

What makes a Successful Marriage?

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'I take thee,
to be my lawful wedded wife,
to have and to hold,
from this day forward,
for better for worse,
for richer for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
till death us do part.'

'I will.' With these words a young man and a girl freely pledge themselves to each other in the presence of a priest. At this moment, when they give themselves completely to each other in the sacrament of marriage, they know that from now on they are going to spend their whole life together, that they are going to shape their future as a pair, indissolubly united for better or for worse. Despite the solemn nature of their commitment they are joyful and confident: they are certain that their future life will be happy because they want it to be lived together.

As the years go by, they meet their share of joys and regrets: there are days of happiness but also inevitable misunderstandings and bitter disappointments. And then, probably, will come the time when each asks him or herself: 'Is this really what I dreamed it would be? Is my marriage a success?'

This is a perfectly normal question which many men and women ask themselves at moments of stress or simply of weariness due to everyday tedium. Nevertheless it is an all important question, because not only the harmony and balance of the home, but also the inner peace and fulfillment of husband and wife, will depend on the answer each of them gives.

Failures

There are countless 'successful' marriages. We must state that clearly, in spite of so many bitter and disillusioned opinions to the contrary. But the partners of such marriages usually find it difficult to explain why and how they are successful. Husbands and wives fall back on vague phrases which convey a general feeling: 'We get on well together.'... 'We couldn't do without one another.'... 'He (or she) is my companion, my support.'

Other marriages are failures. This is an undeniable fact. But here again, what marriages are failures, and for what reason? Let us try to find a more definite answer to these questions by looking at a few case histories. Each of the couples I am going to describe had their own particular motive for marrying.

Physical attraction

Vincent and Catherine married because they were passionately attracted to one another. They found complete accord in their physical union. Gradually the instinctive passion on which their marriage was based began to cool. Then each began to discover what the other was really like in the light of circumstances: he was revealed as dictatorial, selfish, indifferent to the needs and aspirations of others, she as whimsical and unstable, letting herself be guided by every passing mood.

Their physical harmony and sexual infatuation proved insufficient to give them the strength they needed to adapt themselves to meet each other's needs. They viewed each other at first with surprise and then with dismay. Reproachful looks gave way to open hostility and finally ever more frequent scenes. Where were the resources which would have given them strength to forgive each other's injuries, to tackle their own failings and to find a deeper union? Their sensual desires satisfied, they were no more to each other than strangers, soon to become enemies.

However important a part physical harmony must play in the mutual fulfillment of any married couple, it is not enough by itself to ensure the stability of a happy home. Even if it loses nothing of its original intensity over the years, it cannot by itself satisfy the deepest needs of married love.

Common interests

Richard and Sheila had known each other from child-hood. Their families were delighted when they announced their intention to found a home together. How could such a marriage fail to be a success? They had the same tastes, shared the same interests. Their professional life would bring them even closer together, for Richard had just taken over the management of a bookshop and his wife would help him in the business.

Both of them enjoyed meeting people, talking to their customers and advising them in their purchases. They took over the ownership of the shop and devoted all their free time to planning the extension of the trade. With their dynamism and business sense, its success seemed assured.

Could there ever be such a united couple, to all outward appearances? But who can judge success in marriage from the outside? Richard and Sheila were not happy. In spite of the interest of her work, Sheila had never ceased over the years to long for children. Richard, on the other hand, could not forgive her for not living up to his preconceived image: he wanted to think of her as finding complete fulfillment in the constant companionship of a husband who shared the same tastes and interests.

By the time John and Sarah were born, with an interval of eighteen months between them, their parents had become used to organizing their life around their work. To combine this with the care and upbringing of children was inconvenient. Sheila's happiness in at last becoming a mother irritated her husband. He accused her of neglecting her business duties and blamed her for the financial difficulties which had arisen because of the over hasty expansion of the bookshop. His wife no longer gave him what he had expected of his marriage: he considered he had been let down. Sheila, for her part, sought compensation in her children for the disappointments and difficulties of her married life. The rift which separated her from her husband became wider every day.

In most cases common interests play an important part in helping a couple to adapt to each other, to deepen their mutual understanding and to find balance and harmony in a shared rhythm of life. But they only relate to one aspect of personality; they often represent a passing phase in the development of individual tastes. As experience grows, so these tastes will change. A marriage

which is entirely based upon such common interests is therefore at the mercy of changed circumstances which may lead to new opportunities of fulfillment and new responsibilities.

