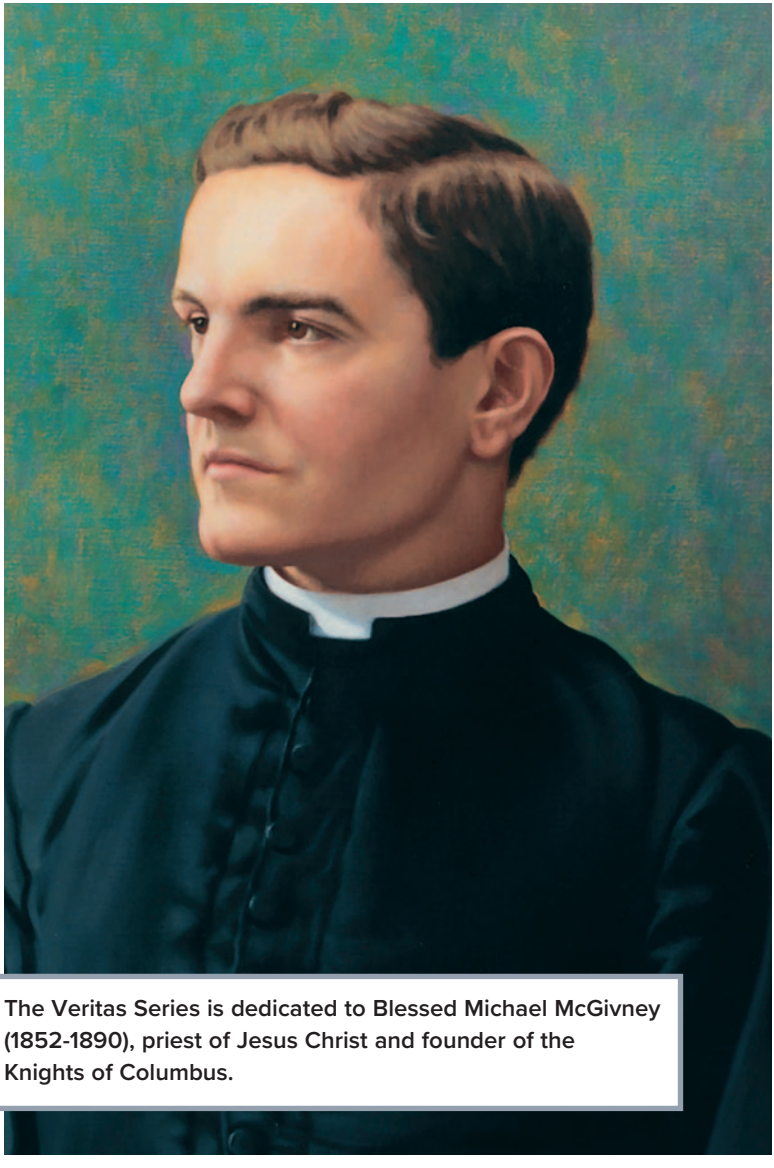
# Preserving the Sanctity of Marriage

Reverend W. Becket Soule, O.P.



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# *Preserving the Sanctity of Marriage*

## The Catholic Teaching on Annulment

*by*
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## The Growth of Annulments

According to statistics compiled by the Vatican from Catholic dioceses around the world, diocesan tribunals completed 49,233 cases for nullity of marriage in 2006. Tribunals in the United States were responsible for more than 27,000 of those cases; this percentage of cases handled in the United States (fluctuating between 55 and 70 percent) has remained about the same over the past 30 years. This is an astronomical increase, for in 1968 only 338 annulments were granted in the United States.

This number, despite its remarkable growth over the past several years, represents only a fraction of the estimated 10 million divorced Catholics in the United States, this number increasing by about 200,000 each year. Is an annulment merely a "Catholic divorce"? How can the Church give out so many annulments and still maintain its teaching that marriage is a permanent union between a man and a woman? How is the Church attempting to respond in compassion and justice to the needs of the millions of Catholics around the world who have divorced and experienced the personal tragedy of failure within an intimate union such as marriage?

