

Celebrate Love: Living Marriage in Full Colour

Edmund Adamus

Since its beginnings in Australia in the mid 1990s more than 1000 couples have attended a *Celebrate Love* seminar - in Australia, New Zealand or England. Sydney coauthors Byron and Francine Pirola are the founders and principal developers of the seminar. ‘The content and exercises’, says Byron, ‘are designed for couples in stable, loving marriages.’ ‘We all hit periods of disillusionment in our marriage,’ adds Francine. ‘At these times, some couples just knuckle down and wait it out, and eventually, things usually do improve. Others unfortunately start to come unstuck.’

Celebrate Love is a remarkably effective way to help couples start afresh. The seminar offers couples the opportunity to get to core issues that are dividing them, deal with them and then start afresh. Feedback from these couples typically tells the same story: they had no sense of anything lacking in their marriage; they just didn’t realize how much more it could be. When people saw colour television for the first time they wondered how they could ever have been satisfied with black and white. Couples say that *Celebrate Love* is like seeing their marriage and their future together in full, living colour.

Learning to ‘Love Smart’

One of the key insights in the seminar is an appreciation of male and female differences. Recent studies in brain science have shown that even from before birth, there are structural differences in the brains of men and women. As adults, these differences are initially one of the things that attract men and women to each other. However, for many couples, they become a source of frustration and hurt because they are not well understood. The seminar teaches couples about ‘Smart Loving’. ‘Most people give love the way they like to receive it’ explains Francine. ‘We assume that if we feel loved when some one sits down and listens to us, for example, then that is what the other likes too. In fact, a lot of people don’t feel loved this way.’

‘If a couple doesn’t understand the differences in the way that their husband or wife experiences love,’ says Byron, ‘they will be burning energy, trying to be loving, but missing the mark. Eventually they get frustrated because their spouse doesn’t appreciate their efforts.’

The Theology of the Body

For some couples, however, the most radical and empowering aspect of *Celebrate Love* is the revolutionary vision of human sexuality inspired by John Paul II’s Theology of the Body. *Celebrate Love* incorporates key insights from this theology and applies it to the everyday living of spouses.

‘A lot of people don’t realize that sexual union is sacramental,’ says Francine. ‘The vows that couples exchange at their wedding are sacred promises. They call a couple to live with a love that is freely given, total, faithful and fruitful. These characteristics of love are also the way God loves us.’ It is precisely because of the capacity of sex to reveal the

nature of God and his love, that the Church has been so resistant to calls by secular society to change its teaching.

One of the most amazing insights which runs as an undercurrent of the seminar is the reconciling, healing nature of the power of God's grace at work in our sexuality as men and women. We could describe it this way: the priest at the altar invokes the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine to be changed in to the Body and Blood of Jesus. In like manner, the Holy Spirit hovers over the spouses in their one-flesh union, a communion of persons, open to life, to bring forth from their homes a profound and mystical proclamation of the Gospel of life.'

The society in which we live is so saturated with harmful and wrong interpretations of that union that, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est* (God is Love), 'the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive'.

Celebrate Love aims to open the eyes and hearts of couples to resist the deception and empower them with a new sense of a mission to love. More recently during the address to the papal household on December 22nd 2008, the Holy Father spoke in these terms: 'we should go back to the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*: the intention of Pope Paul VI was to defend love against sex as a consumer good, the future against the exclusive claims of the present, and human nature against its manipulation.'

A marriage that successfully - but not without suffering! - reaches forty years is deemed worthy of the ruby anniversary celebration. Forty, as we know has profound biblical significance, and the ruby as a precious gem is also an appropriate symbol for reflecting on the enduring prophetic nature of *Humanae Vitae*. The ruby gem is of a particularly rich and deep colour, the reason being that geologically it is apparently the gem that has undergone the longest and most severe forms of pressure but which has not been crushed. It would be difficult indeed to imagine any other papal teaching in the Church's history which has undergone the long and severe pressure than that which is enshrined in *Humanae Vitae*. The prophecy of Pope Paul VI in 1968 - not only to what was but that which had yet to pass - cannot now be questioned. *Celebrate Love* enables spouses to hold this prophetic document of *Humanae Vitae* up to the light again.

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