A community of interests can contribute to the success of a marriage if it is the outward expression of common ideals and of a basically identical conception of the demands of duty and the pursuit of happiness.

Shared ambitions

When Paul married Margaret he was a traveler for a textile firm. A relentless worker, supported by a wife who readily accepted the sacrifices demanded by his desire for success, he swiftly climbed the rungs of the ladder towards the object of his ambition - to become the manager of the rival firm. He was well aware of what he owed to Margaret, to her intelligence and tact, and openly acknowledged this debt. This exceptional business and financial success caused admiration among their friends. 'What a united couple!' they said. 'What a successful marriage!'

Successful? To all outward appearances Paul and Margaret seemed to have everything that makes for happiness: three healthy and normal children, a comfortable life free from worry, lots of acquaintances, a luxurious flat.... But in real life, this apparent success masked a pitiful failure. For Paul, Margaret was no more than an indispensable means to his professional success. Now that this success had been achieved, all she wanted was to live quietly and simply with the man she loved, but instead she was required to cut a figure in the world, to go from one reception to another without ever sharing with her husband those moments of intimacy she longed for, deprived even of the intimate conversation that would have brought her peace and comfort. The revelation that Paul was deceiving her came, finally, as no surprise. Too demoralized to react normally, she accepted this ruin of her happiness as inevitable, taking care only to conceal it from the outside world.

Success in marriage does not come simply when a couple achieve the goal they set themselves at the beginning of their life together: it depends upon the intrinsic value of this goal and of the means used to attain it. It is as vital for a married couple as for an individual to get their priorities right and not to sacrifice what is essential (as here, the intimate union between man and wife) to aims which may be justified in themselves but which, when they interfere with this basic mutual commitment, can become disastrous and harmful.

Obviously, financial success is perfectly compatible with a happy marriage! Often it makes for better understanding and deeper love, if only because it frees a couple from numerous worries and affords better opportunities for relaxation and cultivated pursuits. Nevertheless it is irrelevant where real success in marriage is concerned. The proof of this can be seen in the many homes where, in spite of hardship and difficulty, family life finds fulfillment in steadily increasing love.

Escape from loneliness

Helen was a nurse, Andrew a bank clerk. When they got married, they knew quite well that they would never be rich, but this was of little account. Both suffered from loneliness, and so blessed the good fortune which had brought them together at the house of friends.

No one was more surprised than the friends. Helen and Andrew had so little in common. She came from a very simple background and had to struggle to get through her studies and obtain her qualifications. This had strengthened her character. Andrew came of wealthy parents, but had lost them both at a very early age. Lacking will power and 'drive', he was only too willing to take a job which suited his passive temperament. Neither he nor Helen had ever known a family atmosphere.

As they were both nearly thirty, they had some difficulty in getting used to life in common. Their basic honesty, their sense of indebtedness to each other for the stability of home life, helped them to put up with their differences in background, education and hopes for the future. They wanted children, lots of children, and they looked forward to them with an eagerness that offset their growing awareness of the contradiction that lay at the heart of their marriage.

The first two children brought them the shared joy and absorption they had dreamed of. The first differences arose with the birth of the third child, when Helen finally had to give up her nursing job altogether. Simple though her needs were, it irked her not to be able to give her children more than the bare necessities of life.

Her husband, satisfied with sedentary work that carried no responsibilities, refused to change his job. Helen's active temperament rebelled against this. Andrew was a very good father, it is true, and a good husband, too, in his way: he was faithful, he kept back none of his earnings, and accepted all his wife's decisions without protest. But she wanted something else: she needed to feel secure, to share family problems with her husband, not to feel she was alone in bearing the moral responsibility.

What her husband saw as caution ('How do I know I'll like a new job?'), she despised as laziness and faint heartedness. The difficult birth of her fourth child, which necessitated several long months of rest, made the situation even worse. Helen recognized her husband's good qualities, but developed more and more of an antipathy towards him. He, for his part, humiliated, convinced of being misunderstood, took refuge in silence and gradually reverted to his old bachelor habits. They had married out of a common desire for children, but even these very children, who had seemed to promise them fulfillment, were insufficient to bring them together. On the contrary, the presence of the children only made their incompatibility more obvious.