## What is an Annulment?

Couples can, of course, enter many different kinds of unions. They are not, however, entitled to call all of them "marriage." They may only use the word "marriage" when their union meets the conditions and contains the elements that are demanded by their community. For the Christian community, and particularly for the Catholic Church, marriage has a certain God-given content. For Christians, there is always another witness to marriage: Christ

himself. The Catholic Church believes that it can use the word "marriage" only when it is marriage as God created it, when it has the minimum of the content that God gave it. If that minimum content is not there, then the union may be called by whatever name people wish to give it, but as for the Church it is not marriage.

Precisely because the Church holds so strongly to the indissolubility of marriage, it must face the question of who is married. Since she believes that there is a content to marriage, proper Church authority can sometimes declare that people who have been through a wedding ceremony are not married.

This is the meaning of an annulment, or to speak more correctly, a declaration of nullity. A decree of nullity is a declaration that despite outward appearances and their good faith, a couple has not entered into a union which has all of the content necessary for marriage, and thus each of them remains free to get married, unless a prohibition is attached to the sentence or decree of nullity.

Thus a declaration of nullity is essentially different from a divorce. A divorce states that two people, who had been validly married, are married no longer. A declaration of nullity, on the other hand, states that because something which is necessary and indispensable for a valid marriage was missing at the time two people exchanged consent, a valid marriage has not come into existence. It is thus clear that an annulment is not a divorce, "Catholic" or otherwise.

The idea that two people can go through a wedding ceremony and still not be married is not a new one. In the Christian tradition, we can find the roots of the declaration of nullity in the New Testament. Christ says to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "You are right to say you have no husband; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband" (John 4:17-18). Saint Paul condemns the Corinthians for allowing a man to enter into a union with his father's wife (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-8). The practice of declaring certain unions invalid has continued ever since.

Every legal system has some procedure for declaring marriages invalid. Civil courts do so only rarely, principally because divorce is much simpler and cheaper to obtain than a decree that a marriage is null and void.

It should be underscored at this point, however, that for the most part, ecclesiastical declarations of nullity have no civil effects in the United States (and, indeed, in most countries of the world). Thus, an annulment never affects the legitimacy of the children born of the union (this is so according to both civil law and canon law); an annulment will not claim to affect either the distribution of property nor the award of the custody of the children.

Nevertheless, the union that existed between the parties created very real moral and legal obligations toward the other party and any children born. There would be serious moral guilt if these obligations were ignored. If a person seeks to remarry after a decree of nullity, the Church insists on the fulfillment of obvious moral and legal obligations, and will not allow a new marriage to take place in the Church unless those obligations were being fulfilled up to that time. If there were doubts concerning the future, the Church would insist on a solemn written promise in this regard from both parties to the new marriage. This element has to enter in because otherwise the Church could become a party to the immoral ignoring of serious obligations by allowing a new wedding to be celebrated in the Church while the obligations to the former union were being ignored.

The divorce percentage rate in the United States has dropped from 48 percent in 1992 to 40 percent in 2000. Not every marriage that ends in divorce was null at its beginning. That is why it is all the more important that the Church provides the opportunity for the investigation of marriages, where this is requested by either of the parties, to see if a decree of nullity can be issued. In a society where two out of every five marriages end in divorce, the increase in the number of annulments surely must come as no surprise; it is only by carefully investigating each petition that the Church can with sure conviction maintain that true marriage is a firm and lifelong commitment between two people.

As an aside, it is important to note that those Catholics who remarry after divorce, without obtaining a declaration of nullity, are not automatically excommunicated. While they are living in a state that is in contradiction to the teaching of the Church on marriage and are thus in manifest grave sin, they do not incur the penal

sanction of excommunication for this reason. This was the case in the United States until 1977. The penalty of excommunication was imposed exclusively within the United States by an ecclesiastical council in 1884. However, since the revision of the procedures for annulments and the promulgation of the two new codes of canon law, no one is any longer subject to such a penalty. Because a person divorced and remarried without a declaration of nullity for the prior union cannot be considered to be living in a state of life that mirrors the union between Christ and the Church which is signified by the Eucharist, such a person is not permitted to receive Holy Communion until their marital status is resolved. This is, however, not the result of the public imposition or declaration of an ecclesiastical penalty, but rather the result and consequence of the person's public circumstances and behavior.

