

**Matrimony**

**DOGMATIC THEOLOGY**





# Matrimony

Marriage is a sacrament in the Coptic church. The wedding is celebrated in a special church ceremony, and a multitude of customs traditionally surround the occasion. Marriage is a spiritual bond between a man and a woman, sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit, joining them into an indissoluble unit for the purpose of establishing a caring and harmonious Christian family.





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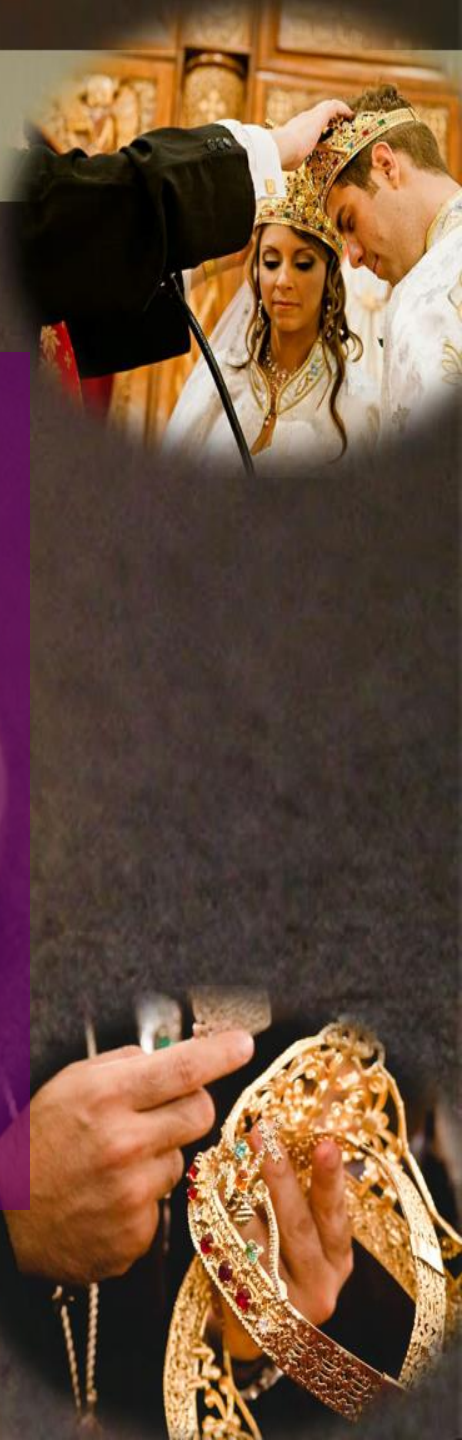
These distinctive characteristics were culled from the Old Testament, the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, the commandments of the apostles, and decrees of various ecumenical councils. God blessed Adam and Eve, and later, Noah, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gn. 1:28; 9:1). Likewise, Christ rebuked the Pharisees who importuned Him for a facile justification of divorce by reminding them that





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"God made them at the beginning male and female, and for this cause a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the twain shall be one flesh" (Mt. 19:5- 6). The presence of Christ at the marriage of Cana was a very significant event. That the Lord accepted an invitation to a wedding and performed His first miracle there reflects the importance He attached to marriage as a sacrosanct (sacred) institution in the structure of society.





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On this basis rests the sacramental approach of the Coptic church to matrimony. Consequently, during the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the priest says this prayer: "O Thou Who wert present at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, and blest it, and changed the water into real wine by Thy Divine power, do bless the marriage of Thy servants [names]."





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In the early centuries of Christianity, the fathers and theologians of the Church strove to establish a permanent solid base for the institution of marriage. St CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA laid special stress on the recognition of the divine process by which man and woman are unified through marriage. His student and successor at the Catechetical School, Origen, in his commentaries on Matthew wrote, "Certainly it is God who joins two in one, so that when he marries a woman to a man there are no longer two. And since it is God who joins them, there is in this joining a grace for those who are joined by God."





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Paul knew this, and he said that just as holy celibacy was a grace, so also was marriage, according to the Word of God, a grace.” The same attitude was expressed by St Ambrose, fourth-century bishop of Milan, in a letter to Pope Siricius: “Neither do we deny that marriage has been sanctified by Christ, since the Divine Word says: “The two shall become one flesh.’“





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In the fifth century Saint **CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA** remarked that "when the wedding was celebrated [at Cana] it is clear that it was entirely decorous (well mannered): for indeed, the Mother of the Savior was there; and, invited along with His disciples, the Savior too was there, working miracles more than being entertained in feasting, And especially that He might sanctify the very beginning of human generation, which certainly is a matter concerning the flesh."