The success of a marriage cannot be gauged simply by the presence of children in the home. It requires a constant exchange between husband and wife at all levels - physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual - and a full acceptance of mutual responsibility. In the case under consideration, it would seem that Andrew and Helen failed to distinguish between love and the need to escape from the burden of loneliness, between mutual self-giving and the desire to transmit life. They had wanted to make up for the past by bestowing on their children the tenderness and kindness of which they themselves had been deprived.

Causes of failure

Four marriages, four failures. Why? Because each of these couples was looking for something other than the essential object of married life. They measured the success of their marriage solely by the satisfaction of personal needs or ambitions.

We must not imagine, however, that an initial error of motive must automatically lead to a breakdown of marriage. A frank facing up to disappointment, without evading personal responsibility, and a shared suffering in the interests of the other's happiness, can lead to a deepening of married life. Once the disillusionment has been faced and overcome, a deep mutual love can grow and bring the married union to genuine fulfillment.

The converse is true, as we have seen, of marriage which seems to start with everything in its favor and yet can develop serious misunderstandings, sometimes even to breaking point. In the light of these reflections, what then is a 'successful' marriage?

From all the cases already quoted it is clear that the success of a marriage depends not so much upon circumstances in themselves as upon the spirit which animates married life, and consequently upon the physical, moral and spiritual attitude of one partner towards the other.

This attitude must be one of openness, respect, and understanding. There must be a desire to create something in common, with, or rather through, each other - not only to create children, who are the fruit of a love given and received, but also to create a common life, completely sharing its failures and weaknesses, its efforts and its successes.... And all this must be based on an unfailing and constructive love.

We must be under no illusions. This building of unity in partnership cannot be achieved without failures. It will not always be easy to remain faithful to the implications of the marriage vow.

Every marriage has its inevitable difficulties which arise from the differences between the partners. Obstacles will arise, threatening mutual good will, sowing the seeds of doubt and fear of betrayal. It is then that the husband or wife begins to make comparisons: 'How different it would be with X or Y'. They look at other married couples, other households, and think: 'If only we had taken a different path... if only we had never had to face the obstacles which they have avoided... we too might have come through, we too might have realized our dream'.

There is no need to be alarmed by these involuntary backward glances. The main thing is not to dwell on them and not to make them seem more important than they are. It is true that a marriage may come to grief against obstacles which have repercussions that we fail to foresee or guard against. Some couples enter upon these compromising situations or accept them unguardedly without being fully aware of the risks involved; all too often, they only wake up to the danger when the harmony of the home is already threatened. That is why it is important to recognize the dangers and face them squarely.

It is necessary to make a distinction between the genuine obstacles which we shall overcome the more easily if we understand them clearly, and the false obstacles which are convenient alibis for our own mistakes and shortcomings.

False obstacles

1. Crises in married life

During the period of engagement, a young man and woman are seen at their best. Each tries to live up to the other's ideal, each sees the other in the same idealized terms.

Once married, husband and wife begin to discover each other as they really are. This is a slow and tentative process which can sometimes have its shocks, but these should cause no surprise. The 'crises' which all couples must undergo present no obstacle to the success of a marriage unless the husband and wife allow themselves to become imprisoned within them.

FIRST STAGE.

The first crisis comes with the discovery of 'otherness'. This is the wonderful period of the first months of marriage - ecstatic and a little confused. Love manifests itself at every opportunity, and can make demands which are not always understood or accepted. The one partner must adapt himself or herself to the other's way of life, make his or her own habits fit in with the other's. This calls for patience and detachment. But few misunderstandings are proof against affection, and there is a particular charm about the reconciliation that follows a lovers' quarrel.

SECOND STAGE.

Two or three years of married life lead to a new stage and new problems. By this time the marriage has gained in depth and stability: family life has taken on a pattern, with the sharing of tasks and a succession of cares and joys. There comes a moment when each partner becomes aware of his or her own individuality, separate from the other: this is the discovery of one's self, of one's own personal needs.

The wife finds a monotony in the duties assigned to her. Her husband rarely perceives just how monotonous and irksome these can be. She feels the need to assert herself, to find a justification for her activity beyond the narrow framework within which she feels confined. The husband finds some escape in his professional work, but this is offset by a tiredness and worry which his wife does not take into account.

Each has his or her own different needs which are hard to reconcile. This is a difficult period which calls for mutual sensitivity and for a constant effort of loyalty and understanding. Husband and wife must see each other more clearly, must accept that within the ties of their common life each must be free to express his or her own personality. Their married happiness demands that each helps the other to find self-expression and self-fulfillment.