## Reasons for an Annulment

There are three ways in which Church law (also referred to as "canon law") recognizes that a true and valid marriage does not exist in a previous union:

1) where there was a lack or defect of what is called "canonical form."

2) where there was an impediment to the marriage.

3) where there was a defect in the consent exchanged between the partners (the most significant in the majority of cases).

## Lack or Defect of Canonical Form

All persons who have been baptized in the Catholic Church, or who have been received into the Catholic Church after their baptism in another Christian denomination, and who have not left the Catholic Church by a formal act, are bound to "canonical form." Canonical form means that the parties were married in the presence of a properly delegated priest or deacon and two witnesses, following the rites of the Catholic Church. Thus, if a Catholic entered marriage before a justice of the peace (or even before a Protestant minister) without obtaining permission (called a "dispensation") from the bishop of the diocese, then that marriage

would not be recognized as valid by the Catholic Church because of a "lack of form." The one exception to this is marriage before a priest of an Orthodox church (e.g., a Greek Orthodox priest). Since the requirement of canonical form is a law of the Catholic Church, it applies only to Catholics. It is important to remember, however, that the Church recognizes as valid the marriage of two persons who are not Catholic, whether they are non-Catholic Christians or non-Christians, whether they marry in their own church or another church or with a civil ceremony. The only requirement for the marriage of non-Catholics is that there be some legitimate ceremony, that is, a ceremony which the laws of that country would recognize. Therefore, if a Catholic's wedding was solely a civil ceremony, or ritual performed in another faith without the Church's permission, then the union can be declared invalid.

## Impediments to Marriage

Impediments are circumstances of a person or of the couple that mean that they are not free to enter certain marriages. Impediments exist in both canon and civil law. For example, if either party is below the minimum legal age (in canon law, this is 14 years old for the female and 16 years old for the male; in civil law, this minimum varies according to the state) at the time of the wedding, then the marriage, regardless of the couple's good intentions, remains invalid. Marriages of very close relatives by blood or by marriage are invalid unless a dispensation is given. For example, a dispensation would not be given for a brother to marry his sister; a person cannot marry a deceased partner's parent or child. There are about a dozen impediments noted in canon law, all of which should be reviewed by the priest or deacon preparing a couple for marriage. The impediment of *ligamen* (meaning a "prior bond" exists) affects many unions. The Church cannot recognize the remarriage of a person during the lifetime of a former spouse, unless the former marriage has been declared null by an ecclesiastical tribunal or dissolved by the authority of the pope (according to certain conditions). Such an unauthorized remarriage can, therefore,

be declared invalid because of the impediment of a prior bond. The ecclesiastical laws concerning impediments, therefore, protect the rights of the individuals seeking to enter marriage, as well as safeguard the Church's teaching concerning the indissolubility of marriage.

## Defect of Consent

At a wedding, it is not the priest or deacon who "marries" the couple, but rather the bride and groom who contract marriage by their words of consent; in the ancient words of Roman law, "Consent makes marriage." The priest or deacon is necessarily present as an official witness who represents the community and receives the vows of the parties in the name of the Church. In the Eastern Christian tradition, both Catholic and Orthodox, the priestly blessing is necessary for a valid, sacramental marriage (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1623), but there obviously must be an exchange of consent for the priest to bless. It is the consent of the couple, or their marriage vows, therefore, that makes the marriage, while the priest or deacon serves as the necessary ecclesiastical witness (and, in the Eastern tradition, the minister of the sacrament). This is important to remember because no priest, indeed, no human power can supply this consent of the bride and groom where it is lacking. Thus, if the consent is seriously defective, the marriage is invalid.

Those who exchange consent in good faith are presumed to have entered a valid marriage; this is a presumption of canon law that lasts until the nullity of the marriage in question is established. Thus, the validity of the marriage never has to be "proven," but is assumed. It is the contrary, the nullity of the union in question, that must be fully proven, and if it is not, then the Church holds that the union in question is a valid marriage.

Unlike a lack of canonical form or the presence of an impediment, both of which can most often be proven through documents, the defect of consent may not be immediately obvious at the time of the wedding. The question revolves around the consent, particularly the internal consent, of the parties. Since

"consent makes a marriage," that is, freely and knowingly saying "yes" to all that marriage involves with this other person, the content of this "yes" is a key issue. To put it simply, were the parties ready to consent, willing to consent, and able to consent?

