

## MARRIAGE AS A COVENANT: THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT INSIGHTS WITHIN THE WEDDING AT CANA

### Abstract

Marriage in the biblical tradition is revealed as a divine institution established from the creation of the world, intended to ensure both the perpetuation of humanity and the communion between man and woman as an icon of God's harmony. The Old Testament presents marriage as a covenantal reality, marked by the tension between the divine ideal of monogamy and the historical distortions brought by sin, yet always oriented toward the Creator's original design. The Song of Songs offers a profound theological vision of conjugal love, in which eros, friendship, and fidelity converge in an exclusive, reciprocal relationship, elevating marital intimacy to the sphere of holiness and freedom. The prophetic writings unfold marriage as the privileged metaphor of God's covenant with Israel, wherein divine fidelity surpasses human infidelity. This symbolism culminates in the Wedding at Cana, where Christ, through the transformation of water into wine, inaugurates the messianic time and raises marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. In this perspective, human marriage becomes an icon of the eternal covenant between Christ and the Church, a space where divine grace transfigures human love into communion with God.



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## Introduction

The institution of marriage occupies a fundamental place in biblical anthropology and in the theology of the Old Testament. From the very first pages of Scripture, marriage is presented as a divine institution, instituted by God through the creation of man and woman and through the blessing given to them to multiply and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28; 2:24). It is not constituted as a simple social convention, but as an expression of the will of the Creator, being a call to communion, fruitfulness and mutual responsibility. Although sin introduced deformations in this original order, leading to practices such as polygamy or concubinage, these realities were tolerated only temporarily and never elevated to the level of an ideal. Both Mosaic legislation and the voice of the prophets keep alive the model of monogamy and the indestructible unity between husband and wife, as an expression of God's plan for humanity.

The Song of Songs has a special role in the Old Testament canon, a text that elevates the experience of conjugal love to the rank of a theological paradigm. Beyond the poetic beauty of the dialogue between the bride and groom, the book conveys essential principles regarding marriage: the reciprocity of love, the exclusivity of the relationship, and complete fidelity between the two spouses. In an era when women were often reduced to secondary roles in social life, the Song of Songs highlights the equality between the two partners, their capacity to admire and support each other, and the vocation of love to manifest itself freely and responsibly. Thus, conjugal love is not viewed as a simple biological reality, but as a divine gift and as the foundation of a communion that includes friendship, trust, and spiritual beauty.

On the other hand, the Old Testament develops a theology of marriage that goes beyond the strictly anthropological and social framework, transforming it into a privileged symbol of the relationship between God and the chosen people. The prophets frequently resort to the image of the conjugal covenant to express God's fidelity and, at the same time, the infidelity of the people of Israel. Idolatry is described as "spiritual adultery," and the prophetic call is to return to the first love of restoring the bond of the covenant (Jer 2:2; Hos 2:18-22). In this logic, God is presented as a faithful Bridegroom, full of mercy, who forgives his unfaithful bride and restores her in a new and eternal alliance.

Thus, marriage, in the Old Testament perspective, appears under three complementary dimensions: its ontological foundation, ordained by God at creation; the poetic and anthropological expression of conjugal love in the Song of Songs; and

its symbolic value as a representation of the covenant between God and the people. These coordinates show that the institution of marriage is not a simple social framework for living together, but a reality with profound theological, anthropological, and soteriological implications, which anticipates the perfect communion between Christ and the Church in the logic of the New Testament.

### **Marriage in the Old Testament. Key elements**

In the Old Testament, the fundamental structure of society is constituted by the family, and its foundation is marriage. According to the testimony of Holy Scripture, the family is not an institution founded by human initiative, but a divine institution, ordained by God since the creation of man. In the account of creation, the first people were blessed with the commandment to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth, and to subdue it (Gen 1:28). Therefore, in the mentality of the Jewish people, the family enjoyed special consideration, being seen metaphorically as the foundation of any social, political, and religious organization.

The foundation of the family is marriage, instituted by God as a covenant and a communion of life between a man and a woman, in both the physical and spiritual planes. Through this act, humanity's vocation to perpetuate humans is fulfilled. From a biblical perspective, marriage is conceived as an indestructible unity between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24). However, sin disrupted this order, altering the divine intention. From the original model of monogamy, people came to practice polygamy. The first biblical example recorded is Lamech, a descendant of Cain, who took two wives, Adah and Shelah (Gen 4:19) (Abrudan and Cornițescu 2002, 114).

