



## Article

# Preparations for Marriage in the Jewish and Catholic Traditions

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**Abstract:** In many churches nowadays, there has been a standardized approach to premarital counseling for couples involving social, pastoral, and psychological perspectives. In contrast, many rabbis and other Jewish officials still concentrate on legal aspects alone. The need for resolving important issues on the verge of wedlock is too often left to secular experts in law, psychology, or counseling. However, in recent years, this lack of formal training for marriage preparation has also been acknowledged by the Jewish clergy in order to incorporate it in the preparatory period before the bond is tied. This case study focuses on Jewish and Roman Catholic conceptions of marriage, past and present. We intend to do a comparative analysis of the prerequisites of religious marriage based on the assumption that both Judaism and the Roman Catholic Church have a distinct legal framework to assess marriage preparation.

**Keywords:** counselling; intermarriage; Jewish law; kiddushin; marriage preparations; nissuin; shidduchin; wedding; sacrament of marriage

## 1. Introduction

In Judaism, marriage is a religious institution subject to divine statutes. Jewish law has the task of providing a framework for these religious and ethical ideals. Accordingly, during its development, it shows a tendency to elevate marriage from the realm of private contract law to an ethical issue and to emphasize its moral character. Marriage, built on such moral principles, even forms for the prophets a parable of God's close union with Israel. For this reason, Judaism has always regarded marriage as good and desirable, as well as divinely sanctioned, and, with few exceptions, has never seen celibacy as a higher status. The preparation for marriage is an interesting topic, especially since it, in contrast to the Christian approach, aims to examine all possible impediments to marriage. This may seem legalistic, but it serves to avoid damaging the sanctity of married life.

The Roman Catholic Church has developed comprehensive and systematic premarital education programs. In fact, clergy of this faith may not perform marriages unless the bride and groom demonstrate that they have undergone adequate preparation. The programs include components of religious education as well as training in the pragmatics of marriage and family life.

Some of the topics that couples usually address in premarital counseling are: How do we communicate about sensitive or difficult issues? What would we do if either of us felt that our marriage was in crisis? Would we agree to go to couples counseling in the future if either of us felt it was important? What do we think about parenting and raising children? What values would we like to instill in our children, and what religious choices would we like to make in raising them? Infertility and adoption are also aspects that can be brought up. If one of the couples already has children, one question is how to raise them together. In addition, learn how to deal with problems related to finances, sex, or cleanliness in the home. What are our goals in life? Where do they overlap, and where might there be tension? How do we deal with our respective families? In short, premarital counseling is about empowerment and developing competence for marriage and family life.



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In 2000, rabbinic leaders such as the Rabbinical Council of America advocated that synagogue congregations consider a similar policy. The idea was to ensure that all couples receive a minimum amount of premarital education before they reach the *chuppah*, the wedding canopy, and perhaps even regularly during the early stages of marriage (Weinreb 2000). Apparently, the appeal did not receive much response in terms of pastoral considerations. In his essay “A Marital Agreement to Mediate”, David Joseph Mescheloff stresses that “much effort has gone into searching for a ‘halakhically and legally valid’ marital agreement that will help alleviate the contemporary *aguna* problem, which is caused by a live spouse who refuses to cooperate in the delivery of a *get*”, a document of divorce (Mescheloff 2010, pp. 29–30). In 2012, the Orthodox Union published “Six Conversations About Marriage: A Guide”, which “identifies six stages during the dating and marriage process in which preparation and thought can make a significant difference” (Hauer 2012, p. 2). The guiding thread, however, is not counseling but *taharat ha-mishpacha*, “family purity”.

Jewish marriage is not a sacrament in the Catholic sense; it is a *mitzvah*, the fulfillment of a religious commandment. And it is a *brit*, a sacred covenant that entails sacred duties. The spouses have an obligation to each other, to the community, and to God to be faithful in their relationship and in love and mutual respect and to make their home a “little sanctuary” filled with the beauty of the holy.

Three goals can be formulated for marriage: First, it serves human procreation. God wants the earth to be inhabited, and he has a plan for man’s activity in history. Furthermore, marriage serves life in happy companionship because “It is not good for the Human to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Family life can be considered the third goal of marriage. Marriage and family are regarded as the foundation of society: “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife” (Gen 2:24).

## 2. Prerequisites for Marriage in the Jewish Tradition

### 2.1. Three Successive Legal Acts Lead to Marriage

Since Talmudic times, marriage under Jewish law has consisted of three successive legal acts: *shidduchin* (betrothal), *kiddushin* (courtship), and *nissuin* (the actual marriage and bringing home of the bride) (cf. Shetreet and Homolka 2021). Thus, in a sense, betrothal (*shidduchin*) is the first stage of the three-stage process of marriage. This act is also called *tena'im*, which in turn is short for *tena'e shidduchin* (“terms of betrothal”). In biblical times, the betrothal probably occurred orally, and the details of the agreement were negotiated between the two fathers. In Talmudic times, on the other hand, we find an explicit contractual arrangement between the two parties, which was often also recorded in writing. In this contract, the young woman and the young man express their agreement that they will be married to each other at a future date. By *shidduchin*, then, we refer to the formal act of betrothal (Homolka 2009, pp. 61–63).

