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Preparing for Marriage: What Pastoral Marital Counselors Should Know About Religious Belief, Psychological Health, and Marital Outcome

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Preparing for Marriage

What Pastoral Marital Counselors Should Know about Religious Belief,
Psychological Health, and Marital Outcome

Both during the prescribed marriage preparation course and in the marital interview conducted by the presiding minister, the fiancés are asked a series of questions about their understanding of, and ability to enter into, a committed, life-long relationship of fidelity and mutual care. Besides the scrutinies as to whether there are any diriment impediments which would prevent a valid marriage, the examiner is to inquire whether both parties are Catholic, and if one is not, to which other faith tradition (if any) that person adheres. As well, the examiner is to gauge the levels of commitment to, and practice of, the professed faith of each party. Finally, the examiner is to ask whether either party has had, or is undergoing, psychological counseling or treatment. This last is perhaps the most sensitive question, for on the one hand, such counseling is recommended by Canon Law as a support for a successful marriage, yet on the other hand, it is indicative of a possible incapacity to contract a valid marriage. This line of questioning precedes and prepares for the essential questions concerning freedom, fidelity and fruitfulness. Given the delicacy of the question regarding mental health, some examiners may be tempted to rush through it if the engaged couple has already indicated a strong faith-commitment in response to the previous questions. The examiner may assume that strong religious belief will more than make up for the pressures of a mixed religious marriage and/or for the psychological frailties of either party. This assumption would be both a mistake and a missed opportunity. These questions not only help to establish the freedom to marry (and

thus the validity of the sacrament) but also surface issues that can influence the long-term success of the marriage.

While it is true that shared religious belief and higher levels of religious practice are positive supports for marriage, Church ministers should not assume that religiosity automatically shields couples from marital discord brought on by psychological pressures. Indeed, as we shall discuss, research shows that in some cases, religiosity actually increases the chances for marital discord when coupled with certain psychological issues. Identification of areas of potential difficulty can open up possibilities of treatment which can significantly increase marital satisfaction and success. In this article, we will begin with an analogy between two vocations within the Roman Catholic Church to suggest that there are solid theological grounds for the inclusion of psychological data about marital success and satisfaction, gained from clinical studies, in both the preparatory discernment process and in the ongoing support of sacramental marriage. We will then review some of the empirical information gained through such studies on religiosity and marriage which pastors and marriage preparation team members ought to consider, both in order to proffer sound pastoral care and to avoid erroneous assumptions. We will conclude with some practical suggestions for those Church ministers engaged in couple counseling.

Marriage as Graced Vocation

Sacramental marriage, like Sacred Orders, is a graced calling in the Christian community. Both

are further realizations of an individual's ecclesial life which began with the baptismal sacrament, and both are a further integration of the individual into the interpersonal community of the Church. The decision to marry is inspired by God; in it is a gracious invitation to enter into a state of life that is holy, loving, and directed to the good of others (spouse, children and community). Indeed, c. 226 §1 of the 1983 Code calls marriage a "vocation" and indicates that it is not merely a secular state of life. It is a concretization of the believer's intimate participation in the ongoing mission of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, for the salvation of the world. Since it parallels Holy Orders, the ecclesial means used to prepare priestly vocations may also be appropriate, *mutatis mutandis*, in strengthening the marriage vocation. C. 241 §1, in the context of admission of candidates to the seminary, instructs the diocesan bishop to admit only those persons "who are judged capable of dedicating themselves permanently to the sacred ministries in light of their human, moral, spiritual and intellectual characteristics, their physical and psychological health and their proper motivation." In their interpretation of the canon, CORIDEN ET AL. (1985, 182) note that "most seminaries in the English-speaking world require...a physical examination and a written report containing the results of psychological testing"¹. The aptness of similar psychological tools during preparation for the marital sacrament is clear. C. 1095 states this in a negative construction: "they are incapable of contracting marriage who lack the sufficient use of reason; who suffer from grave lack of discretion of judgment concerning essential matrimonial rights and duties which are to be mutually given and accepted; [and] who are not capable of assuming the essential obligations due to causes of a psychic nature." In both cases, these Canons refer to the capacity of the person to enter into a consensual, sacramentally sealed relationship (with the spouse and with the Church community). It is only in freedom (i.e., in relative psychological health) that a person may validly enter into a covenant with other human beings and with God.