A note of warning here. The inevitable quarrels which so often end in a fit of laughter or a spontaneous gesture of tenderness may, if one is not careful, become a means of expressing dissatisfaction or bitterness. There is a danger, too, in those periods of silence which are due to boredom with the other's conversation or simply indifference to what the other is thinking. It is more than ever necessary then to share our thoughts and reactions to the events of the day. This is the way to restore intimacy in spite of our differences. Finally, we should beware of taking for granted something that needs to be constantly renewed. It is normal that as married love develops and deepens, it should not need to manifest itself so explicitly. But sometimes what looks like peace can be a mask for withdrawal into self, egoism, apathy or indifference.

Happy are the homes where a new bond brings husband and wife even closer together - the arrival of a child. With this, the love of husband for wife and wife for husband comes to fruition.

THIRD STAGE.

The third crisis comes after ten or twelve years of marriage. The children are growing up. The sense of wonder with which father and mother gradually realized their new love and new responsibility is slowly wearing off. It is here that a new feeling often arises between husband and wife, often unexpressed, a feeling of nostalgia for personal freedom. They become more acutely aware of the sacrifices and self-denial that family life demands. When the wife does go out to work, the many problems which she finds in combining her work with the upbringing of the children lead to tension in her own life and in that of the home. The peace of both is threatened.

Yet for many women a professional job is a stabilizing influence. It gives them the opportunity to realize themselves and their own true worth. The restrictions which irk them at work are so different from those they readily accept at home.

The husband in his turn finds that family life imposes restrictions - the need to return at regular hours, to give an account of his expenditure, and so on. All this gives him the feeling of being boxed in. He feels himself to be less in harmony with his wife, and senses her dissatisfaction. Often the increased responsibilities of his job make it necessary for him to take less part in family life. The

truth must be faced, that this is the period when a husband most easily falls prey to outside temptations. Vigilance (though not worry), more straightforwardness in the relationship between husband and wife, respect for the other's personal life, and increased affection are the best safeguards against such temptations.

FINAL STAGE.

The last crisis comes after twenty-five years of marriage. The children have gradually found their independence. Husband and wife find themselves once more alone together, with their affections undivided. Companions on life's way, closely united in the common hopes and fears of everyday life, they must avoid that sense of routine which dulls affection, and learn to look at each other with fresh eyes. They must learn to love one another not only for what unites, but also for what separates them. The danger which threatens their unity is more than ever that of withdrawal. Yet for those who know how to use it aright, this, like the early days of marriage, is the time for the free gift of self.

These crises are by no means inevitable. When they occur they no doubt constitute a threat to married unity, but they also provide the couple with the opportunity to strengthen this unity with increased understanding, to assert and to clarify their shared ideals.

These generalizations may not always correspond with individual experience. Every marriage has its own unique and individual history which no outsider can describe. Nevertheless it is helpful to know that the same difficulties may occur to all in different forms.

2. Childlessness

Obviously we are not speaking here of those couples who marry with the intention of not having children. For them there can be no 'success' in marriage, since from the very beginning one of the primary ends of marriage - the procreation of children - is deliberately frustrated.

But there are others who are denied children for reasons not of their own volition, and who feel that their love has been cheated and humiliated. How many times have I heard unhappy couples tell me: 'If we had a child, we would never have got into this situation...' 'You don't know what it's like not to have children. A marriage without children is doomed to failure.'

This is wrong. Doubtless, for many women motherhood brings a fulfilment, and the transmission of life is nearly always a steadying factor. But 'childless' marriages have just as much meaning in their search for complete fulfilment and mutual support between husband and wife. Though childlessness may be painful for certain temperaments, already feeling the strain of unsatisfied desire, it is not in itself a cause for failure.

Couples who are put to this test must face up to it with generosity and honesty. A family which is not enlarged by the addition of children tends to close in on itself. Since there is no child to remind the couple of the need to think of and, if necessary; to sacrifice themselves for a third person, they tend to become self-centered. Without knowing it, they also begin to look for compensation: husband and wife instinctively try to find in their love for each other what they cannot give to or get from a child. There is a danger of becoming inward looking and cut off. Equally dangerous is the temptation to look for outside distractions as a means of escaping from the emptiness of family life.

A childless marriage can be a successful marriage if husband and wife do not try to evade the problem but accept each other, 'childless' as they are, with more free time to devote to others, and to draw closer to those who need them.