Mistakenly, in colloquial language, this first moment of marriage, according to Jewish law, is often called *erussin* (correctly: “marriage”). The mistake of this everyday way of speaking is that the *erussin* is rather to be equated with the *kiddushin*, the marriage rite, thus denoting the second legal act in Jewish marriage: the transition of the betrothed man to the status of the *erus*, the engaged groom, and of the betrothed woman to the status of the *erusa*, the engaged bride.

Finally, the third moment of the marital legal bond is the legal act called *nissuin*, which is clearly distinguishable from *kiddushin*. In it, the actual marriage takes place as the sealing of the entire process of marriage. Nowadays, as has been the case for several centuries, *kiddushin* and *nissuin* are performed as part of a single wedding ceremony, but from a legal point of view, they are still two completely different processes (Homolka 2009, pp. 69–71).

Of course, the *shidduchin* is also subject to historical change and has undergone various modifications over the centuries. It gained its greatest importance in the Middle Ages (especially since the 11th and 12th centuries), when there were major changes in

the legal and ritual procedures of marriage. The ceremonial unification of kiddushin and nissuin that took place at that time led to the fact that the form of the preceding agreements also found new interest. In the process initiated by this, the form of the Jewish betrothal that is still valid today was developed (Bloch 1980, p. 27).

A number of attempts were also made to strengthen the legal validity of the shidduchim. They were now uniformly recorded in a written document (*shetar shidduchin*, i.e., notarization of the engagement). In this document, the compensation to be paid in the event of the withdrawal of one of the parties is fixed in advance. Even though it was considered inappropriate to have a marriage without a prior engagement, it had little legal force. And insofar as it was based on a merely oral agreement—against the trend toward written fixation—it could be broken with impunity, although such a “broken promise” was morally condemned with the formula: “He who punished the generation of the flood and the generation of the Tower of Babel will also punish him who does not stand by his word” (M BM 4:2).

## 2.2. Marriage Requirements

According to Jewish law, anyone wishing to enter a marriage must meet certain requirements. First and foremost, this includes legal capacity, i.e., the legal ability to enter a valid contract under private law. Deaf mutes, persons of unsound mind, and minors (*cherech, shoteh ve'katan*) cannot, in principle, enter a valid marriage. According to the Talmud, the woman must consent to the marriage; however, silence was taken as consent. Since marriages were often arranged by the parents and the marriage was traditionally unilateral, that is, initiated by the man, the daughter bowed to their choice, especially since in Talmudic times, girls were often given in marriage at the age of twelve or even younger. By the marriage contract, she passed from her father's care to that of her husband. Although a minor could not enter marriage himself, before the introduction of civil marriage, the father of a minor daughter could, in extreme cases, give her into marriage without her knowledge or consent. However, this “early marriage” is already rejected in Talmudic times (bT Qid 41a; ShA, EH 37:8); also, the minor can object to the marriage upon reaching the full legal age.

Furthermore, the qualification to marry, nubility, is tied to certain physical conditions: A known inability to procreate because of castration, for example, is an absolute impediment to marriage. There are also prohibitions on marriage: between relatives or with *mamzerim* (bastards) or Karaites. *Kohanim* (members of the former priestly caste) observe special rules in choosing partners. Another group of marriage prohibitions has the purpose of promoting morality. For example, a man may not remarry the wife he divorced if she has since entered another marriage, which was then dissolved again by the death of or divorce from the second husband. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a woman who has been convicted of adultery may neither continue her previous marriage nor marry the adulterer (Klein 1979, p. 385). Similarly, a man is prohibited from marrying a woman for whom he has acted as a representative in a divorce or even as an individual witness in the determination of the death of her husband (ShA, HM 33–35, ShA, EH 12:1). The rule that a woman who has already been widowed twice under unexplained circumstances should not enter another marriage also belongs in this context (bT Yevt 64b). However, this rule has not been enforced since the early Middle Ages.