While much of the legal history behind c. 1095 concerns the definition of the state of "amentia" – the degree of psychic impairment and the state of mind of the person at the time of the marriage ceremony (e.g., marriage shattering mental illness must be traced back to a time before the wedding for the marriage to be declared invalid on these grounds), – CORIDEN ET AL. (1985, 776) expand on the positive intent of the Canon: "Due discretion" must be proportionate to the requirements of the interpersonal relationship needed to create and sustain the *consortium omnis vitae*, the "community of the whole of life". A person may well be capable of conducting business and other matters yet still lack the fundamental psychological capacity in regards to the special relationship of Christian marriage. Here the commentators make a distinction between intelligence, will, and an unnamed third mental area (the sub-conscious?) which can suffer from psychological or emotional disturbance, such that the person is incapable of a sufficiently free act. In both the case of the priestly candidate and that of the candidate for marriage, it is the full and unique person who accepts the vocation. Certainly, there are no objective measures to gauge freedom, yet there are many diagnostic inventories which give strong indications of problematic areas of personality and mental balance. Apart from their obvious use in denying or dissolving failed vocations, such tools can and should be used to further the chances for the permanence and the quality of these life-long commitments.

For spouses, the unitive and procreative ends of marriage call for the historical intertwining of two personalities. Each must be "other oriented", capable of self-giving love, possessed of a healthy personality that is capable of self-giving. The medieval scholar Panormitanus spoke thus of sufficient capacity: "it is the will to treat one's spouse as a spouse should be treated." But

¹ They distinguish psychological testing from psychoanalysis, the latter being a process lasting 2 years or more, which has been prohibited by the Holy Office as a requirement for admission (see in: *AAS* 53 [1961], 571).

the understanding of the goal and the will to pursue that goal are not sufficient; one must also be a relatively healthy "self", free of debilitating psychological disorders. The Roman Rota has described psychological insufficiency as "emotional immaturity"², a condition which, in the language of contemporary psychology, seems most consistent with the personality trait "neuroticism", which is usually defined as intense moodiness and a general tendency to overreact, especially in negative ways (i.e., with anger, anxiety, and depression). Clearly, much of the case history in this matter has been written in the context of failed marriages, when one or both parties sought an annulment. But what of those marriages which do hold together? Can these warnings serve to strengthen the marriage bond of faithful people in the modern context, marked as it is by negative "social and psychological influences" (*Gaudium et spes*, 47)? Can the pre-Cana period be a time for diagnosis and the beginnings of ongoing treatment of mental health issues such that the quality of the "community for the whole of life" be strengthened and assured?

Pastors are clearly obliged to coordinate the resources of the ecclesial community in order to furnish assistance to the faithful "so that the matrimonial state is maintained in a Christian spirit and makes progress toward perfection" (c. 1063 §2). This assistance is to be furnished both before and after the wedding, through engagement and marriage ministries which predispose the couple "toward the holiness and duties of their new state" and help them, day by day, "to lead holier and fuller lives in their families" (c. 1063 §2,4). Among the resources of the community are the wisdom and the skills of psychologists whose research and treatment programs are designed to enhance the marital covenant. Their work can help the preparation of couples, indicating not only whether the two are ready for marriage, but also to inform couples of therapy options that will increase the likelihood of successful and fulfilling marriage. These days, more Catholics are entering into mixed marriages where spouses do not share religious convictions and commitments, adhering

either to different religious traditions or to none at all. Couples are living in increasingly secularized social contexts, where fidelity in marriage and permanency of marriage are neither highly valued nor particularly supported. As well, economic and social pressures on marriage continue to increase as two income families become the norm rather than the exception. It would seem that modern couples need more psychological and emotional strength than ever. It is, therefore, both appropriate and necessary that marriage ministers look for, and actively foster, "a basic degree of maturity and the potential for continued growth as well as the ability to cope with the expected stresses and strains of a developing marital relationship" (CORIDEN ET AL., 1985, 748). In this, psychological health goes hand in hand with strength of faith. Although these are two quite different aspects of the human person, they both are essential for a thriving, sacramental marriage. How are faith, psychological health and marital outcome related?