First, when they said their vows, did both parties have sufficient use of reason to consent to marriage? If a person is incapable of the logical thought necessary to enter into marriage (such as in epileptic seizures), then that marriage is invalid.

Second, when they said their vows, did both parties freely accept and clearly understand the lifelong commitment they were making? Marriage is the most serious and weighty decision that a person may ever make. It is not a decision that is made immediately, just for the present, which will eventually be discarded or forgotten. It is a lifelong choice, and in many ways both obvious and subtle, it is different from any other decision we make routinely. In order to consent to marriage, there must be both the freedom to consent, and some assessment of what is being consented to.

The consent must be free. Pressure, whether external (imposed from the outside by someone else in order to obtain consent, as in the case of the so-called "shotgun marriage") or internal (even where no one else is forcing a person to marry), significantly reduces the person's freedom to consent or undermines their judgment. The classic example of this lack of freedom is the teenage prenuptial pregnancy. The girl rightly refuses an abortion, but she does not want to give the baby up for adoption, either. The boy feels trapped. He may have all of the right intentions (wanting to "do the right thing," to give the child a name, etc.), but he feels that marriage is the only way out. Is this decision a free, mature choice of a lifetime partner, or is it a hurried and pressured short-term solution to a problem?

The consent must also be an informed consent. This does not mean that a person must know everything about what he or she is getting into when marrying. No one knows what they are getting into when they marry! One always learns more about the other person after marriage than before, for this is the manner in which the human personality gradually reveals itself. However, there must be some assessment and weighing of the obligations, responsibilities

and expectations of marriage before one consents. This is not just the case with marriage in general (since, after all, no one gets married "in general"), but more importantly with this marriage in particular, with this particular spouse. What about the consent of the teenager, infatuated with the only person ever dated, "in love with love" rather than with the person he or she consents to marry? This is compounded in the case of older persons, perhaps in their 30s or more, who are not yet married and panic at the thought of becoming "old maids." Or consider the young person, with no critical appraisal of the character of the intended partner, and a meager appreciation of the financial responsibilities of marriage and the burdens of parenthood. Add to these pictures, perhaps, the desperate need to escape from an unhappy home life marred by alcoholism, quarrels and fights, or abuse. How would one assess the consent of the man recently widowed and still grieving? Suppose he remarries in haste because he has a demanding job and is concerned for his young children. Is he giving prudent, thoughtful consent to marrying a spouse for life, or acquiring a housekeeper and stepmother for his children?

The judgment necessary to enter marriage is different from the judgment necessary for other actions. One may, for example, be mature enough and responsible enough to hold down a job and fulfill basic obligations, and still not be ready to get married. The tribunal must weigh the judgment of the parties with respect to the object of that judgment (that is, marriage), and not be content with a general and nonspecific assessment of the maturity or immaturity of the party.

There is no automatic answer to any of these questions about the quality of the consent elicited in these examples. A more thorough investigation on the part of the marriage tribunal may support the conclusion that one or both of the parties did not freely, maturely and with discernment choose to marry at the time they exchanged consent externally.

Third, when they said their vows, did both parties have the personal capacity to assume and fulfill their consent, to carry out the essential obligations of the partnership of marriage with this person? St. Thomas Aquinas enunciated the principle on which this question

is based quite briefly when he stated that "what one could not do, one did not do."

Even though a person goes through a marriage ceremony in good faith and with the very best of intentions, if that person does not have the capacity to assume or fulfill the vows taken, then a true marriage has not come into existence. What could cause a person to lack the capacity for marriage?

This incapacity is not merely the presence of incompatibilities. No two people are exactly identical, and it is the rarest of persons who is so mature that there are no failings or imperfections to work through. The basically mature person tries to be honest and admit mistakes, be open to the advice of trusted friends and be willing to receive God's grace. If this is the case even with ordinary friends, how much more is it the case with marriage! That two people may occasionally have disagreements, or that a couple have grown apart, does not necessarily mean that their marriage is invalid, or that either of them was incapable of entering marriage.