## 2.3. Reasons for the Prohibition of Marriages

A problem that occurs much more frequently in practice than the cases discussed last is the problem of intermarriage, that is, marriage between Jews and Gentiles. Obviously, the underlying reason for this is the sanctity of the Jewish family and home, as well as the Jewish status of the children. Under Mosaic law, marriage to all Canaanite peoples was forbidden. This prohibition was then extended to almost all foreign peoples and is the basis for the general prohibition of marriage to non-Jews unless the potential spouse converts to Judaism (Homolka 2009, pp. 33–59). With emancipation and the possibility

of civil marriage, intermarriage between Jews and Christians became more common, and there were certainly some attempts to change the official attitude toward this problem. For example, the Grand Sanhédrin, convened by Napoleon in 1807, declared that marriages between Jews and non-Jews were valid under civil law. And although these marriages were not permissible from a religious point of view, they were not to entail a “ban curse” in the future (Mielziner 1901, p. 47; Philipson 1931, p. 20). Accordingly, the Brunswick Rabbinical Conference of Reform Rabbis decided in 1844: “[...]The marriage of a Jew with a Christian, marriage with adherents of monotheistic religions generally, is not prohibited, provided that the laws of the state permit parents to raise the children of such a union also in the Jewish faith” (Meyer 1995, p. 133). Conservative Judaism, however, recognizes only marriage between two Jews as *kiddushin*.

Today’s progressive Judaism, like Orthodox and Conservative, discourages intermarriage because intermarriage might weaken the Jewish community. Progressive Jews recognize, however, that in an open society, such marriages do occur. In such cases, the Jewish partner should be encouraged and supported to maintain his or her connection to the Jewish community and to raise his or her children as Jews. Whether the religious blessing of intermarriages should nevertheless be permitted is a topic of debate, especially in North America. Individual members of the liberal Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) are willing to officiate at such weddings. However, the conference as a whole has repeatedly spoken out against such a practice (Central Conference of American Rabbis 1983). Progressive Jewish communities in the rest of the world take a similar view.

### 2.3.1. The Minimum Age

Each legal system sets a minimum age for marriage. This age has varied and still varies in different historical periods and in different countries. In general, the age that was considered a prerequisite for marriageability has steadily increased over the centuries. In traditional Jewish law, there is a difference between boys and girls regarding the minimum age for marriage. A boy is a minor, a *katan*, until the age of 13 (MT Ishut 2:10). During this time, he cannot enter a valid marriage; a marriage entered by him would be void (MT Ishut 4:7; ShA, EH 43:1). After that, at the age of 13 years and one day, he becomes a “son of duty” (*bar mitzvah*) and thus religiously mature, a *gadol*. The boy now has all the rights and duties of an adult, including the right to marry. Nevertheless, it does not seem to have been customary for boys to enter marriage immediately upon reaching adulthood. The Mishnah recommends the age of 18 for this purpose (M Abot 5:21); the Talmud mentions the period “from 16 to 22” (bT Qid 30a), “from 18 to 24” (bT Qid 30a), or “under 20” (bT Qid 29b) as the ideal age for marriage (bT Qid 30a). The Shulchan Aruch, the halachic vademecum by Joseph Caro, published in Venice in 1565, says that a young man should marry at the age of 18, preferably even earlier, but certainly at the age of 20 (ShA, EH 1:3). Of course, such recommendations are obsolete in our time.

### 2.3.2. Health Aspects

Deficiencies in physical health do not generally prevent the validity of a marriage. If the man is known to be incapable of procreation from birth or through illness, this is not an obstacle to marriage (ShA, EH 5:10). A person who is mentally ill is generally considered incapable of giving consent in a legally valid manner; he is considered to be someone “without personality” in the legal sense. Therefore, she may not enter marriage. However, persons suffering from a merely temporary mental illness may marry in lucid moments (MT Ishut 4:9; ShA, EH 44:1–2). Deaf-mutes posed a special problem in ancient times. But the Talmud allowed them to marry with reservations, relying on their ability to communicate by sign language (bT Jeb 112b; MT Ishut 4:9; ShA, EH 44:1). Finally, drunkenness beyond a certain level also limits the ability to freely consent (MT Ishut 4:18); the degree of drunkenness that precludes free consent is referred to (following Gen 19:30–36) as the “drunkenness of Lot”. A marriage entered into in this condition is, therefore, invalid. These rules are based on the general principle that marriage requires the voluntary consent

of both partners. For the same reason, marriage is also invalid if the woman's consent has been coerced (MT Ishut 4:1; ShA, EH 42:1). If the man's consent was based on coercion, however, some authorities consider the marriage valid but require that it be dissolved. The provisions of traditional Jewish law mentioned here, however, are severely limited in their significance by the fact that they generally compete with existing state laws.

### 2.3.3. Temporary Impediments to Marriage

In addition to the basic prohibitions on marriage, there are also several temporary impediments to marriage. These include the rule that a widow or divorced woman may not enter a new marriage within 90 days of her husband's death or receipt of the divorce decree to avoid ambiguity about paternity in the event of pregnancy (ShA, EH 13:1). A nursing widow or divorced wife may not remarry until 24 months after the birth of her child. This (long) period was the usual breastfeeding period for newborns (bT Yeb 42a; ShA, EH 13:11–14). However, this prohibition was often overridden in the responsa literature. If the wife dies, the husband is not to remarry during the mourning period of 30 days and, in addition, is to wait for the next three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) before entering a new marriage (ShA, YD 392:2). However, this rule does not apply if there are young children who need to be cared for.