3. Shortage of money

Poverty, shortage of money, is another 'false obstacle'. 'How do you think my husband and I can find time to talk over our difficulties?' The question was put to me by the mother of a large family who had been compelled for financial reasons to take a job outside the home. 'I have so much to do at home when I get back from work... cleaning, cooking, looking after the children. I envy rich people. It must be so nice to have time to spend alone together. How can you make your marriage real when you're always short of time?'

It is not the amount of time at one's disposal that allows love to flourish and find expression. A few moments snatched from work or rest, a glance, concern shown for the other's wants - this is all that is needed for husband and wife to reassure each other of their desire to remain close. 'He speaks his love in the help he gives me', a country woman once told me, speaking of her husband. 'When I'm bathing the baby, or ironing his shirts, I watch him lighting the fire and preparing the meal. I haven't time to talk to him because the children are all round us, asking for this and that. We just smile at each other, as if to say "I'm happy. Thank you".'

The fact remains that poor or overcrowded housing conditions, lack of peace and quiet, or intrusive noise from outside, among other reasons, can make it difficult and even impossible for people to communicate properly. And a husband and wife who no longer communicate with each other soon become strangers.

On the other hand, worry and uncertainty about the future (particularly when the wife blames the husband for financial difficulties, or when the husband is continually accusing the wife of extravagance) undermine that feeling of security and confidence which every couple has the right to expect and the duty to give to each other.

But here too, difficulty is not the same as failure. The sharing of sacrifices for the general benefit of the family is as much a source of unity as the sharing of comforts - sometimes more so. Comfort is not always a matter of material well-being; a husband and wife can derive just as much comfort from knowing that they love one another body and soul, that the happiness of the whole family is the result of their work and their efforts, that they can share in the lives and dreams of their children. What is family unity itself if not a comfort?

While lack of money can enter into the success of a marriage in so far as it calls for an increase of affection and mutual support, it is not in itself a cause of failure.

4. Temptations

These present themselves to every couple sooner or later. Sometimes they amount to little more than a fleeting thought, which is at once dismissed. 'If only I could begin again...' But it does not take much to feed such temptations: a strained atmosphere at home, preoccupation with business matters which prevent the husband from showing his wife the signs of affection she expects; tension on the part of the wife, and over concern with her responsibilities as housewife or mother, which lead her husband to think that she is gradually becoming indifferent to his concerns.

In these circumstances it is easy for a man to be attracted by a woman colleague or fellow worker, or perhaps by a younger acquaintance, with more sparkle than his own wife. The wife too can find pleasure and comfort in knowing that she is appreciated and regarded by another man - perhaps even in feeling herself to be beautiful and desirable. However little she may be physically attracted to this man, she is courting disaster.

Of course, temptation can take many other forms as well. Husbands and wives who genuinely love one another all too often seek escape in some friendship from which they get comfort and support, which puts them in a better mood at home and makes them more indulgent towards each other. Since the other knows nothing about it, what harm can it do?...

Playing with fire is dangerous. Even if one's heart remains intact, there are serious dangers in allowing such a friendship with a member of the opposite sex to develop, a friendship that is unknown to one's partner and offers a means of escape.

Such a friendship cannot but have repercussions for the psychological and moral well-being of any husband or wife. They may find a more or less conscious justification for their conduct: in so doing they explain away the uneasiness but gradually falsify their consciences. They suddenly find that they have become enslaved by the very feelings which they thought they had under control.

Once temptation is overcome, it presents no intrinsic obstacle to the success of a marriage. It can prevent a couple from allowing themselves to fall into a routine; it can reawaken their sense of joy and sense of duty; it can give them the opportunity of clearing away the grievances that have built up from day to day and have been allowed to overshadow their love. It can give will power and self-control an opportunity to assert themselves. Sometimes it can force a person to take stock of himself and the spiritual life he has neglected. In many 'successful' marriages, a temptation resisted has been the starting point for a renewed, more honest and more mature love.

Genuine obstacles

These became clear when we spoke of those purely external circumstances which are so often blamed for failed marriages. We have seen that a marriage can succeed in spite of such circumstances, in spite of psychological crises and temporary failures. The genuine obstacles are related to more deep seated aspects of personality, to certain defects in moral attitude such as selfishness, pride, laziness and, above all, that way of reacting to people and events which we call psychological immaturity.