Monogamy was generally preserved among those with a modest material situation. Still, in other cultural contexts, such as among the Assyrians and Egyptians, a second wife was tolerated, especially in cases of infertility in the first, leading to forms of concubinage. In the plan of divine economy, God temporarily permitted polygamy to ensure the multiplication of humanity (Gane, 2017). Thus, the family of the patriarch Abraham experiences concubinage due to Sarah's sterility, and the family of Jacob exemplifies the typology of polygamous marriage, a phenomenon that became common in ancient Israel. In the time of Moses, polygamy was so widespread that the Law did not abolish it but only restricted it through normative prescriptions (Abrudan and Cornițescu 2002, 114).

The texts of divine law limit the excesses of polygamy: the prohibition of marrying two sisters (Lev 18:18), the restriction imposed on the king not to take many wives (Dt 17:17), as well as various regulations regarding the protection of slaves or concubines (Ex 21:8–9). Despite these realities, the ideal of monogamy remained in the consciousness of Israel as the institution desired by God, a fact confirmed by the requirement that the high priest marry only a virgin (Lev 21:13–14). Although biblical history shows that monogamy was often violated, it will be restored in its fullness by Jesus Christ, who rejects polygamy (Mt 19:3–9) and raises the union between man and woman to the dignity of a sacrament (Jn 2:1–10).

In the Jewish tradition, marriage did not initially have a strictly liturgical character but was understood in two distinct moments: the engagement (*erusin*) and the marriage itself (*nissuin* or *chatunah*). The engagement was made through a contract between the parents of the future spouses (or, in their absence, close relatives) in the presence of witnesses. Sometimes the act was reinforced by an oath or covenant (Ezk 16:8; Mal 2:14), metaphorically called “God’s covenant” because the divine name was invoked. In archaic times, the contract was only verbal, but later it acquired written form, becoming an official document (Tarnavski 1930, 176).

The engagement involved the payment of a sum of money (the marriage price – *mohar*), usually fifty shekels, to the bride’s family (Dt. 22:29). Cases, this price could be substituted by work (cf. Jas, Gen 29:20–27) or by acts of heroism (Jgs 15:16). Once the engagement was concluded, the young people were already considered bride and groom. However, the girl remained in her parents’ house, maintaining the obligation of chastity. In the case of infidelity, the punishment was death by stoning (Dt 22:23–24). The fiancé could break the engagement by a formal act of separation.

The actual marriage took place after a period of waiting. The bride, adorned with a special veil, was blessed by her parents and led in a procession, with songs and dances, to the groom’s house. Here, the wedding feast took place, usually lasting seven days (Gen 29:27).

The Old Testament analysis of family and marriage shows that these are not simple social conventions, but institutions with a divine foundation, founded by God since creation. Monogamy, understood as an indestructible unity between man and woman, constitutes the original will of the Creator. However, due to sin and human weaknesses, this order was often altered, polygamy and concubinage becoming tolerated realities in biblical history, but never elevated to the rank of ideal. The prescriptions of the Mosaic

Law attempted to limit excesses and maintain an orientation towards the original plan of monogamy, which remained the exemplary institution, especially for servants close to God.

### **Marriage in the Song of Songs**

The Song of Songs offers a biblical vision of marriage as a mutual relationship of love, appreciation, and support, based on dialogue and freedom. This conception, far from being merely a poetic ideal, constitutes a theological and anthropological principle of the Old Testament that can serve as a model for maintaining and strengthening marriage in the present.

The message of the Song of Songs remains relevant for contemporary society. It can be interpreted as a true “divine manual” on the dynamics of love relationships and the strengthening of the institution of marriage. This biblical book is not limited to poetic expressions of affection but offers fundamental principles that underlie a lasting marriage, valid in any era, including the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A first aspect that emerges from the text is that love must be mutual. The poetic dialogue between man and woman is based on sincere affection and each’s genuine desire to contribute to the maintenance of the relationship. In this framework, love is not unilateral but mutually shared, with each partner actively and responsibly responding to the other. Thus, marital communion is based on a living exchange of initiatives, complementarity, and mutual giving (Thompson 2021, 9).

Exegetes such as Pope emphasize that the two lovers live in an “alliance” of love, in a free and reciprocal relationship, face-to-face, with initiative constantly alternating (Pope 1997). This perspective emphasizes that the marital relationship in the biblical tradition is based not on dominance or unilateralism, but on an active and dynamic communion, in which the man and the woman describe, invite, admire, and encourage each other.