### 2.4. The Betrothal (*Shidduchin*) and Its Contractual Status in Jewish Law

The central content of the *shidduchin* is the mutual agreement of a man and a woman to enter marriage with each other, although traditionally, a matchmaker, the *shadchan*, may also establish the relationship. . . . The *shidduchin* also involves the families of both parties. Strictly speaking, then, the term in Jewish law encompasses two different types of promises:

1. The promise of the man to marry the woman at a certain time or at a time to be determined.
2. The promise of the parents or other relatives of the parties, by which they agree to their future marriage, including dowry and wedding expenses.

For an overview, see Zacharias Frankel's outlines of the Mosaic-Talmudic marriage law (Frankel 1860). The *shidduchin* is regarded in Judaism as the obligatory first stage in the process of marriage: In Jewish law, it is traditionally considered immoral to enter marriage with a woman unless the status of *shidduchin* has first been passed. Nevertheless, today, the formal *shidduchin* is often omitted for practical reasons. Instead, the future spouses become engaged according to secular custom. In this case, the respective rules of civil law apply.

Jewish law recognizes the action for breach of betrothal as a special case of the action for breach of contract. The promise of marriage, however, has the special feature that there is no claim for fulfillment here. However, the party who has broken the promise may be obliged to pay damages (Homolka 2009, pp. 63–67).

### 2.5. The Meaningful Symbolic Power of Marriage

All these are primarily legalistic aspects. Today, of course, in most countries except for the state of Israel, marriage and the family are regulated by a comprehensive system of state norms. The liberal Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873–1956) puts it very precisely: "Just as we no longer have a civil law of our own, strictly speaking, we also no longer have a marriage law. We have only a marriage right but no marriage law. What is consummated is not a copulation but only a *benedictio*. It is no longer a legal act that is consummated, but almost only a homiletic act, with us and with the Orthodox" (Baeck 2005, p. 505). And yet, for Baeck, marriage also has an inherent mystery: "Where mystery is involved, we cannot abdicate in favor of the state. The hidden, the sacred reaches so deeply into the marital that we cannot abandon this realm to the profane. Secondly, for us, an essential is the community factor. There is no Judaism without Jewish community, and the cell of community is the family



and, through it, marriage. For the sake of community, we must hold on to Jewish marriage, we must therefore hold on to tradition” (Baeck 2005, p. 505).

Even if the legal commitment for citizens of the Jewish faith is already given by civil marriage today, Jewish marriage retains meaningful symbolic power, and thus, religious family law still has great significance in Judaism today.

#### Five Symbolic Steps towards Nissuin, the Wedding

Although there is no proper marriage preparation in the form of seminars and reflective education by the rabbi, Jewish tradition contains several spiritually meaningful prewedding customs to support and honor the bride and groom before their Big Day. Five rituals help the couple to celebrate, relax, and prepare before the chuppah is raised: Separation, *aufruf*, *mikvah*, fasting, and *badecken*, the veiling of the bride.

Traditionally, Jewish couples separate for a period before the wedding. This split used to last an entire week, but today, many couples spend only a couple of days apart. It is an opportunity for the bride and groom to have time alone or be with close family and friends.

Jewish to-be-weds are publicly honored with an *aufruf*, Yiddish, for “calling up”. On the Shabbat before the wedding (or the Shabbat after the wedding for Sephardi Jews), the groom recites the blessings before and after the first Torah reading. In egalitarian congregations, the bride and groom may say the blessings together. When they are done, there is an obligatory shower of candies and nuts, wishing for a sweet marriage. The *aufruf* is usually followed by a celebratory meal (Klein 1979, p. 399).

Immersing in the *mikvah*, or ritual bath, prior to a wedding allows the bride and/or groom to quietly mark the transition from being single to being married. It can also create an island of peace, contemplation, and perspective amid the public ceremonies and celebrations that surround the big event. According to traditional Jewish practice, a bride visits the *mikvah* within four days of her wedding, seven days after the end of her period. This joyous occasion is followed by a small party for women, friends, and family. Sephardic Jews celebrate with a ritual called *noche de bano*, or “night of the bath”, where the bride is presented with scented soaps and perfumes. Some grooms also go to a *mikvah* to prepare for their weddings. They may be accompanied by a group of friends and have men-only parties afterwards.

In most Jewish communities, both bride and groom fast, beginning at sundown the night before the wedding. Before the wedding ceremony, two separate receptions are held (usually in adjacent rooms), one for the bride and another for the groom, who has not broken their fast yet. It is customary for a groom to deliver (or attempt to deliver) a learned discourse at the *tisch* (“table”). But traditionally, he is interrupted by his friends shortly after beginning, with lively singing and rhythmic clapping in which all present join to prevent him from continuing. This custom is not intended as an affront or as an act of disrespect to the groom but is designed to protect the groom, who may be less than scholarly, lest he be shamed on what should be his most joyous day. They will meet again only at the *badecken*, the veiling ceremony that follows the reception (cf. Wiener 2013, p. 69).