5. Selfishness

Selfishness is an attitude which leads the individual to relate everything to himself without taking account of the interests of others. Marriage implies the mutual gift of self, without holding back, without invidious comparisons. The attitude of 'Me first' runs clean counter to this: it puts up a barrier to this openness of one to the other, an openness which is nothing if it is not complete and unreserved. The great danger of selfishness is the way it can take so many forms in everyday life without either partner being clearly aware of it.

While married life certainly has its moments of heightened awareness when everything is brought into perspective, in the ordinary way it is made up of the humdrum, the routine, the unimportant; and it is here, in the ordinary events of everyday life, that selfishness can first establish its unsettling foothold. In contrast to that utterly simple generosity which at all times should exist between husband and wife, selfishness turns them in on themselves, poisons their relationship, leads each to

prefer his own personal pleasure to that of his partner and hence to turn that partner into a possession, an object, no longer an independent person in his or her own right.

6. Pride

The same is true of pride, by which one partner asserts his or her imagined rights over the other. Again, where there should be sharing without calculation, pride introduces a note of competition and comparison, setting off the imagined superiority of one partner against the other.

By separating the partners in this way pride goes even further than selfishness in undermining that moral intimacy which guarantees a marriage. Genuine understanding, the fruitful interchange of ideas, even the ability to forget and forgive, are all made impossible.

The danger here is that there are many disguised forms of pride in family life: a false idea of self-esteem, authoritarianism, over sensitiveness, the claiming of unwarranted rights, and even falsehood (in cases where truthfulness might perhaps ruin the image one is anxious to present to one's partner). It can often take the form of unjustified jealousy, for everything tends to be seen as an offense by the husband or wife who takes what the other gives as his or her 'due'. Once pride has entered into a married relationship, trust soon disappears.

7. Laziness

The harmful effects of laziness are often not realized. Yet so many of the terms we used in speaking of married life - striving, building, learning - all imply some kind of effort. The person who refuses to make this effort is unfit for love. Contrary to what is generally thought, it is not love which creates courage: courage comes first. And courage, too, whatever people say, has to be acquired. The influence works both ways, of course: the beginnings of love can give rise to a courage which will strengthen and mature it. Laziness leads to paralysis of the heart, it destroys that mutual support which each partner owes the other, and it undermines that feeling of security which is essential to the peace of the family.

8. Lack of emotional maturity

This is the most frequent, and also the most insidious, cause of failure. So often the husband and wife are unaware of how much they are at the mercy of their moods, conditioned by their environment and therefore superficial in their reactions. They consider themselves as adults whereas, in fact, their emotional development has not passed beyond the infantile or adolescent stage with its need for self-defence. They are centered on themselves to such an extent that they are incapable of considering others, always ready to blame others for their own difficulties or failures, never willing to take responsibility on themselves. Where there is a disagreement, instead of trying honestly to see where they are to blame they reproach their partner for failing to live up to their image. They are the prisoners of their own set ideas and, even more, of their passing whims.

Emotional maturity calls for self-mastery and self-control. It is this that makes it possible for a human being to establish his moral independence without having to feel dependent on others, even on his marriage partner. Within the marriage relationship it eliminates selfishness, pride, laziness - all the subterfuges we invent to evade the demands of genuine love. Emotional maturity is the essential condition of a successful marriage because it alone allows us to see and love another human being for what he is.

The conditions of successful marriage

It is time to outline these conditions not in artificial abstraction, but as they are in reality. The main outlines have gradually become clear already from our analysis of the false and genuine obstacles to this success. Sexual harmony, the desire to build a life in common, the procreation of children - these are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee the success of a marriage. Similarly, while difficulties, of whatever kind, can be a source of disharmony in the home they can also contribute to a deeper, more intimate married love.

This explains why it is so difficult to draw valid conclusions and to lay down universal lines of conduct. For how can we do justice to so many varying factors? In fact there is no one criterion of success which all couples can use, since every successful marriage must be seen against its own particular psychological, social and family background. Married love has different aspects according to the different personalities of each couple, the obstacles they encounter and the material and moral pressures to which they are subject, such as inadequate housing conditions, the wife's job, the interference, or otherwise of parents-in-law... But in whatever way it finds expression, the love of successfully married couples has certain constant characteristics: it implies an unreserved mutual self-giving of two people who commit themselves at marriage to live no longer two parallel lives but one single life, the life of a married couple, which finds further continuation and fulfillment in the life of a family.

Each couple must work out the success of their own particular marriage, which will depend not only upon external circumstances outside their control, but upon their own separate characteristics of temperament and personality. It is up to each couple to live their life in their own way. A marriage, like all living things, never stops developing and maturing.

