no belief, because there is no one there to believe in.”

- Capacity for Accurate Empathy – capacity to enter into the world of another person with understanding.

“Without the ability to put aside one’s own concerns and one’s own view of the world for a while, a man can only be isolated, preoccupied only with himself, and inescapable of anything more than a tentative entrance into human relationships.”

It requires an accurate grasp of what the other is experiencing in his world so close and yet so separate from our own. It also demands that we communicate back the fact that we do understand.

“Hope fleshes itself out in the lives of persons who have broken the seal on their own personalities and truly moved out towards others. Hope never travels alone and it only looks forward. It is part of what people give to each other when they truly share life seriously together. The message of hope is that we

are not only with other persons but that we are going to stay with them throughout their time of crisis or throughout their period of growth and development.”

Hope bids us to make a good effort, to take a chance at doing it badly.

“The Spirit is experienced as something deep and solid. . . as the human face of the faithful man who gives hope in his willingness to understand.”

□ Non-possessive Warmth.

Whole complex of affectionate responses.

“Warmth is powerful when it is real, sickening when it is not, and desolating when it is absent.”

‘Non-possessive’ warmth recognizes the separateness of the other and, longing for unity, is still able to set him free from the deepest concern and continuing regard for the sacredness of the other.

“Marriage is a challenge for lovers when they come up against the truth that, yearn as they might, they can never achieve the unity together that eclipses their separate personalities. . . Love only arises between persons who have separate identities and that intimacy is an area only available to those who are in possession of themselves.”

Associated with the above three qualities is that of concreteness.

These beautiful notions remain on a theoretical level unless they are expressed in a clear and substantial form.

“That is why lovers, even when they love very deeply, are delighted with signs of affection, little surprises, or unexpected gifts. That is why they like to hear each other say ‘I love you.’”

“In and through the mystery of the meeting of man and woman the Spirit comes to illumine the experience of incarnation and to deepen the awareness of God who reveals himself in human terms.”

Chapter FIVE: The Redemption of Intimacy

“To overcome the aching pain of loneliness people reach out, struggling to find something they cannot always put into words, and tell us of the incompleteness which they experience when they are isolated from other human beings.”

Man’s basic problem is friendship, the establishment of some genuine community with other persons; he hopes that somewhere, somehow, there is another with whom he can draw sufficiently close to share all of his life.

The solution is essentially religious: entering life and dying to self in order truly to reach others is the ordinary means through which persons come to feel the power of the Gospel in their own lives.

Erikson: the individual must be able to face the fear of ego-loss in situations which call for self-abandon.

This is the dying that is always at work in the loving Christian.

The struggle for deepened relationships is primarily a religious action, and it can be experienced only by those willing to walk on the sacred ground of intimacy.

Marriage asks a man to be born again in the Spirit, to allow death to have its way with him so that he may have and give life.

Caliber and Hereof distinguish five different styles of marriage, each of which reflects some truth about intimacy for us:

1. The conflict-habitual relationship.

The dynamic that keeps this marriage together is rooted in the way this man and woman exchange their hostilities.

“The tension of pain unites but in no way deepens the meaning of man and woman to each other.”

2. The devitalized relationship.

The firm ground of intimacy on which they began has gradually fallen apart over the years.

Frequently the man and woman gradually adjust to the barren reality of their now apathetic relationship instead of doing anything about it.

They are very vulnerable to affairs with other people, or to the development of other interests, such as absorption in a career or other work, which leaves little time for trying to repair the damage life has done to their relationship.

Intimacy is not something that can be left to take care of itself; there is need for regular nourishment.

3. The passive-congenial relationship.

Marriage distinguished by passivity from the start; they have adjusted on a level of relationship that is far from intimate, although perhaps polite and quite convenient in many ways.

Because the expectations are so minimal, these marriages frequently get along reasonably well since the level of disappointment is not very high.

4. The vital relationship.

The man and woman seem to be related to each other in a sensitive and pervasive manner in most of the things that are important in their lives.

They find that the directions of their life is shaped by their commitment to each other.

5. The total relationship.

A high and seldom achieved ideal in which a couple resonate together across all the major concerns and activities of their lives.

Suggestions which may help individuals deepen their mutual intimacy, strengthen their marriages, and therefore, intensify their own living experience of Christianity:

1. The romantic ideal of marriage must be presented with enough realism to prepare people for a life of growth rather than of easy triumph.

A religious view expects problems in a redemptive life; the ideal is not that there be no strife but that strife be responded to redemptively.

2. Couples must understand the process aspect of marriage, the vitality of which depends on their will to work at it throughout all their days together.

Devitalization is virtually inevitable unless the individuals keep working at the difficulties which they constantly encounter.

Hope = the practical down-to-earth virtue that says something can be done about this if we really want to do it.

3. Concrete expression of caring for another person is absolutely essential to the continued development of intimacy.
4. It is helpful for people to broaden the base of their sharing with one another – e.g., intellectual, recreational, work.
5. A direct focus on the practical expression and understanding of the religious significance of marriage can be of inestimable value in sustaining a vital intimacy between man and woman.

“... helps them to view their life from a timeless perspective and to sense the reverberations of the mystery of Jesus at work in their own lives.”

The hazards of marriage can be handled more successfully by the persons who understand that life and marriage constitute an essentially religious experience in which they are constantly suffering death in giving themselves to each other in view of the promise of resurrection.

Chapter SIX: Sex on Intimate Terms

“Sexuality offers man and woman a powerfully symbolic and sustaining opportunity to make themselves fully present to each other, to be born again in each other’s sight and to face the ‘ego loss’ which inevitably accompanies sexual intercourse when it really means something.”

This loss of themselves in each other is completed by the experience of resurrection in which two things occur: their own lives are enlarged, and they take responsibility for new life in the world.

Much current sexual literature simply gives 'how to do it' advice to people frightened and afraid, to people whose confidence in themselves and their powers is shaken, to people desperately looking for some kind of human redemption in a profoundly significant area of their experience.

Many factors play upon persons as they struggle to understand their own sexuality:

1. Man and woman are subtly cast as competitors in our present cultural scene.
2. The pervasive myth that 'everyone has had sexual intercourse.'
3. Lack of basic sound information about the physiology and psychology of sex.
4. Myth of the successful orgasm.

This emphasis has uprooted sex from the intimate context of a total personal relationship.

"Constant orgasm-seeking sex seems too intimidating and too exhausting a challenge for man to be able to express his sexuality with the integrity and ease appropriate to mature human beings."

"There is no way out of the present tangle of misunderstanding, misapplied findings, and newly flourishing myths, that does not take advantage of the positive capacity for mature religious faith to illumine and integrate all of man's experience."