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IN DEFENSE OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Pope Francis writes: "Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple." —*The Joy of the Gospel*, 66

BY ANNE WILSON



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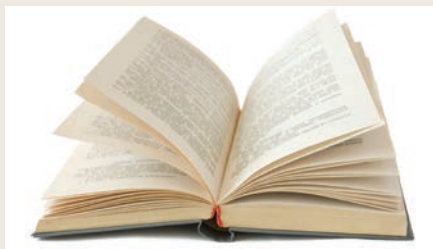
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I remember with fondness the elementary-school readers of my Catholic schooldays. Bright illustrations accompanied stories that taught us not only how to read, but also what family life was like in the early 1970s for most people—a father, a mother, and their children. With the make-up of the family unit a given, the short vignettes introduced new words, reinforced family values, and even managed to weave in snippets of the sacramental life.

As I grew and changed, so did the composition of many families. I watched some of my classmates deal with the divorce of parents. What did not change, though, was the overriding belief that traditional marriage was still the ideal even if everyone didn't live the storylines in my early readers. My husband and I, like my other friends, married and started a family. It just seemed natural.

A NEW CHAPTER

Couples now choose from an unending table of contents of relationship options—including living together or choosing a partner of the same gender. In the rapidly turning pages of today's world, traditional marriage between a man and woman seems much like those well-worn Catholic readers, coming apart at the seams after many years of trusted use.



As recently as 2001, the majority of Americans still supported marriage in a traditional sense—between one man and one woman. Among those identifying

themselves as Catholics, that number was even higher. A Pew Research study shows that in 2000, only forty percent of those identifying themselves as Catholic favored allowing couples of the same sex to marry. Yet in 2014, that number had swelled to more than half—fifty-seven percent. Clearly, attitudes about marriage are changing.

But what is marriage and how is its composition decided? Is it arbitrary? Let's look at the long-held Catholic teaching about marriage.

UNION OF MAN AND WOMAN

All of us know about the creation story and Adam and Eve. Here, in nature, is also the beginning of the story about marriage. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him" (Genesis 2:18). God then explained his complete plan for man and woman: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (2:24).

As God created the world, so he also created the first law about marriage. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in



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the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) clearly points out: "For God himself is the author of matrimony and has endowed it with various values and purposes" (48). In fact, the Catholic Church teaches that all societal laws are to be a reflection of the natural law written on our hearts by our Creator. No legislative body has the right to change what God has ordained. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "The natural law... provides the necessary basis for the civil law with which it is connected" (1959).

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