Though success, again, takes many different forms, certain interior attitudes remain constant to it. All that remains for us is to outline these attitudes, while repeating that every couple has its own way of interpreting and exploring them.

9. Knowing and accepting one another

This is the first secret of a successful marriage. One does not marry a dream husband or a dream wife, a figment of one's imagination or desires. One marries a real individual, someone who is unique and whose body, heart and mind have their own special needs and demands. We have a strict duty in justice towards our partner to get to know these needs and demands intimately, to accept them as they are and not as we would like them to be. This is a duty which we also owe to our marriage. Disappointment is so often the result of false illusions! This quiet acceptance is the most elective expression of genuine love and consideration.

Not that this will always come naturally. The lover instinctively tends to identify the loved one with himself. It is so easy to attribute one's own feelings to others... It often calls for great self-control and generosity of heart - emotional maturity - to maintain a constant effort to get to know and accept others as they really are.

This is all the more true as married life develops. Life in common brings with it a gradual discovery by each partner of the other's complete personality, with all its shades and subtleties. This is a discovery which never ends, since each personality is always developing. Every man and woman has within himself or herself potentialities which have never had a chance to assert themselves, as well as weaknesses and contradictions which only circumstances will bring to light.

Love means accepting and respecting this development from the start; it means treating one's partner as a free, person, responsible for him- or her-self. How can a husband and wife fulfill their love in this way if they do not learn to forget themselves, to be open and sensitive to every aspect of the other's personality?

I used the term 'complete personality' because this includes the body as well as the mind and the heart. A harmonious sexual relationship brings peace and fulfillment to married life.

This physical union which seems to belong to instinct in fact involves the whole personality. This essential aspect of marriage has been treated in other pamphlets. Suffice it to recall here that in marriage the discovery of the body, and of its needs and reactions, is also a gradual process which requires of each partner not only spontaneous warmth, but also a simple desire to satisfy the other and the self-control and complete generosity which will make this possible.

Complete and final harmony is a delusion; the ups and downs of every married life are sufficient evidence of this. But a constant effort to accept one's partner as he or she is, a refusal to entertain those dream images which lead to disappointment, will make love strong.

10. Making ourselves known

How can we learn to know and to accept one another if we do not give mutual help? Now, it is sometimes even more difficult to make oneself known than it is to know. Firstly because we ourselves are often surprised by the inconsistencies in our own character, and secondly because our psychological life is continually evolving. We only allow the other person to see one aspect of our personality at a time, particularly when we are instinctively concerned to present to the other person the image that is expected of us - which is frequently the case within marriage.

No doubt clarification will come with intimacy. But contrary to what one might think, a genuine exchange of views is not made easier by life in common. Because of over tactfulness, fear of causing pain, or even laziness, married couples too often tend to turn inwards, to keep silent if they are not sure of being perfectly understood. And silence can so easily become a habit.

It needs courage - sometimes a lot of courage - to give expression to one's true feelings and reactions. Only the courage that is born of love will enable the married couple to live with each other in genuine honesty. There can be no success in marriage where the partners are afraid to speak and unwilling to listen.

This frankness must include everything, even the sexual relationship. Out of a sense of modesty or because of their upbringing, young (and even not so young) women often find it difficult to explain their expectations and frustrations to their husbands. Husband and wife alike should remember that from the very beginning of married life one of the essential conditions of success is the virtue of honesty.

11. Helping and sharing

This aspect of the marriage relationship, like all the others, has to be learned from each other. Just because genuine harmony, at any level, involves difficulties, each partner needs the support of the other in bringing this about. And because this harmony involves the whole of the individual, as he is and as he would like to be, this mutual help means first of all helping each other to improve; it means desiring the other's true welfare.

This living and fruitful collaboration cannot be attained without a deep respect for the other's personal liberty, respect for the path which he is called by God to follow.

This mutual support is harder to give than it may seem to young couples who are discovering the first joys of married life. It is not just on their wedding day, but throughout their whole life that each partner has to think of the other's happiness while at the same time trying to realize his or her own. We must always help each other throughout our married life at every level, even if no return is forthcoming.

This support will be easier to give and to receive if we learn to practice unreservedly that other requirement of marriage - sharing. This, too, extends to every level. It means the sharing of earthly and material goods which are no longer 'mine' but 'ours', whether it be bed, food, work or leisure. It means the sharing of all the advantages of life, cultural, financial, etc. It means the sharing of spiritual goods, also, in proportion to each couple.

