

COMMENTS ON THE NEW PHILIPPINE MARRIAGE RITUAL

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In her all-embracing solicitude for the welfare of her children, our Holy Mother Church leaves nothing undone to make sure that every man and woman contemplating marriage is fully prepared — physically, emotionally, intellectually, but especially on the spiritual aspect of matrimony. The old Spanish Civil Code, used in the Philippines all the time that we were under Spanish rule, had much to say on “desposorio” or *espousals*. Our present Civil Code (Rep. Act 386), however, has no word on the matter. Yet, the *CODEX JURIS CANONICI* meant for the whole Catholic Church, still speaks about it (C. 1017). Priests and responsible Catholics take care to tell boys and girls coming to them for guidance about the responsibilities of married life, its joys and trials, the blessings of a happy choice of partner, and the chief means to merit such and other blessings. All this goes to show that, in the mind of a true Catholic, marriage is a sacrament and, therefore, something to be regarded as sacred, not an experiment or mere fun.

The *ROMAN RITUAL* lays down in detail (Tit. VIII) the rites and ceremonies in the administration of matrimony. But, during the entire period of Spanish domination in the Philippines, including that of the American regime—indeed, until the *INSTRUCTIO* (of the Holy See) of Sept. 26, 1964, we have been using a more elaborate ritual, i.e., that of Toledo. This was the rule even when, by virtue of subsequent rulings, marriage began to be solemnized after the gospel of the mass, and not before the mass proper. Then came an attempt to follow the American ritual. The Liturgical Commission of the Philippines came

in by preparing a ritual more appealing to Philippine social life. After slight modifications still, it was sent to Rome for approval. Confirmation thereof came on July 29, 1967 (Prot. 214/67), with the proviso that it be used *ad interim*. See BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS of May-June, 1968, pages 359-371.

By virtue of the "ad interim" provision, a member of the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Laoag begs to submit the following remarks:

1. In our desire to have our communities participate actively and conveniently in the divine service, many priests provide their flocks with the necessary pamphlet or cards from which one can learn what to answer to our greetings or invitations, what to pray or sing, and when to kneel, seat, or stand. But many seem to forget that, even in big cities, there are a few who go to church only thrice in their whole life; to say this in a lighter vein, they go to church "when they are hatched" (baptized), "when they are matched" (married), and "when they are dispatched" (buried). A bridegroom of this calibre, if required to remain kneeling from the beginning of the mass until the end, even during a long sermon—will not go to church anymore! He was scared with that position, to him both meaningless and unpleasant, since he has never knelt before. Let us, then, provide seats for all couples during the service.

In this connection, attention is invited to the fact that, as far as possible, the couple or couples should kneel *inside* the sanctuary, i.e., between the altar and the communion rail. But it is less in conformity with the spirit of Liturgy and Canon Law to let sponsors or other members of the bridal party to stay also in the sanctuary during the Nuptial Mass.

2. On page 367 of the BOLETIN referred to above, three lines at the bottom, left column, are at variance with the Manual of Toledo, at a point Bishop Morrow took care to retain in his MY WEDDING DAY, basically a translation of the Spanish ritual. We refer to the *time* when the veil or its substitute is to be placed on the shoulders of the bridegroom and on the head of the bride. Our Manual is clear on the matter: that it be placed *after* the "Pater noster". With the

lines referred to in the BOLETIN, how can the couple conveniently stand for the Lord's Prayer — as everybody in church should — if they have already the veil on their shoulder or head? If this rubric was ignored in places where the priest said nothing to nobody about it, this is no reason for the innovation in the lines we are referring to in the new MARRIAGE RITUAL.

3. Marriage is one of the rare occasions when lay people may receive Holy Communion under both species. The new Ritual does not explain clearly how this is to be done. Without any desire to outshine or inconvenience others, not a few couples can—and will gladly—buy a little chalice for this purpose and keep it thereafter as a remembrance of their wedding. We humbly submit this idea to their Excellencies so that, if there is no inconvenience, they may ask Rome—either collectively or individually—permission for this desire of contracting parties who can afford to do so. In the meantime, no priest in the Philippines is allowed to follow this suggestion until he gets permission from his Ordinary.

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1. The Espousals

After the publication of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 attempts were made in several countries to re-vitalize and re-introduce the celebration of the espousals. Despite the elan of the liturgical movement of the twenties and thirties these attempts were not successful. The main reasons for this failure were the fact that the present-day meaning of the espousals were not understood and the observation of both canonists and liturgists that the rite was not obligatory.

2. The Marriage Rite of the Roman Ritual and Particular Marriage Rites

Even in times of strict Roman centralism in liturgical matters, the marriage rite was always exempted from ecclesiastical uniformity. The

particular wedding rituals had even the protection and sanction of the Council of Trent which stated that "if certain locales traditionally use other praiseworthy customs and ceremonies when celebrating the sacrament of matrimony, this sacred synod earnestly desires that these by all means be retained." This text has been inserted into the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II; it was even extended: new marriage rites may be drawn up by the episcopal conferences (art. 77). Usually the particular rites for the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony are much richer in their symbolism and more meaningful in their prayers. The rite found in the Roman ritual needs a thorough reform which is already underway.