The bride sits on a distinctive, ornate throne-like chair. Her friends and family approach, wish *mazal tov*, and offer their heartfelt wishes and words of encouragement. At the groom’s reception, songs are sung, and words of Torah are often delivered. In many communities, this occasion is used to complete and sign two of the wedding documents: the *tenai’m* (“engagement” contract) and the *ketubah* (marriage contract or prenuptial agreement). At the conclusion of the reading of the *tenai’m*, the mothers of the bride and groom break a china or glass plate to the joyous shouts of *mazal tov!*

After the *kabbalat panim* receptions comes the *badecken*, the veiling ceremony. A procession headed by the groom goes to the bridal reception room, where the groom covers the bride’s face with a veil. The custom originated with the matriarch Rebecca, who covered her face when meeting her groom, Isaac. The veil symbolizes the idea of modesty and conveys the message that no matter how attractive physical appearances may be, the soul and character are paramount. After the groom veils the bride, the parents of the bride and

groom approach the bride and bless her (Klein 1979, p. 401). The groom's entourage then retreats from the room. The bride and groom proceed with their chuppah preparations, and everyone else continues to the site of the chuppah, the wedding canopy. The couple's fast is broken with the first glass of wine under the chuppah. Like Yom Kippur, marriage fasting is a way to purify oneself, enabling the bride and groom to enter the chuppah and their new life together with a clean slate.

### 3. Main Elements of Marriage in the Catholic Tradition

For the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is a religious reality. God is the Creator of man and the Creator of marriage. He has a specific plan for him. Knowing this plan is essential for a man to find his true identity.

When analyzing the issues of God's plan for marriage and family, we must first take into account two realities: the mystery of creation and the mystery of salvation. At the same time, it should be emphasized that, for God, the creation of the world and its salvation are one eternal plan. Creation is shown in the Holy Scriptures as the first act that begins the path of salvation (Filipiak 1972, pp. 145–55). The creative and salvific orders are united here through the Person of Jesus Christ, who is "the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15). God, creating the world to be a dwelling place for man, wanted to conclude a covenant with him, basing it on relationships of love, faithfulness, and trust, and he expected their reciprocation from man. This covenant also concerned, from the very beginning, marriage. "God's saving intervention reaches to the very core of marriage, uplifting and transforming what is natural. In the history of salvation, marriage has never been just a "secular thing". From the very beginning, it was a reflection and image of God's infinite love, which is the ultimate foundation of all events related to the covenant" (Grzeszkowiak 2010, p. 65). Marriage is the image of God and is also a certain anthropological phenomenon based on the human genesis contained in the pages of the Bible.

The Second Vatican Council recalled this important truth in the following words: "For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. (1) All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole" (GS 48).

#### 3.1. *Marriage Is a Covenant*

Marriage, which is the foundation of the family, has become a sign of the covenant with redeemed humanity. Christ sanctified it with his sacrifice on the Cross, making it a sacramental sign of his love for the Church. According to Jerzy Grzeszkowiak, "marriage was designed by God not only as an image of God but also as a type of saving covenant that God concluded with people. In marriage, in the order of salvation, the fact becomes even more clearly and radically visible that marriage is not fulfilled only for itself but that it has an important function to fulfill in God's saving action towards all humanity and its history (Grzeszkowiak 1985, p. 37). The essence of the marital covenant mentioned here is not only the relationship between a man and a woman but also the relationship between the Creator and marriage. Marriage and family belong to the order of creation. Moreover, as Edward Ozorowski emphasized in his book, marriage and family "are the original reality and have their own inviolable rules determined by God" (Ozorowski 2009, p. 11).

By creating man as male and female, God has already hidden the mystery of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Based on the analysis of biblical texts, Grzeszkowiak stated that "marriage, as an institution belonging to the economy of creation, was established as a natural model announcing Christ's love for the Church and, at the same time, it was already determined in its meaning and structure by the same love of Christ for the Church. [...] God created marriage "in the beginning" according to a certain archetype inherent in His plan, which was the spousal bond of Christ with the Church [...] His Bride and Body. This is the specificity of "marriage in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39), i.e., the essence of

what the modern Church understands by the “sacramentality of marriage” (Grzeškowiak 2010, pp. 134–35).

### 3.2. *Unity and Indissolubility of Marriage*

God, the Creator, is Love. Out of love, He brought man into existence in order for him to love. Therefore, the Creator inscribed in the humanity of men and women a vocation to love, which is the natural foundation of the marital relationship, which is one of the forms of implementing God’s plan of love.