Religiosity and Marital Outcome

Psychologists and sociologists have been studying the relationship between religiosity and family life for over fifty years, resulting in hundreds of articles addressing how various aspects of religion and religiosity are related to marital satisfaction and stability. Researchers have focused on three questions: Does membership in a particular faith or denomination affect marital outcome? Are religiously homogenous marriages more stable and/or more satisfying than the marriages of spouses of different faith traditions? Is a higher level of religiosity related to higher marital satisfaction and/or a lower likelihood of divorce? This section will provide an overview of the empirical findings by scientists looking at these questions.

Does affiliation with any particular religion contribute to marital success?

People often assume that couples in some religious traditions enjoy more successful marriages

compared to couples in other traditions or with no religious tradition at all. In fact, psychological studies conducted in the 1950's indicated that Catholic couples and Jewish couples were more satisfied than couples who had no religious affiliation (WALLEN, 1959) and more satisfied than Protestant couples (BURCHINAL / CHANCELLOR, 1962). However, more recent studies have found no significant differences in marital satisfaction among couples from these religions (SNOW / COMPTON, 1996). Whatever former advantages may have existed seem to have disappeared, a change that may be linked to shifting attitudes regarding divorce. Earlier studies indicated that Jews and Catholics were less likely to divorce as compared to either Protestants or couples who reported no religious affiliation (BUMPASS / SWEET, 1972; SHRUMM, 1980; GLENN / SUPANCIC, 1984; HEATON ET AL., 1985); generally, divorce was less frequent among couples affiliated with more traditional religions (HEATON / CORNWALL, 1989). A more recent study has found no differences in divorce rates across religions, except that Mormon couples were slightly less likely to divorce and couples with no religion were slightly more likely to divorce (LEHRER / CHESWICK, 1993). In the only longitudinal study examining the relationship between religious affiliation and marital stability, CALL / HEATON (1997) found that all significant influences of religious affiliation disappeared after controlling for basic demographic variables such as age at marriage and parental divorce. Thus it appears that, today, demographic variables and family histories are more likely to make the couple vulnerable to divorce, much more so than their religious affiliation. With the overall waning of the strength of religion's influence on couples, other factors now must claim a good share of the attention of the marriage minister.

Are mixed religious marriages less stable and less successful?

There seems to be moderate support for the hypothesis that religious homogeneity is related to increased marital stability (LANDIS, 1948; BUMPASS

/ SWEET, 1972; LEHRER, 1998), at all lengths of marriage (HEATON, 1985), even when taking into account other important variables (BURCHINAL / CHANCELLOR, 1962, LEHRER / CHESWICK, 1993). The strength and significance of this relationship varies, based on the degree of difference between faiths of individuals involved in mixed marriages (BAHR, 1981). For example, Protestant/Catholic marriages appear to be more unstable than same-faith marriages in either tradition, but mixed Protestant marriages are as stable as same-denomination Protestant marriages (KERCKHOFF, 1976). The type of homogeneity may also be important: denominational homogeneity is most significantly related to stability; similarity in levels of church attendance is fairly significant; but similarity in biblical interpretation is not significant (HEATON / PRATT, 1990). Some studies indicate that, if one controls for important other marital variables, this reduces or eliminates the advantage of homogeneity in religion (ORTEGA ET AL., 1988). In one recent longitudinal study, heterogeneity and a lack of faith did predict dissolution, but other significant factors were also present (young age at marriage, parental divorce, etc.), blurring the findings (CALL / HEATON, 1997). Certainly, the number of heterogeneous marriages has increased over the last 5 decades, and there is evidence that its impact on stability has decreased (GLENN, 1982).

Are couples who are more religious less likely to become unhappy or divorce?