Significantly, the initiative of the dialogue belongs to the woman, who openly expresses her desire: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine...” (Wis 1:1). This detail contradicts the cultural stereotypes of antiquity and shows that within the framework of biblical marriage there is room for the free manifestation of female passion and desire, equally strong as that of the man (Greenspahn 1984). She directs all her affection and intense longing towards him,

without reservation, which denotes a conception of love as a shared and reciprocal force, not as a simple unilateral possession.

In turn, the man responds with words of tenderness and appreciation, going beyond the woman's perceived imperfections and highlighting her inner and outer beauty. Compliment, in this context, becomes a tool for building and strengthening unity, while criticism would represent an obstacle to harmony. This dimension suggests that, in the biblical conception, marriage is maintained by mutual valuing and the cultivation of appreciation, which nourish the stability and intimacy of the couple.

The exchange of floral metaphors (Wis 2:1-3) highlights another essential aspect of marriage in the Old Testament: marital intimacy is built through modesty and mutual support. The woman humbly describes herself as a "daffodil of the field" or a "lily of the valley," common flowers without brilliance. This self-characterization expresses her sense of simplicity and even insufficiency. But the man elevates her through his words, transfiguring this modesty into a unique and valuable beauty. Thus, the marital dynamic is revealed as a process of mutual edification, in which each partner contributes to the other's valorisation.

Another fundamental principle of marriage, presented in the Song of Songs, is that of the exclusivity of love. Sexual intimacy, in the marital context, is not described as a simple biological experience, but as a sacred, profound, and liberating act, through which the ontological unity of husband and wife is expressed. It does not represent the freedom to escape from marriage, but the freedom to give oneself entirely within it, in a faithful and total communion (Holtz 1984).

The biblical book emphasizes this aspect particularly explicitly in the verses of fragment 7:1–8:4, considered by exegetes to be the most erotic in the entire scriptural canon. Here, the intimacy experienced by a man and a woman as a legitimate couple, who enjoy the fruits of their love, is vividly described: "I am his, my beloved's. He carries my longing for him... Tomorrow let us go to the vineyard and see if it has yielded fruit... there I will give you my caresses" (Wis 7:10, 13). The passionate language is not used outside the conjugal context, but precisely to emphasize the fullness of freedom and joy experienced within the framework of marital exclusivity.

The image of the "locked garden" and the "sealed spring" (Wis 4:12) is a metaphor for virginity and protected intimacy, reserved only for the legitimate spouse. This symbolism suggests the private, sacred, and inviolable character of the marital relationship. The "garden" is a space separated from the world, a place of safety and

communion, to which only the legitimate partner has access. The “sealed spring” evokes the same reality: a total self-giving that cannot be shared but is intended exclusively for the chosen one within the covenant of marriage.

This dimension of exclusivity is reinforced by the well-known expression: “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Wis 2:16; 6:3), which recalls a marital vow. The formula, also present in the Jewish tradition in the nuptial ritual, expresses a covenant of mutual belonging in which each spouse proclaims their absolute fidelity to the other. It is a declaration of sacred possession, not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of exclusive consecration, through which the man and the woman affirm their indestructible unity.

Thus, we observe that the author of the Song of Songs clearly conveys the fact that sexuality, experienced within the framework of marriage, becomes a divine gift and a space of authentic freedom. It is the deepest expression of the covenant of love, through which the two give themselves entirely to each other, excluding any other intimate bond. As Bullock notes, sexual relations outside of marriage cannot be compared to the total and authentic joy of giving within the framework of the matrimonial alliance (Bullock 1979).

From this perspective, marital exclusivity is not just an ethical norm but a theological and anthropological reality that reflects the divine intention: husband and wife are called to honour each other, to preserve their purity, and to transform the conjugal act into a space of communion, security, and holiness. This Old Testament conception emphasizes that exclusive fidelity is the foundation of a blessed and lasting marriage.

The Book of Songs shows us that love is not reduced to a theoretical or abstract reality but is expressed through concrete facts and a communion of life. The biblical text emphasizes that the relationship between man and woman is based not only on erotic attraction, but also on friendship. The man calls the Shulammitte *my beloved*, using a noun in the feminine singular, accompanied by a possessive pronoun (Bokser 1989). Moreover, he calls her “my sister,” a title that emphasizes closeness, spiritual union, and respect. In turn, the woman states: “...this is how my beloved is, O daughters of Jerusalem, this is how my bridegroom is” (Wis 5:16), thus emphasizing the integral nature of their relationship.