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The fifth-century theologian Saint Augustine maintained that “having been invited, the Lord came to the marriage in order to affirm conjugal chastity and to show that marriage is a Sacrament.” Similarly, Epiphanius, fourth-century bishop of Salamis, adduced that “two reasons can be advanced to explain why the marriage was celebrated with external festivities in Cana of Galilee, and why the water was truly changed into wine:





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so that the tide of bacchanalian frenetics in the world might be turned to chastity and dignity in marriage, and so that the rest might be directed aright to the enjoyment both of wine free of toil and of the favor that presented it; so that in every way it might stop the mouths of those aroused against the Lord, and so that it might show that He is God with the Father and His Holy Spirit."





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In contrast to that wave of bacchanalian dissipation and intemperance to which Epiphanius refers, there arose a tendency that veered (turned) to the other extreme in advocating strict celibacy and harsh self-restraint. MANICHAEISM and GNOSTICISM frowned upon marriage, and many of their adherents flouted (disobeyed) Christian teachings on this subject with derision (scorn) and contempt. The church, however, continued to affirm the sanctity of marriage.





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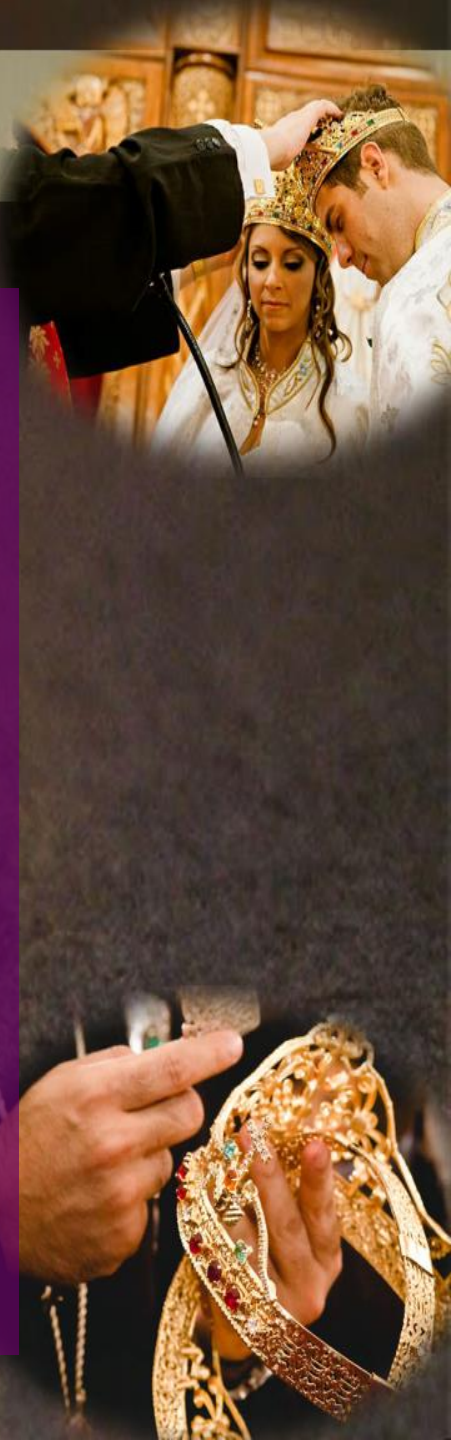
In 345 the Council of Gangra in Asia Minor adopted farreaching resolutions that were directed against his spirit of false asceticism that condemned marriage and boycotted ordinary services of the church.





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Among other measures, the council decreed the excommunication of those who inveighed against lawful church marriage, those who refused to receive Holy Communion from the hand of a married priest, And those who remained celibate not because of a genuine pursuit of a state of celibacy but because of contempt for marriage and hatred of married persons. The council also condemned women who deserted their husbands as a result of a similar disdainful outlook on marriage and a false sense of decorum and affected propriety. Likewise, it decreed that members of the clergy who turned away their wives on the grounds of a more pious relationship could be expelled.