3. The "ad interim" approval of the new Philippine Marriage Rite

The liturgical reform is still in progress; far from being complete, Rome proceeds step by step, but on the whole line at once. The first step is that rites are approved "ad experimentum". Some examples may follow: There is the booklet with chants wanting in the Roman Missal, which became mandatory after the publication of the first instruction on the post-conciliar liturgy (Dec. 14, 1964). It contained new melodies for the Pater noster, the subsequent Libera and parts of the Canon. A second example is the Weekday Lectionary granted by the Apostolic See to the Philippines on Sept. 19, 1966 (cf. Lit. Inform. Bulletin of the Philippines, Dec. 1966, p. 102 f). Also the approval of the "Blessing of a Home" by the postconciliar Council for the reform of the Liturgy is "ad experimentum" as the decree of Oct. 20, 1967 says (Lit. Inform. Bulletin of the Phil., May 1968, p. 2). The reason for this kind of approval is that the rites should be first extensively practiced. Then observations and suggestions should be brought to the attention of the pertinent authorities. At a later date they may be incorporated into the rites.

Other liturgical documents got the approval "ad interim". Such an approval was given to the English translation of the Roman Canon on Aug. 10, 1967. The new marriage rite for the Philippines got the same qualified approbation. Why was this done? Here we must not forget that the wedding rite is part of a whole liturgical book, the

Ritual. The Constitution on the Liturgy opened the way to have finally a "Philippine Ritual", because "following the pattern of the new edition of the Roman Ritual, particular rituals are to be prepared as soon as possible by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority... These rituals, adapted to the linguistic and other needs of the different region, are to be... introduced into the regions for which they have been prepared "(Const. on the Liturgy, art. 63, b). Our new wedding rite will be a part of this future ritual. As long as such a definitive edition cannot be published, Rome gives only the approval "ad interim". This mode of approbation has also the advantage that before the definitive approval eventual changes and improvements can be inserted. We should use this time of transition to make suggestions in this line.

4. Practical Proposals

It is a praiseworthy custom of many parishes to offer their faithful practical means for active participation in the liturgical celebrations. For the wedding celebration parishes may order a booklet from Catholic Trade School, Manila, which contains the whole new wedding rite. It is to be hoped that we will have soon approved translation of the same rite in the various dialects, and especially in the national language, so that everywhere an intelligent participation is guaranteed.

The rules for kneeling, standing and sitting in the liturgical celebrations are to be found in the "Pastoral Directory of the Philippine Hierarchy" published in 1966 by the National Liturgical Commission. It would be an abuse to let the couple kneel throughout the wedding rite and the Mass. Pastors should take personal care that there are not only kneelers with cushions available, but also seats for the couple, not only for the rich, but equally for the poor.

According to the new rite the couple's place is in the sanctuary. No ceremonies are to be performed at the Communion rails. Since the sponsors are in many cases also the official witnesses who have to sign the documents together with the officiating priest, there seems to be a good reason to admit them also to the sanctuary. They must be able to witness the asking and giving of the marriage consent.

5. The Veil and Yugal

The old text of the "Marriage Ritual for the Philippines" (ed. of Catholic Trade School, Manila) is not very clear concerning the exact time when the veil is to be placed on the shoulders of the groom and the head of the bride: "After the Pater noster, the priest genuflects and goes to the epistle side... and pronounces the following blessing... (*In the meantime, a server, or friends of the couple place a white silk veil...*)". At that time the blessing was to be given immediately after the Pater noster and before the Libera. Therefore the new rite says, that the veil be placed on the couple *before* the Our Father, even at a time as early as the Sanctus, in order to avoid disturbance during the Canon after the Consecration.

Ours is a fast-changing time. The old rule, to give the blessing immediately after the Pater noster still stood, when the new wedding rite was sent to Rome for approval. Then there appeared the second post-conciliar Instruction on the Liturgy on May 4, 1967 which made the following prescription: "In nuptial Masses, the celebrant says (the nuptial blessing) not between the Our Father and its embolism (Libera), but after breaking the host and dropping the particle into the chalice, immediately before the Agnus Dei (art. 17)". In view of this instruction it seems to be more reasonable to follow the suggestion of Fr. Albano and place the veil on the couple only *after* the Pater noster and during the recitation of the Libera. But the new rite was flexible from the beginning. It never forbade the praxis of placing the veil after the Pater noster. It says only that "it is less advisable to place the veil and the yugal after the Consecration." *Bol. Ecl.* (1968) (368).

6. The Chalice

The new wedding rite is only concerned with the celebration of this particular sacrament. For the administration of the chalice to the couple the "Rite to be observed in the Distribution of Communion under both kinds" of March 4, 1965 must be consulted. It provides four different modes on how to receive the precious Blood: a. The communicants can drink directly from the chalice. b. They can receive the precious Blood by intinction. In this case provision must be made that the hosts will not be too thin nor too small, but thicker as usual,

so that when they are partially dipped in the precious Blood, they can be conveniently distributed. c. The Communion with the chalice can also be given with a silver tube. d. The precious Blood can also be administered with a spoon.

To use, in addition to the chalice of the celebrating priest a second chalice seems to be less appropriate for the occasion, particularly in view of the sacramental symbolism which is to be expressed. St. Paul speaks of the *one* Bread and the *one* Cup (cf. 1 Cor 10, 15-17). More than *one* chalice should only be used if, because of the great number of communicants it should be really necessary. The sacramental symbolism as well as that of an ancient Philippine tradition is best represented if the couple, after the priest, drink from the same chalice used by the priest at Mass.