This language is not accidental: it shows that conjugal love in the Old Testament vision involves not only desire and passion, but also the sharing of dreams, hopes, and

life projects. Along with the erotic dimension, the two also find themselves as traveling partners, as faithful companions in everyday existence. In this sense, biblical love goes beyond mere emotion, requiring active, constant communion, nourished by fidelity and mutual commitment.

Moreau notes that in marriage, we see the daily celebration of the commitment between a man and a woman, and friendship is the essential ingredient that ensures the health and durability of the relationship. This is, in fact, the foundation of biblical love and the necessary condition for marriage to be lasting. In the logic of the Old Testament text, marriage is based on friendship and the common worship of God, both of which are the foundations on which spouses build their intimacy (Moreau 2000).

The broader Old Testament perspective confirms this view. In Gen 2:18, God declares: “It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make him a helper suitable for him,” thus placing friendship and mutual support at the centre of the institution of marriage. At the same time, the wisdom literature states that “a friend loves at all times” (Prov 17:17), which reinforces the idea that husband and wife, beyond the erotic role, are called to be life companions, united by loyalty and constant support. In the same vein, the titles “my sister, my bride” (Wis 4:9) show a double dimension: the partner is loved, but she is also a friend, a trusted confidant, part of the same spiritual family.

On this basis, it is evident that marital satisfaction does not derive only from physical attraction, but from the joint efforts to build a solid friendship, which gives meaning and stability to marriage.

Another characteristic element of marriage in the Old Testament, reflected in the Song of Songs, is the emphasis placed on the beauty of the relationship. The man expresses his admiration in words that transcend the external appearance: “Arise, my love, and come!” (Wis 2:10). The beauty of conjugal love is not limited to the physical dimension but includes the inner beauty of character and the spiritual dimension of the relationship, expressed in fidelity to God’s plan.

In the book’s theological logic, spouses perceive each other as a precious gift from God, and the beauty of their bond deepens with time, like a fine wine that becomes more valuable with age. This conception suggests that conjugal beauty is dynamic: it does not exhaust itself in physical attraction but deepens through spiritual maturation and increasing conformity to the divine will.

In an eschatological sense, the beauty of love presented in the Song of Songs anticipates the communion between Christ and the Church, the supreme model of love.

Therefore, the beauty of marriage does not refer only to aesthetics, but to participation in God's plan, which transforms human love into a sacred and transfigured reality.

The Song of Songs is a collection of love songs, through which the joy of physical love and conjugal intimacy is openly and unreservedly celebrated. Through the words of the two lovers, the biblical text proclaims the value and beauty of mutual devotion between man and woman. Their relationship is depicted as a complete communion, grounded in the total dedication of each to the marital covenant. In this light, the book is not reduced to an erotic poem. Still, it becomes an authentic theological anthropology of love that shows how attraction, desire, and fidelity unite in a unitary reality: marriage.

In practical terms, the Song of Songs has great relevance for any era. When interpreted correctly and used responsibly, it offers principles for strengthening and improving married life, applicable even in the face of the difficulties that spouses face. For us, Orthodox Christians, the book is a call to continue cherishing the institution of marriage as one of society's cornerstones, valuing the goodness and beauty born of the union in the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony.

### **The Wedding at Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1-12)**

In numerous artistic representations of the "Wedding at Cana," both in paintings exhibited in museums and in widely circulated reproductions, the evangelical event is not rendered in the authentic appearance of first-century Palestinian society but according to the style and cultural context of each artist's era. This artistic transposition is not without theological value, as it invites the viewer to penetrate, through meditation, contemplation, and reflection, to a deeper level of the scriptural message (Kizito 2021, 6).

A careful analysis of the nature of what the Evangelist John relates, together with the multiple implicit references to the Old Testament, leads us to understand the Wedding at Cana not only as a simple account of a miracle, but as a theological icon of marriage and as an anticipation of the "Messianic Wedding" between Christ and the Church.

In the Jewish context of the era, marriage was conceived primarily as a family contract, negotiated between the two families involved, with the precise terms, resources, and venue established. An essential element of the celebration was wine, a sign of joy, abundance, and blessing. The lack of wine was not only an organizational deficiency but also a public shame brought upon the groom's family, endangering their social status

and honour before the community. The situation was more delicate because hospitality and serving guests were considered an eminently feminine responsibility, which reflects social pressure on the housewife and, implicitly, on the entire family.

In this context, the discreet intervention of the Mother of God acquires a special symbolic value. Through the words addressed to the Savior Jesus Christ in prayer, “They have no more wine” (Jn 2:3), Mary not only signals a material lack, but also expresses a careful compassion for the fragility and vulnerability of a family at the beginning of the conjugal journey. She combines discretion with trust, avoiding public exposure of shame and entrusting everything to her Son. This gesture reflects her role as intercessor and “mother of the helpless,” a quality recognized by the Tradition of the Church as a permanent function of the Mother of God.