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St Clement of Alexandria, in his Stromateis (Miscellanies) wrote, "If, however, marriage, though commanded by the Law, were yet sinful— really, I do not see how anyone could say that sin has been commanded by God. If the Law is sacred, then marriage is a holy estate." In light of these religious sanctions, the marriage ceremony, in harmony with other sacraments, must be conducted in the church. (It is true that in certain cases it can be held in a private house, but this is the exception to the rule, similar to baptizing an invalid at home or administering the **HOLY UNCTION** of the sick to a dying person in a hospital or at home.) The officiating priest must be in ecclesiastical vestments.





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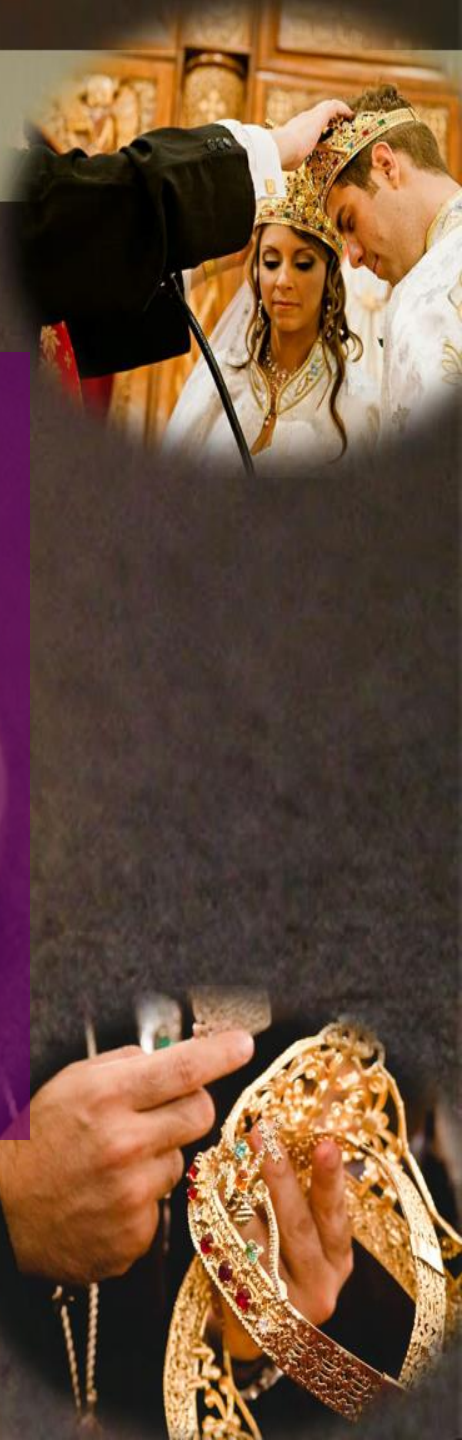
According to Safi ibn al-‘Assal, "a wedding may be conducted only in the presence of a priest who shall pray for the bridal couple and administer Holy Communion to them in the ikkil ceremony, By which they are united and become one flesh, as God Almighty has ordained. Contrary to this it shall not be deemed a proper marriage, for it is through Church prayer alone that man and woman can become mutually legitimate."





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This sanctity of marriage makes it an indissoluble bond that may be broken only on the grounds of adultery (Mt. 5:23, 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12; Jn. 16:18) or death (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom.7:2-3). The church also concedes that certain circumstances may be considered tantamount (equal) to death, as when a husband or wife renounces the Christian faith, In which cases the partner may be allowed to divorce and remarry.