It has been clear from the beginning of research into the relationship between religion and marriage that the *degree* to which a couple is religious (i.e., actively practice their religion, attend church services, pray, etc.) is of particular importance; perhaps even more than the specific religious affiliation or couples' similarity in affiliation. This was verified empirically by HEATON (1984), who found that the relationship between

2 For two exemplary case decisions, see the Roman Rota's *Decisio coram Ferraro*, 6 Feb. 1979, and the *Decisio coram Huot*, 7 June 1979.

heterogeneity and stability disappeared when one controlled for the amount of religious activity.

There is some evidence that church attendance is related to marital happiness (GLENN / WEAVER, 1978), willingness to choose the same partner again, less disagreement about marital roles (KUNZ / ALBRECHT, 1977), and greater marital dependence (WILSON / MUSICK, 1996). However, other studies have found no evidence for the relationship between church attendance and marital satisfaction (HUNT / KING, 1978; SCHUMM ET AL. 1989). The evidence for the relationship between church attendance and stability has been more consistent, with a direct relationship being reported across many studies (KUNZ / ALBRECHT, 1977; GLENN / SUPANCIC, 1984; BAHR / CHADWICK, 1985; LARSON / GOLTZ, 1989), even after controlling for important demographic and family variables (SHRUM ET AL., 1980; CALL / HEATON, 1997). The studies are not unanimous, however, with at least one important study demonstrating minimal differences in church attendance between married and divorced couples (THORNES / COLLARD, 1989). In his review on religion and family, JENKINS (1991) concluded that there was mixed evidence for the relationship between religious attendance and marital satisfaction and moderate evidence for the relationship between church attendance and marital stability.

Studies employing religiosity scales (which often include items assessing prayer, involvement in organized worship, religious experiences, self-identification as a religious or spiritual person, turning to God in times of trouble, etc.) yield more convincing evidence for the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, with many of them reporting a direct relationship between the two: the higher a couple's level of religiosity, the more satisfied they are with their relationships (HUNT / KING, 1978; BUGAIGHIS et al., 1985; WILSON / FILSINGER, 1986; ANTHONY, 1993; SNOW / COMPTON, 1996). FILSINGER / WILSON (1986) make a particularly strong case, reporting that religiosity accounted for twice the variance in marital satisfaction compared to socio-economic status and family characteristics.

There is similar evidence for the relationship between religiosity and marital stability (NYE ET AL., 1973; BUGAIGHIS ET AL., 1985). Religiosity was the second highest reported barrier to divorce, second only to finances and tied with children (ALBRECHT / KUNTZ, 1980). It has further been demonstrated to be related to a lower likelihood of divorce for couples of various lengths of marriage (WHITE / BOOTH, 1991).

These findings are limited, however, because they are based on cross-sectional studies that measure religiosity and marital outcome at the same point in time. These correlational findings leave open the question as to whether couples who are more religious at the beginning of their relationships are actually more likely to be happy or stay married as the marriage progresses. This is especially true given that among the stronger cross-sectional studies, mixed evidence was sometimes found (BURCHINAL / CHANCELLOR, 1962; HANSON, 1981; JENKINS, 1991). In one of the few longitudinal studies, BOOTH and his colleagues measured religiosity and marital satisfaction at several points in time. They found that changes in religiosity did weakly predict later divorce proneness, and changes in marital satisfaction predicted changes in religiosity; specifically, lower marital satisfaction led to less church attendance and less influence of religion on couples' daily lives. In conclusion, the authors state that the "relationship between religion and marriage is both reciprocal and weak" (BOOTH ET AL., 1995, 661). In other words, the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction is a complex one and additional study is needed to clarify it further.

Making sense of these contradictory findings is difficult, perhaps because many researchers have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between religiosity and marital outcome without attempting to understand the *process* by which a faith life may make marriages stronger and more stable. Such an understanding can help to clarify why a relationship between religiosity and marriage has been found in some studies but not in others. For example, WALLEN

(1957) and WALLEN / CLARK (1964) found that, among wives with lower sexual satisfaction, those who are more religious report higher marital satisfaction than those who are less religious. Here, religiosity appeared to function one way in one type of marriage (i.e., increased satisfaction for less sexually satisfying marriages) and in a different way in another type of marriage (i.e., did not increase satisfaction in more sexually satisfying marriages). These early, cross-sectional findings indicate that the function of religiosity in marriage may be moderated by other important variables.