However, with some persons, psychological problems have become the compelling and motivating force of life. The sense of alienation or inadequacy, self-depreciation, hostility, sexual problems, impulsiveness or selfishness can be pervasive and chronic. It is most unlikely that such a psychologically burdened individual can establish and maintain the close, empathetic, cherishing relationship with a spouse which provides for mutual growth and the proper rearing of children. To put it briefly, a marriage can be annulled if the person entering marriage does not "have what it takes" to develop the community of life and love that is the substance of the marital pledge.

For some time now, the Church has recognized that psychoses, and such disintegrative mental illnesses as schizophrenia and manic depression, can so impair mental and emotional stability that one's consent to marriage lacked the necessary discernment or capacity. More recently, using further insights, the Church acknowledges other dysfunctions of personality that may make a particular marriage union impossible. It is impossible to make general statements about such matters, because the human personality is so complex and the circumstances of each marriage vary widely. But

with that caution, it can be asserted that conditions such as homosexuality and alcoholism often undermine the capacity for a permanent union.

Another group of emotional disturbances are called "personality disorders." These may not show the acute episodes or the bizarre features of psychoses, but they are marked by deeply ingrained maladaptive patterns of behavior, usually with roots in early life, and often evident by the time of adolescence. Such persons may function quite well in their work, be excellent providers, efficient household managers, or spectacular entertainers. But they are psychologically unable to meet one essential criterion of marriage: the close and intimate personal relationship of mutual support and affection.

In many cases, the signs of later problems were evident before the parties married, but were ignored or denied by the other person. There was an unrealistic hope or romantic expectation that one party could "change" the other after the marriage. This seems to be the case quite regularly where the abuse of drugs or alcohol is involved, or where there is some other form of abuse. Yet the consent to marriage binds both of the parties together in a lifelong union that may turn into a living hell. The stress, discord, tension, abuse and violence that is often present in these unions is hardly compatible with the Church's definition of marriage as a community of life and love.

The precise clinical labels of these disorders are not important here, and the personality descriptions may seem harsh. Yet they are sketches of truly handicapped persons. In their early years, often through no one's fault, they were shortchanged on the love and stability needed for self-esteem and security, and from which later mature independence and relationships develop. The failure of their marriages, and even their lives, is often more due to weakness than any malice.

In the exchange of consent, exclusion of any essential part of marriage also invalidates the marriage. A person who is willing to marry, but at the same time reserves from that consent certain elements of the relationship, engages in what is known as "simulation." The most important reservations are the intention

against having children (reserving the right to exclude children from the marriage), the intention against indissolubility (reserving the option to divorce if things do not work out), and the intention against fidelity (reserving the right to have sexual relations with a person or persons other than one's spouse). Occasionally there are incidents of "total simulation," in which one of the parties goes through marriage for an extraneous reason, or substitutes for true marriage one's own idea of marriage. This is most evident in the so-called "green-card cases," in which one of the parties goes through a marriage ceremony principally and directly to gain resident status in this country, but without intending to live together permanently in a marital union.

The tribunals of the Church never seek to assign blame for the breakup of the marriage. They seek only to understand a failed marriage and determine whether either or both parties lacked the proper consent or the ability to carry out that consent. In this respect, the person who presents the petition for the declaration of nullity is accusing the marriage of invalidity, rather than the other party. Unlike the Anglo-American legal system, the canonical system is not adversarial; in many cases the petitioner's former spouse may wish the annulment as much as the petitioner does (and thus becomes, in effect, a "co-petitioner"). In each case, a tribunal seeks to understand the circumstances, both external and internal, surrounding a failed marriage to determine whether or not a valid bond was ever established. If it has been determined that no valid marriage ever took place, then each participant is free to marry, as long as other impediments do not exist. In some cases, a *monitum* (or warning) is placed within a decree of nullity, stating that while a certain person may be free to marry, there is concern that this person may not have the maturity or proper state of mind to enter a marital union.