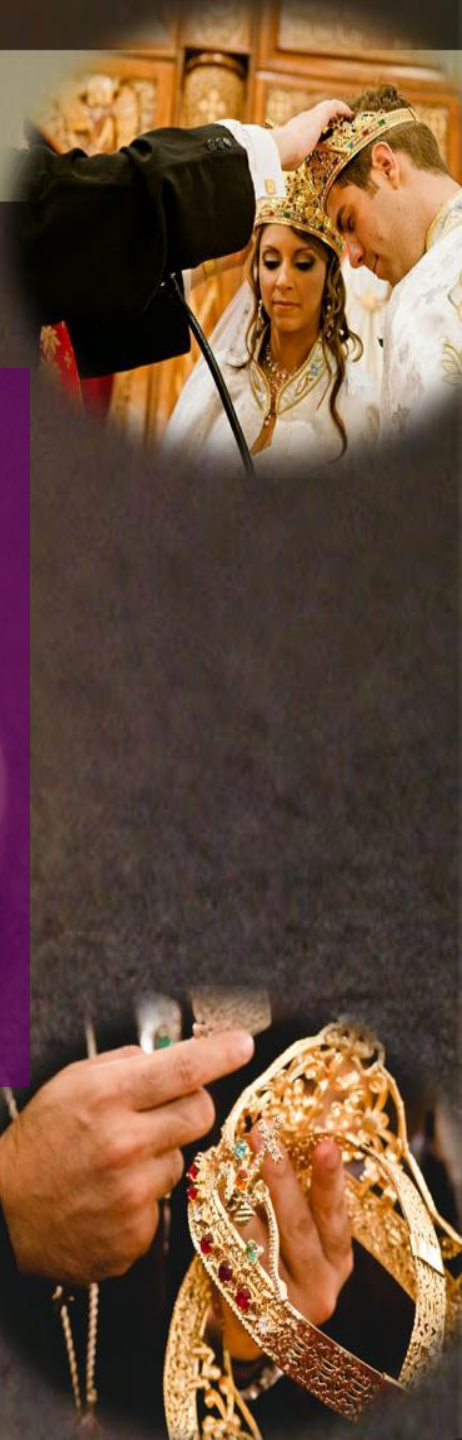




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Marriage is thus a lifelong relationship between man and woman, the purpose of which is the enjoyment of mutual company on the basis of equal partnership, the procreation of children, and the avoidance of sin.

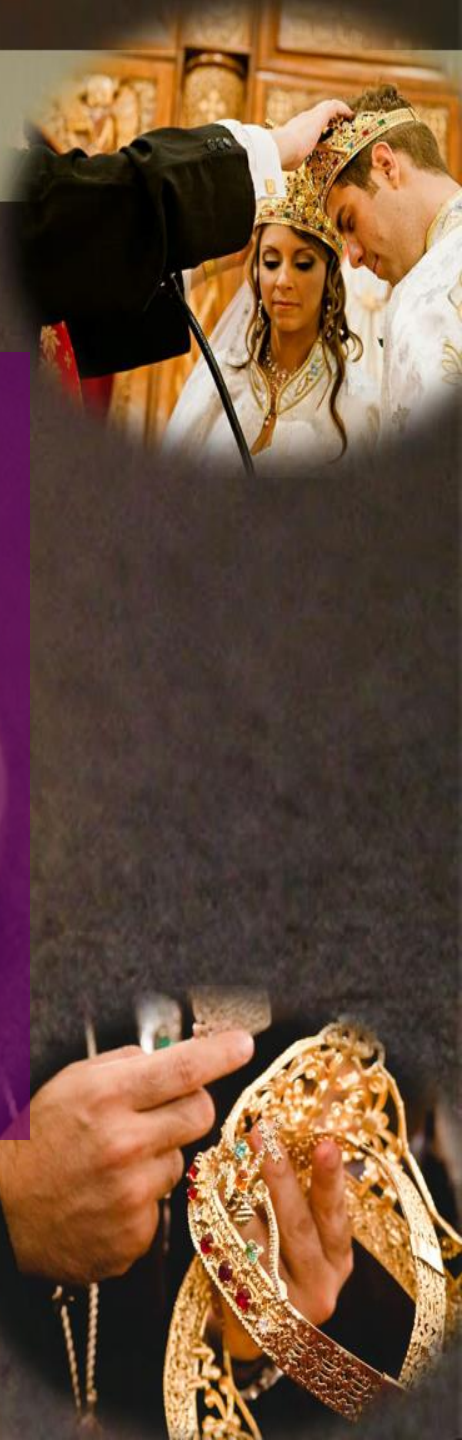
The annals (records) of the Coptic church, however, are not devoid of instances in which a couple entered voluntarily into a chaste relationship of spiritual communion, although they were married.





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According to the **SYNAXARION**, Saint **DEMETRIUS I**, third century patriarch of Alexandria, had been married to his wife for forty-seven years before he was chosen patriarch, but both had lived in strict chastity. Anba Ammonius, in the fourth century, lived with his wife for seventeen years in complete chastity until her death, when he became a monk. Other examples are Anba Cyrus of Jawjar in the eighth century and Saint **JOHN KAMA**, in the ninth century.





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