In order to clarify how religiosity functions in marriage, data were collected on two samples of newlywed couples (SULLIVAN, 2000). In order to overcome the limitations of previous findings, couples were studied both cross-sectionally (Sample 1) and longitudinally (Sample 2) over the first five years of their marriage. In addition to assessing religiosity and marital outcome, several other potential moderating variables were also assessed, including levels of marital commitment, attitudes toward divorce, willingness to seek help in times of marital trouble, psychological health (i.e., how neurotic each spouse was), and the age of the spouses at the time of marriage.

Analyses of these data indicate that religiosity seems to affect marital satisfaction indirectly; couples who are more religious have a stronger marital commitment, more conservative attitudes toward divorce, and greater willingness to seek help for their marriages. More importantly, over time, religiosity seems to function differently for couples with higher levels of neuroticism as compared to couples with lower levels of neuroticism. Specifically, religiosity had a positive impact on marital satisfaction for less neurotic husbands and a negative impact for more neurotic husbands. Thus, being more religious does seem to directly lead to higher levels of satisfaction when husbands are psychologically healthy; however, high levels of religiosity may actually have a negative effect on the marriages of more neurotic men.

Consequences for Pastoral Praxis

Our review of psychological studies on religion and marital success, in light of the Church's proactive position on psychological support both during marital preparation and on an ongoing basis for sacramental marriages, leads us to make the following recommendations.

First, ministers ought not to assume that a couple is at low risk for divorce simply because they are both Catholic, or because they are very religious (e.g., attend church services regularly, pray together, etc.). Basic demographic variables (e.g., age at marriage, income, education level, and whether or not their parents were divorced) are better predictors of divorce today than are religious affiliation or levels of religiosity. If some of these circumstances are present, marriage preparation ministers should address these factors and make appropriate referrals for further exploration of these issues. Ministers should either have professional training in pastoral/psychological counseling, or they should have a list of affordable and supportive therapists whose assistance will prepare for, and enhance, the sacramental nature of the union.

Second, higher levels of religiosity *per se* are not a guarantee of marital success, yet religious faith does help in many marriages; this underlines the importance of pre-Cana retreats and the deepening of personal and communal prayer. However, certain psychological difficulties will probably be aggravated by unreflected and misdirected religiosity. As was shown, higher levels of religiosity predicted higher marital satisfaction for husbands who were more mentally healthy (i.e., less neurotic) but higher levels of religiosity predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction for husbands who were less mentally healthy (i.e., more neurotic). Since couples therapy is often successful in helping troubled marriages, this suggests that ecclesial communities should see such warning signs as an invitation to minister to the couple, i.e., to provide all the means necessary for the success of every sacramental union.

Third, the engagement period is perhaps the most propitious moment to address those spiritual and relational concerns that psychological profiling may surface. Generally, couples are focused during this period of time on their relationship; as they move through the interview process, the sessions of counseling, and planning the ceremony, they are apt to want to work on problem areas in their relationship and on undergirding areas of strength. Since sacramental marriage is a common project between two faithful persons, the prospects for a successful and satisfying marriage are to be explored and strengthened in the context of the relationship and not in isolation, i.e., not by judging the relative health/strength of faith of the single person but by assessing the two persons in the couple relationship. In the process of marital preparation, the use of psychological inventories and the exploration of family histories should be carried out with great attention and care, for these important tools can reveal deep strengths as well as debilitating weaknesses and, therefore, bring to light hopeful opportunities.

Fourth, church ministers engaged in work with recently married couples should be on the lookout for "red flags", markers that suggest that a couple may be more vulnerable to divorce or grave marital discord. These include marriage at a young age, lower socio-economic levels, parental divorce, high levels of neuroticism, high levels of stress, poor communication skills, and a family history of domestic violence. All of these factors call for psychological intervention and treatment, as do instability in employment and alcohol/substance abuse. Marital support programs (e.g., the *Equipes de Notre Dame*) can and do provide a supportive context of spirituality and solidarity for couples who are not in crisis and yet who are nevertheless "at risk".