## Procedures for an Annulment

For centuries, the Church has examined the presumed validity of marriages by a formal judicial process. The procedures for the granting of a declaration of nullity are governed by Book VII (Processes), Canons 1400- 1752, of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*,

and Titles XXIV-XXVI, Canons 1055-1400, of the 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. These procedures were revised and more clearly spelled out in an Instruction issued on 25 January 2005 by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, at the direct request and with the approval of Pope John Paul II; this Instruction is called *Dignitas connubii* ("The dignity of marriage"), the first words of the document, and regulates the procedures to be observed by diocesan and interdiocesan Tribunals in handling cases on the nullity of marriage. An annulment is a formal judicial process governed by the universal procedural law of the Church, although each diocese has procedures that differ somewhat in specifics from those of other dioceses. What follows is a description of a typical process.

The first step is usually consultation with one's parish priest. In some dioceses, the diocesan tribunal may be contacted directly at the chancery (sometimes called the pastoral center) of the diocese. The parish priest or the tribunal will normally request a summary of the principal facts concerning the background of both parties, their courtship, marriage and breakup. What happened around the time of the marriage is particularly relevant. Typically, the petitioner is asked to complete an initial questionnaire or compose a narrative statement, giving particular information relating to the possible annulment.

Canon law requires that the other party must be contacted and informed of the proceeding, and given the opportunity to participate. Although the participation of the former spouse (referred to as the "respondent") is usually helpful to the tribunal in providing a different view of the marriage (and thus furnishing a fuller picture of the situation), the nonparticipation of the respondent does not always hamper the case, and will only rarely stop the case from proceeding further. The respondent has the right to participate, to oppose the granting of the annulment, to leave the case to the justice of the tribunal, or simply to refuse to participate at all.

After the respondent has been contacted and the case has been accepted, the tribunal will usually seek further information, both written and oral, from the parties and from witnesses who can corroborate or add to the information already collected. Persons

who knew the parties before marriage (family members, relatives, close friends) are particularly helpful. Children of the marriage are almost never involved, since they have no firsthand information about the period before the marriage took place. If children are cited as witnesses, they are always adults. A psychiatrist or psychologist is frequently consulted as an expert witness, and is required by the Codes and *Dignitas connubii* art. 203 in cases based on mental illness. The judge uses the assistance of an expert to determine whether a psychological condition is actually present, what specific diagnosis should be assigned to it, and what its impact on the person actually was.

Both parties may be represented in these proceedings by procurators and advocates (normally these roles are exercised by the same person), who act in place of the parties in the proceedings. These are people who have received training in the canon law of marriage and in the tribunal's procedures and are both resources for the parties in the case, as well as persons who monitor the process from the standpoint of the parties.

When the information-gathering phase has been concluded, the case proceeds to a formal hearing before the judge, the advocates, and the defender of the bond. The defender of the bond is a person with a degree in canon law, who reviews the proceeding to see that the rights of the parties are protected in the case, that canon law is observed, and that any arguments in favor of the validity of the marriage are made, so that no unproved case is given an affirmative decision. The judge (either a single judge, who must be a priest or deacon, or a panel of three judges, one of whom may be a lay person) must also have a degree in canon law. The judge or panel of judges hears the arguments, considers the law and the facts, and renders a decision.

Because of the seriousness with which the Catholic Church takes marriage, any decision of the court in favor of nullity (an "affirmative" decision, because the Tribunal is responding to the question "Has the nullity of the marriage in question been established?") must be reviewed by another court of at least three judges. In addition, either of the parties (through their advocates) or the defender of the bond may appeal the decision to the court of

appeal if they are unsatisfied with the first decision (whether that was affirmative or negative). If the second court ratifies the first affirmative decision, then a decree of nullity is issued, and the parties would be free to marry. It is not true that every case has to go to Rome, although every party to the case has the right to appeal directly to the marriage Tribunal of the Holy See.

Throughout the world, the vast majority of all cases presented receive affirmative decisions. In recent years in the United States, more than 85 percent of all cases presented have received an affirmative decision (in 2006, the percentages were 86% of cases in the United States, and 82% of cases in the whole world received affirmative decisions). This percentage, however, includes all cases, no matter how long the marriage lasted. In cases in which the marriage lasted longer than 10 years, the percentage of affirmative decisions is significantly lower.