Love is, therefore, a matter of the highest importance, the main principle of the entire marital life, an impulse for constant development. Of course, love is understood here as a communion of persons consisting of a mutual and free gift of self. The choices people make should be made out of love and freedom. This is necessary when you want to promise another person undying love and fidelity, putting yourself at the other person’s complete disposal. “In such an act of free choice, a person realizes himself and, at the same time, grows beyond himself, entering the dimension of transcendence. Because every act of choice and decision to remain faithful to someone forever is, in a way, a victory over time and its transience. At the same time, it is something creative because in it, a person becomes more himself, and by sovereignly disposing of his freedom, he possesses himself even more” (Grzeškowiak 2010, p. 161). Love, which so fascinates, makes happy, and unites a man and a woman, naturally leads them to an irrevocable and radical bond in marriage. This love between the two of them becomes marital love. And it is she, “established by the Creator”, that, in turn, demands unity and indissolubility, which are the attributes of marriage.

Judaism allows divorce but makes it legally very difficult. For the Catholic church, marital indissolubility is a gift. John Paul II emphasizes this truth in his teaching: “Christ renews the first plan that the Creator inscribed in the hearts of man and woman, and in the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony offers a “new heart”: thus the couples are not only able to overcome “hardness of heart” (Mt 19, 1), but also and above all they are able to share the full and definitive love of Christ, the new and eternal Covenant made flesh. Just as the Lord Jesus is the “faithful witness” (Rev 3:14), the “yes” of the promises of God (cf. 2 Cor 1:20), and thus the supreme realization of the unconditional faithfulness with which God loves His people, so Christian couples are called to participate truly in the irrevocable indissolubility that binds Christ to the Church His bride, loved by Him to the end (cf. Jn 13:1)” (FC, no. 20). Marital fidelity is achieved by those spouses who cooperate with the grace of the sacrament of marriage, that is, by those who overcome their egoism through everyday efforts aimed at true love in the spirit of *communio personarum*.

### 3.3. *Giving Birth and Raising Offspring*

Marital love, which is spousal love, is, by its nature, fertile love. The Second Vatican Council teaches on this matter as follows: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents” (GS, no. 50). Authentic love always bears fruit. True marital love, therefore, aims at opening to a new life and cooperation with God the Creator. Tadeusz Styczen claimed that spouses should go beyond marital communion towards the Creator as the Giver of the special gift that is a child for them, which means at the same time going beyond marital communion towards family communion (Styczen 1993, pp. 187–88).

The quality of upbringing depends largely on the personal relationship between parents and children. Rocco Buttiglione claims that parents’ love is extremely important for a child. It does not matter what character or level of love they represent. After all, they can love them with a fully personal love, strengthened by supernatural grace; they can love with a love that is in some sense personal but without a supernatural dimension; they can “love” by “satisfying the parental instinct”; they can “love” by using violence. The child understands spiritually that he owes his origins to his parents and also recognizes the nature



of the beginning of his existence based on the quality of this love. According to Buttiglione, only in the first case, where love is a fully personal and strengthened supernatural grace, will the child experience his or her own existence in the world as endowed with meaning, fully justified, justifying the sense of self-worth (Buttiglione 1991, p. 191).

Education for love is education through love. Such upbringing leads to the formation of the mature personality of a responsible person; this is achieved through self-education. However, much of this matter depends on the educational environment. Man “recognizes love through the love of other people while opening himself to the love of God himself. A person more easily recognizes his or her vocation to love, the essence of this love, and the ways of its implementation when he or she lives in an environment “marked” by love” (Nagórny 1993, p. 24).

#### 4. Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage

Preparation for the sacrament of marriage is essential for the good of those who are preparing, as well as for the good of the Church and society (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996, no. 1).

The period before marriage is a special time for engaged couples. This is a time to discern one’s vocation to married life. This time should be used for special evangelization. After all, the issue of faith in the case of a sacramental marriage is a key one. The document of the Pontifical Council for the Family suggests that engaged couples are “(…) called to understand what it means to be responsible and mature love, lived in that community of life and love that will be their family—a true domestic Church that will contribute to the enrichment of the whole Church” (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996, no. 1).

People who serve young people in preparing them for sacramental marriage want their relationships to be successful. However, it is worth realizing that the fulfillment of such a desire depends on many factors. The first of them is related to the development of a person’s personality in the family home, the second with the period of engagement, the third with the motivation for choosing a spouse, and the fourth with the decision to get married. The circumstances mentioned here should be taken into account in the process of preparing two people for the sacrament of marriage (Dzierżanowski 2000, p. 129).

The effectiveness of this process depends on evangelization, which shapes the maturation and deepening of faith. More and more often, we are faced with faith that is so weak that, to stimulate it, we often have to start with elementary truths. The apostolic exhortation “Familiaris consortio” advises in such cases to do it “through a path of faith analogous to the catechumenate” (FC, no. 66). Pope Francis wants to continue this idea in his pastoral activities, as he stated during his speech to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota: “It is therefore necessary (..) for programs of preparation for the sacrament of marriage to be more and more effective, not only for human growth but above all for the faith of the engaged couple. The main goal of the meetings is to help engage couples in real, gradual inclusion in the mystery of Christ, in the Church, and with the Church. This involves a gradual maturation in faith by proclaiming the Word of God, clinging to Christ, and following Him generously” (Franciszek 2017). Therefore, it is about making a journey together with engaged couples who prepare for the sacrament of marriage. This path is supposed to lead to an encounter with Christ and then to deepening this relationship and making an authentic discernment of the marital vocation.