Fifth, while good marriages may well be "made in heaven", they are not made whole and sound simply by a good preparatory process. Sacramental marriages will continue to need spiritual sustenance and social support in the Church community through the years, in sunny and stormy

seasons alike. Given both the importance of Christian marriage as a venue of God's gracious activity and the current negative societal pressures on marriage in all western countries, leading to high rates of dissatisfaction in marriage and/or divorce, Christian communities should discern carefully the effectiveness of their support of marriage, examining among other things the amount of parish resources (in terms of personnel and as a percentage of the parish budget) that are dedicated to supporting this essential Christian vocation.

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• Résumé

Les recherches en psychologie et en sociologie effectuées aux États-Unis depuis plus de 50 ans ont étudié le rapport entre religiosité et stabilité, voire satisfaction dans le mariage. Dans le cadre de ces études, les chercheurs se sont concentrés sur trois grandes questions: quelle influence l'appartenance à une Eglise ou à une confession spécifique, a-t-elle sur le mariage? Peut-on observer davantage de stabilité et de satisfaction chez les couples qui ont une appartenance religieuse homogène que chez ceux où les époux viennent de traditions religieuses différentes? Y a-t-il une corrélation entre un niveau élevé de religiosité et une plus grande stabilité du couple, voire un taux moindre de divorce? L'article énonce sur la base des résultats de la recherche quelques conclusions pour la pastorale du mariage: Aucun argument ne soutient l'hypothèse que le risque de

Se préparer au mariage

divorce est moindre chez les couples où les deux conjoints sont catholiques ou très religieux. Des variables démographiques de base, comme la situation financière du couple, l'instabilité psychologique, les problèmes de drogue ou d'alcool, etc., sont de meilleurs prédicteurs du potentiel de divorce que l'appartenance religieuse ou le niveau de religiosité des époux. Ceci dit, si un niveau élevé de religiosité ne garantit pas automatiquement la réussite d'une union conjugale, il peut quand même être un facteur aidant dans ce cadre. D'autre part, il est assez probable qu'une attitude non approfondie et mal canalisée vis à vis de la religion tend à aggraver certains problèmes psychologiques des époux. Dans la pastorale du mariage, c'est justement la période des fiançailles et donc de la préparation au mariage qui se prête le plus spécialement à un accompagnement dans une

réflexion sur la religiosité et sur la qualité relationnelle et, le cas échéant, à une orientation vers les ressources thérapeutiques appropriées. Dans la pastorale du mariage, les accompagnants pastoraux, lorsqu'ils travaillent avec des jeunes mariés, devraient apprendre à être particulièrement attentifs aux facteurs prédicteurs de divorce. On compte parmi ces facteurs le fait de se marier très jeune, un niveau socio-économique faible, des parents divorcés, un comportement fortement névrotique, un niveau de stress élevé, des compétences communicationnelles peu développées, la présence de violence domestique dans les familles d'origine. Une bonne préparation ne suffit pas en soi à faire un bon mariage; pour cela, il est nécessaire d'offrir aux époux un accompagnement spirituel et psychologique permanent au sein de la communauté ecclésiale.

• Kurzfassung

Der Zusammenhang zwischen Religiosität und Ehestabilität bzw. -zufriedenheit wird in der psychologischen und soziologischen Forschung (in den USA) seit über 50 Jahren untersucht, wobei das Interesse sich auf drei Fragenkomplexe konzentriert hat: Welchen Einfluss hat die Zugehörigkeit zu einer spezifischen Kirche bzw. Konfession auf die Ehe? Weisen die Ehen religiös homogener Paare ein höheres Maß an Ehestabilität und -zufriedenheit auf als Ehen, bei denen die Partner aus unterschiedlichen religiösen Traditionen kommen? Gibt es

Auf die Ehe vorbereiten

eine Entsprechung zwischen einem höheren Grad an Religiosität und größerer Ehestabilität bzw. niedrigerer Scheidungsfälligkeit? Aus den Forschungsergebnissen leitet der Artikel einige Schlussfolgerungen für die Ehepastoral ab: Nichts spricht dafür, dass Ehen ein geringeres Scheidungsrisiko beinhalten, wenn die Partner beide katholisch oder besonders religiös sind. Scheidungsfälligkeit lässt sich besser bemessen, wenn statt kirchlicher Zugehörigkeit bzw. Religiosität andere grundlegende demographische Variablen (finanzielle