The time cases take to process varies greatly. It depends on what type of case it is, how difficult the case is, whether the witnesses cooperate, whether they have very much to say, whether the respondent opposes, whether there are any contradictions in the evidence, etc. Many delays take place when the petitioner does not answer letters or changes address without informing the tribunal. The sheer number of cases being presented today is another major cause of delays, as is the lack of adequate staffing at many tribunals.

As with any other court, there are expenses involved. Although many people are at first offended by this need, when one considers the many hours of staff work, the need for office space and equipment, professional services (both legal and psychological), it is remarkable that tribunals manage to keep the costs as low as they do. Virtually no tribunal asks the parties to underwrite the entire cost of the case; usually an offering to cover a portion of the expenses is requested. Canon law requires that no person be denied access to the process merely because of an inability to make any financial contribution, and every tribunal has a number of cases every year that are handled without any cost to the petitioner. Popular misconceptions and gossip inflate the offerings requested by tribunals from petitioners dramatically (sometimes as high as $50,000!), but in almost no case is the process of an ecclesiastical

annulment even close to the cost of a civil divorce. A rich person receives no priority, either in the time the case will take or in the way the case is handled. Costs vary from tribunal to tribunal, as with the type of case involved. All tribunals state the offering requested when a case is introduced.

Although an annulment is a formal legal procedure, many petitioners find that it can also be a healing process as well. The opportunity to review the story of the marriage, sometimes years after the final separation, often provides a chance for the parties to learn more about themselves than they could have at the time of the civil divorce. Although the memories are often quite painful, often involving tragedy and failure, there is a chance for new insights, the recovery of basic values, and spiritual and personal growth.

Most petitions for a declaration of nullity come from people who are contemplating a new marriage, and need an external, independent religious judgment that their former marriage was not valid. Frequently, after a case has been concluded, one of the parties will remark that after the divorce, they still felt as if they were married. The annulment served as an opportunity to come to a form of peace with their own conscience.

Other petitions come from people who have remarried outside of the Church and now seek to be reconciled with the Church and return to the sacraments. Often the baptism, first Communion, or confirmation of a child will be the stimulus for the divorced and remarried Catholic to re-examine his or her life and seek an annulment so that a return to the sacraments, and particularly the Eucharist, may be part of the renewal of the religious practice of the entire family.

In so many matters, God works through human beings. That is not nearly so efficient or as certain as if God had made known all of his decisions personally, but it is the way God has chosen. The Church is a community, and like any community it has its own laws on marriage. It is freely admitted that sometimes the decisions are very difficult and that there are many gray areas. The human beings involved in tribunals are fallible, but the individuals concerned can only do the best they can on the basis of the specialized training and

experience they have received. The alternative would be to have no decrees of nullity at all, but this would be a manifest injustice.

So while some may claim that the procedure for annulments within the Church amounts to nothing other than a "Catholic divorce," nothing could be further from the truth. The Church teaches us that a valid marriage bond remains indissoluble. The Instruction *Dignitas connubii* begins with the affirmation that "the dignity of marriage, which between the baptized 'is the image of and the participation in the covenant of love between Christ and the Church,' demands that the Church with the greatest pastoral solicitude promote marriage and the family founded in marriage, and protect and defend them with all the means available." (Preface).

Church laws governing annulments have been put in place, therefore, not to make separations easy, but to protect the sanctity and dignity of marriage and family life, and to safeguard the rights of each individual.

## About the Author

Dominican Father W. Becket Soule has served extensively in a variety of capacities (advocate, defender of the bond, promoter of justice, judge, and adjutant judicial vicar) in many tribunals in the United States and Great Britain. He has taught canon law, mediaeval history, and Latin and Greek at the Dominican House of Studies and the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and at Oxford University. Father Soule has also served as an official for the Congregation for the Eastern Churches in the Roman Curia, and as Dean of the Pontifical Faculty at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. He is currently pastor of Saint Denis' Catholic Church in Hanover, New Hampshire.

*"Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response."*

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis. The Synod Fathers have gratefully taken note of the work of catechists, acknowledging that they "have a task that carries great importance in animating ecclesial communities." It goes without saying that Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children...; however, we all ought to be aware of the "rights" that each baptized person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.

Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

## About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world's largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit www.kofc.org.

Whether you have a specific question or desire a broader, deeper knowledge of the Catholic faith, CIS can help. Contact us at:

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