

Marriage

Marriage is a conventional action by which, in many cultures, two members of opposite sexes—in a few cultures now it may be the same sex—formally and in the sight of the law declare their love for one another, and their intention to live in fidelity to one another till death do part them. Provisions are normally made for a marriage commitment dissolution--this is called a divorce-- but in one classic western formulation, as interpreted by the Catholic Church, which has from the earliest Christian period assumed administrative jurisdiction over marriage vows, marriage can only be for life. (These remarks, of course, pass over the role of non-Christian religions in administering the marriage rite, and of nonreligious communities in administering the rite of marriage.)

In a heterodox age like ours, in which many formerly sacrosanct social practices are in question, the authority of religious rites like marriage is not taken for granted. Many loving couples feel no need for the rite of marriage to fortify their mutual commitment, while on certain social levels the aura of sanctity has been totally stripped from marriage. The future of the institution is still under construction.