##### 4.1. Further Preparation

The paths of catechumenal initiation are preceded by further preparation, which includes children and youth. This happens, above all, in the family. A healthy, faithful family in which there is an ambience of mutual trust will best introduce a child to the world of love between people and God. After all, it is the family that creates such spiritual values as parental love, children’s love and respect for their parents, and family solidarity. It is in this reality that the ground is being prepared, as it were, in which the vocation to married life will have a chance to sprout.

Raising children begins before they are born—in an environment where new life is expected and welcomed. This process takes place mainly through a loving dialogue between the mother and the human being who is to be born. It should be continued after the baby is born. We must always bear in mind the truth that upbringing is “primarily the giving of humanity and a two-sided gift to the newborn person” (John Paul II 1994, no. 16). The best example of marital love will be, above all, parents (Majdański 1983, pp. 124–29).

John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation “Familiaris consortio”, pointed out that further preparation “begins in early childhood, in that wise family training that leads children to discover themselves as being endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one’s inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on. Also necessary, especially for Christians, is a solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission” (FC no. 66; Pontifical Council for the Family 1996, no. 22).

There is no doubt, therefore, that the family is a special and privileged place for preparing young people for marriage. It is here that young people should be “aptly and seasonably instructed in the dignity, duty, and work of married love. Trained thus in the cultivation of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to enter a marriage of their own after an honorable courtship” (GS, no. 49). Therefore, further preparation for marriage consists in presenting family life as a calling from God, which must first be read and then undertaken and fulfilled (Pryba 2002, p. 134).

Parents should educate their children to love responsibly and sacrificially. They should instill in them, from an early age, respect for every healthy human value, both in interpersonal and social relationships. They should properly shape their character, teaching them to control and properly use their own inclinations and to perceive and treat people of the opposite sex. Spiritual and catechetical formation is also indispensable here (John Paul II 1981, no. 66). An extremely important task is also education in love, understood as a gift to oneself. It is worth noting here that the vocation to marital love is also a vocation to make a gift of oneself in marriage. Therefore, in order to actually be able to offer yourself to your spouse, you must first possess yourself.

Outside the family, preparation for marriage takes place at school and in formation groups that support the family (Mierzwiński 1980, pp. 192–93). These environments can be valuable allies for the family. What is more, they should be. Pope Francis draws attention to this and suggests that an educational path for further preparation for marriage should be included in the pastoral plans and choices of each parish. In particular, it should appear in youth pastoral care and should be proposed as an appropriate time to begin the maturing of the vocation to marriage (Francis 2019, no. 242). Moreover, it would also be appropriate to cooperate with lay associations and movements (Francis 2019, no. 206).

#### 4.2. Closer Preparation

Proximal preparation is called premarital catechesis. Its purpose is to supplement family upbringing and, if necessary, correct it. This stage of preparation should take into account another important challenge, which is learning interpersonal communication and dialogue.

The Church’s guidelines list three specific tasks for premarital catechesis:

- deepening the Catholic teaching on marriage and family, with particular emphasis on the currently widespread views and theories;
- preparing young people for social life in a family community and cooperation with grace by shaping moral and religious-social virtues and attitudes of young people;
- introduction to deeper cultural life, that is, to common prayer and sacramental life (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 1986, no. 5).

Closer preparation should consist of listening to the Word of God in order to better understand faith and bear witness to it in concrete life. The document of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life proposes a catechumenate at this stage of preparation for marriage. It is addressed to specific couples. It gives an opportunity to proclaim the kerygma to them already at the stage of admission of individual couples. Therefore, a form of proximate preparation is the catechumenate, which also lasts at the stage of immediate preparation and in the initial phase of marriage.

According to the document of the Pontifical Council for the Family, teaching those preparing for marriage should take place in the community of faith—among families who will engage in this work and cooperate in accordance with their own charisms and their own role in the formation of young people, extending their influence to other social groups (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996, no. 34).

The specific goal of this stage of preparation is to lead individual couples to the end of the process of discernment regarding their marriage vocation. This process may lead their participants to make a free and responsible decision to get married or to end the relationship and not get married. During this preparation process, the idea is for the bride and groom to understand the difference between preparing for the wedding and preparing for married life (Dicastery of Laity 2022, no. 55).

At the end of this stage of preparation, after deep discernment, and as a sign of entering the next stage of preparation, an engagement rite may take place. This rite, with the blessing of the fiancée and engagement rings, takes on a special meaning when it is lived with faith. This event becomes a special opportunity to pray for the graces needed to grow in love and worthy preparation for the sacrament of marriage (Dicastery of Laity 2022, no. 59).