Situation des Paares, psychologische Instabilität, Drogen- oder Alkoholprobleme usw.) zu Rate gezogen werden. – Obgleich ein höheres Maß an Religiosität nicht automatisch zum Gelingen der Ehe beiträgt, kann Religiosität doch ein hilfreicher Faktor innerhalb der Ehe sein. Andererseits besteht eine gewisse Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass eine unreflektierte und fehlgeleitete Religiosität bestimmte psychische Probleme der Partner weiter verschlimmert. – In der Ehepastoral eignet sich gerade die Zeit der Verlobung bzw. der Vorbereitung auf die

Hochzeit, um Fragen nach Religiosität und Beziehungsqualität anzusprechen und gegebenenfalls auf die entsprechenden therapeutischen Angebote hinzuweisen. – In der Pastoral für jungverheiratete Paare sollten Seelsorger/innen besondere Aufmerksamkeit

in Hinblick auf scheidungsrelevante Faktoren entwickeln (niedriges Heiratsalter, geringes soziales und wirtschaftliches Auskommen, Scheidung der Eltern, hohes Maß an neurotischem Verhalten bzw. an Stress, schwaches Kommunikationsverhalten, häusliche Gewalt

in den Herkunftsfamilien). – Für das Gelingen der Ehe reicht eine gute Vorbereitung nicht aus; darüber hinaus bedarf es ständiger Begleitung spiritueller und psychologischer Art innerhalb der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft.

• Sommario

La connessione tra religiosità e stabilità o soddisfazione matrimoniale viene indagata da oltre 50 anni da parte della ricerca psicologica e sociologica (negli USA). L'interesse si è concentrato in particolare su tre questioni: che tipo di influsso ha sul matrimonio l'appartenenza ad una determinata chiesa o confessione? I matrimoni tra coppie omogenee da un punto di vista religioso mostrano un grado maggiore di stabilità o soddisfazione, rispetto ai matrimoni in cui i partner provengono da tradizioni religiose diverse? Esiste una corrispondenza tra un più alto grado di religiosità e una maggiore stabilità dei matrimoni o una minore incidenza dei divorzi? Dai risultati della ricerca, l'articolo ricava alcune conseguenze per la pastorale del matrimonio: non ci sono motivi per credere che esistano minori rischi

Preparazione al matrimonio

di divorzio, se entrambi i partner sono cattolici o se sono particolarmente religiosi. La predisposizione al divorzio può essere meglio misurata se, invece dell'appartenenza religiosa o il grado di religiosità, vengono prese in considerazione altre fondamentali variabili demografiche (come ad esempio la situazione finanziaria della coppia, l'instabilità psicologica, problemi di droga o di alcool ecc.). Sebbene un maggior grado di religiosità non contribuisca automaticamente alla riuscita di un matrimonio, può tuttavia costituire un fattore di aiuto all'interno del matrimonio. Tuttavia è possibile, che una religiosità poco ponderata e mal indirizzata peggiori ulteriormente determinati problemi psichici dei partner. Nella pastorale del matrimonio proprio il periodo del fidanzamento o della preparazione

alle nozze è adatto a rivolgere domande sulla religiosità e sulla qualità della relazione ed eventualmente ad indicare le relative possibilità terapeutiche. Nella pastorale per giovani coppie sposate, gli operatori spirituali dovrebbero prestare particolare attenzione nei confronti delle più frequenti cause di divorzio (giovane età degli sposi, scarso sostegno sociale ed economico, divorzio dei genitori, alto grado di comportamento nevrotico o di stress, poca capacità di comunicazione, violenza domestica nelle famiglie di origine). Per la riuscita del matrimonio non è sufficiente una buona preparazione; al di là di tutto, è necessaria una costante presenza di persone o gruppi in grado di accompagnare la coppia nel cammino spirituale e psicologico all'interno della comunità ecclesiale.