Sharing is the chief symbol and outward manifestation of a loving married relationship. It is also a constant reminder of the practical demands of this relationship.

12. Self-giving

Is there not a danger that these demands may seem too harsh, too difficult, to a husband and wife, and perhaps cause them to rebel? Perhaps. But that is because either one or the other has not yet come to accept the ultimate requirement of a successful marriage - the need for self-giving. This means the complete, unreserved and irrevocable gift of oneself to the other. It also means that the couple hands on to others all that their union has given them in the way of personal enrichment and fulfillment.

This is not the place to enlarge on this last point. I am concerned here only with the success of marriage in so far as the partners themselves are concerned. I have not spoken of the contribution made by children, by an outgoing attitude. I have not spoken of that positive commitment to professional and social life which follows from a genuinely successful marriage. I will only suggest here that a successfully married couple is naturally drawn to take part in those local, national and international movements and organizations which need their co-operation in one way or another. It is as if, in practice, the loving gift of one to another leads on to the gift of both to others.

Are these demands too harsh, too difficult to meet? They are, indeed, beyond the strength of any married couple unless in giving assent to their mutual commitment they also made each other a sacramental gift. It is this that enables them to rely for ever upon the continual gift of God.

13. Infidelity

We have already seen how infidelity may start from certain attachments of mind and heart which a husband or wife may form without wishing either to 'deceive' their partner or to reject a union that they value. The pleasure which this attachment gives them, the double life (both material and moral) which it compels them to lead, represent a grave breach of that vow of unconditional fidelity which they made at marriage.

Does infidelity itself - sexual relations with another man or another woman - mean the final failure of a marriage? Very often the answer is yes, but not always and not automatically. When one of the marriage partners breaks his vow of fidelity, this does not cancel the marriage commitment of each to the other. This commitment was irrevocable on both sides. One fall, one transgression, does not

mean the end of a marriage. Depending on the other partner's attitude, it may simply be a stage in the history of a marriage - a painful and crucifying stage for the offended party, but a stage at which the obligation to help one another becomes even more important.

The solution will depend on individual circumstances. Attitudes, character, readiness to forgive and forget (where that is possible), the influence of family and environment - these will all be deciding factors. Even more will depend upon how deep the marriage relationship was, previous to the incident.

It cannot be over-stressed to what extent a married couple requires the virtues of strength and vigilance, to what extent also they need to find support by frequent recourse to prayer and a deeper spirituality.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the efforts, self-denial and patience of one of the partners, the moment may arrive when it is necessary to accept the failure of one's marriage. Each partner finds him or herself alone again - psychologically and morally alone even if there is no physical separation. Is there nothing left but to go over the past and draw up a balance sheet of responsibility?

Certainly not. The husband, or wife, is still answerable for the offending partner. However painful the ordeal may be, even if the emotional ties are broken, love can still survive under a new form, in the shape of sacrifice. A failed marriage need not mean a failed life if it is accepted for its redeeming value, offered up for the salvation of the partner we have loved and of all those others who struggle painfully to remain faithful to one another.

14. Preparation for marriage

Finally, there should be no need to stress that every young couple needs to be prepared for their married life, prepared to make their choice of partner, prepared for the different stages of love, instructed in everything which will enable them to live a harmonious married life at all levels, physical, psychological and moral.

This is not the place to treat this all-important subject. I would only recall what we have learned from our previous reflections on what makes a 'successful' marriage. Preparation for marriage is infinitely more far-reaching than sexual instruction. It concerns the human personality as a whole, and that is why it is an integral part of education.

No doubt it is salutary for every young man and woman to reflect together upon the demands of their new life when they are on the point of getting married and founding a family. But the real preparation for marriage begins much earlier than that: it begins with the first efforts their parents make in forming their minds, hearts and wills: it begins with the first answer they receive to their question about the mystery of the transmission of life.

It is not simply a matter of education at school. The best preparation for a successful marriage is a child's discovery of genuine love from the example of devoted parents.

A 'successful' marriage, with all the effort and sensitivity it implies, prepares the way for other 'successful' marriages - those of the children who, through the love their parents give one another, learn to discover love itself, in all its depth and with all its demands.

This pamphlet has been translated by G. M. Murphy from the French and is published by kind permission of Editions Foyer Notre-Dame, Brussels.