#### 4.3. Direct Preparation

In the months preceding the celebration of the sacrament of marriage, direct preparation for the wedding day takes place. This preparation can be called prewedding catechesis, which aims to make engaged couples aware of the essential purposes of the sacrament of marriage. Its tasks include, in particular, reminding the family of the obligation of religious life (this applies in particular to the religious upbringing of children), discussing the principles of marital ethics, mainly in the field of responsible parenthood, and convincing parents to apply these principles in their lives, as well as preparing them for the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage.

With a view to celebrating the wedding, it is a good idea to involve the future spouses in choosing the Mass readings, songs, and prayer forms of the faithful. An important aspect that should be particularly emphasized in direct preparation is to make them aware of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the ceremony of the sacrament of marriage. This special gift of the Holy Spirit is part of the dynamics of grace initiated in Holy Baptism (Dicastery of Laity 2022, no. 69).

In order for future spouses to experience their wedding as deeply as possible, it is recommended that they undergo a retreat a few days before the wedding. It is also important to go through a prewedding confession at this time.

To sum up, the purpose of immediate preparation is to recall the doctrinal, moral, and spiritual aspects of the wedding. It is also important to clarify the content of the canonically prescribed prenuptial protocol. Moreover, the focus is on the spiritual experience of meeting the Lord and preparation for conscious and fruitful participation in the wedding liturgy (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996, no. 50–58).

#### 5. Conclusions

While the *messader*, the rabbi or cantor who officiates at the chuppah, might not be trained or capable of serving as a counselor to the couple, the traditional seven sanctifications within this ceremony, the *sheva brachot*, speak for themselves. The first blessing is recited over the wine, and the following three praise God, who has created all things for his glory, formed humankind, and created male and female in his image. The fifth blessing

refers to the joy of the restoration of Zion, and the sixth evokes the joy of the first couple in Paradise. The seventh blessing gives thanks to God for having created “joy and gladness, bride and bridegroom” and concludes, “Blessed. . . who makes the bridegroom rejoice with the bride”. To quote an anonymous medieval Jewish scholar of the 13th century: “Know that this union is a holy and pure thing when it is properly conducted in the proper time and with the proper intention. . . God has created everything according to His wisdom and has not created things to be ugly or shameful. . . He created man and woman and created each and every organ and their functions, and there is nothing degrading in this” (Iggeret Ha-Kodesh, Chapter 2, traditionally attributed to Nahmanides; [Cohen 1993](#)).

We have seen that Judaism considers marriage to be a holy union. Considerable preconditions and restrictions can be found in the context of the preparation for matrimony to assure its purity. Besides legal prerequisites, Maimonides has underlined the proper intention as a priority when stepping into wedlock. This approach stands in contradiction to the lack of rabbis and Jewish officiants in modern techniques of premarital counseling. It seems conclusive to many rabbis of all denominations to widen the horizons of marriage preparation and add contemporary forms of counseling to alert couples to problems and issues before they are confronted with them after the wedding. However, we must bear in mind that pastoral care only became part of rabbinical training curricula in the 1930s ([Homolka 2012](#), pp. 39–40) and that the significance of this topic varies in the different Jewish denominations.

[Roman Catholic Church]

Marriage in the Jewish and Catholic traditions is a religious reality. It has references to the Bible. It is in it, as well as in the traditions of individual religions, that its essence and meaning are read. The article on prerequisites and preparation for marriage shows some common elements and differences. It provides a chance for better mutual understanding and thus contributes to interreligious dialogue. Michael L. Satlow stresses that “understanding marriage within the context of Jewish–Christian relations today must also take account of a third player, that of secularization with the options that it opens for religious life outside the traditional institutions” ([Satlow 2020](#)). In 2008, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Orthodox Union, and the Rabbinical Council of America published “Created in the Divine Image: Orthodox Jewish–Catholic Statement on Marriage” ([Consultation 2008](#)). The shared concern was the rejection of same-sex marriage, which is fully accepted by Reform Jews and many Protestant churches as equal in all ways to heterosexual marriage. However, instead of a joint negative attitude toward a minority group, we need to build alliances to develop positive and inclusive approaches to meeting life’s challenges at large. Familiarizing oneself with the best practice experiences of other faith communities can help ensure that religious life cycle events such as marriage remain meaningful and societally relevant.

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## Abbreviations

bt Quid	Babylonian Talmud, Quiddushin
bT Yeb	Babylonian Talmud, Yebamot
FC	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Familiaris consortio</i> of Pope John Paul II
GS	( <a href="#">Second Vatican Council 1965</a> ), Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern World <i>Gaudium et spes</i>
M Abot	Mishnah, Abot
M BT	Mishnah, Baba Metzia
MT Ishut	Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ishut
ShA, EH	Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha-Ezer
ShA, YD	Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah

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