From a theological perspective, Mary’s intervention at Cana highlights the fact that the mystery of marriage opens to a Christological dimension: Christ is called to be present in family communion and to transfigure it through His gift. The transformation of water into wine, the first *sign* of the Gospel of John, becomes an act by which Christ shows that the true joy of marriage cannot be ensured by human resources alone but only through His grace.

The Mother of God also appears in this pericope as a model of expectation and faith: she awaits the fulfilment of God’s promises at the Annunciation, and at Cana she awaits the moment when her Son will respond to the discreet call of her heart. This attitude of “active waiting” is a paradigm for spiritual life and for the way in which the Church herself relates to Christ the Bridegroom.

Mary’s statement “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3) has generated extensive exegetical debate over time, not so much by itself, but by the response that Jesus offers: “What is that to me and you, woman? My hour has not yet come” (Jn 2:4) (Moloney 1998). Exegesis has considered this reply to be one of the most challenging statements regarding the Mother of God in all of Scripture, precisely because it apparently expresses a radical distancing between Jesus and His mother in relation to the will of God. Some authors have interpreted the term “woman” as a substitution for the status of “mother,” suggesting that Christ would have refused the request (Braun 1953).

However, a careful analysis from the perspective of the Jewish language of the first century shows that the address “woman” did not carry negative connotations. On the contrary, it was a respectful and dignified form of address, used to express a cordial relationship (Ratzinger 2011). Other Gospel passages confirm this fact: the address

to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (Jn 20:15), the dialogue with the adulterous woman (Jn 8:10), with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21) or with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:28). The uniqueness lies in the fact that it was scarce for a son to call his mother “woman”. Therefore, this linguistic choice of Jesus becomes significant and requires a deeper theological interpretation.

If the words initially seem harsh, the actions that follow show the opposite: Jesus accepts His Mother’s intercession but integrates it into a broader plan linked to the salvific “hour” of His manifestation. Moreover, Mary’s reaction confirms that she did not perceive the answer as a rejection. With the words “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5), she manifests complete trust in her Son, anticipating the fulfilment of the request. This detail highlights the Mother of God’s role as an intercessor and, at the same time, the foundation of the relationship of faith and obedience that must also characterize marriage: trust, openness, and a willingness to follow the will of God.

From a symbolic point of view, the address “woman” places Mary in the broader framework of the history of salvation, in which she appears as the “new Eve”. The Gospel of John begins with clear allusions to the beginning of Genesis: the themes of light, life, creation, and darkness overcome are taken up again in the Johannine prologue. Likewise, the placement of the wedding at Cana on the “third day” (Jn 2:1), which symbolically correlates with the “seventh day” of creation, suggests that Christ is inaugurating a new creation here. In this context, Mary, called “woman,” is presented as the restored Eve, who, through her mediation, repairs the lack brought about by the first Eve. If in Genesis the woman was associated with lack and the fall (Gen 3), in Cana the woman – Mary – is related to the fullness of grace and life, through reference to Christ (Pitre 2014).

This theological reading links the Wedding at Cana to the Mystery of Marriage: Jesus, the Messianic Bridegroom, intervenes not only to save the honour of a family, but to show that valid marriage is founded on His presence. The transformation of water into wine becomes the sign that conjugal joy and the fruitfulness of family life are not simple human achievements, but gifts that come from the fullness of Christ’s grace. Thus, the marriage at Cana is presented as an icon of the restored covenant: the human family is called to participate in the plan of salvation, and Christ himself reveals himself as the foundation and fulfilment of conjugal communion.

When Jesus addresses his mother as “woman,” he deliberately identifies her with the woman in the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15), emphasizing her role as the New Eve, the one through whom the prophecy finds its fulfilment. Thus, Mary becomes the

maternal figure par excellence, the mother whose Son is destined to restore humanity and bring about new life. Her discreet intervention – “They have no more wine” – not only signifies a material lack at the wedding feast level but also an appeal to the Son to manifest His divinity and inaugurate the new Covenant. In the context of a marriage, where wine represented the joy and fruitfulness of the family, Mary’s gesture takes on a profound theological dimension: she asks the Son to offer the true wine, a symbol of life-giving grace (Kizito 2021, 8).

Through this address, Jesus not only transcends his biological relationship with Mary but also places the Mother of God in a universal function as the mother of all believers. This aspect is clarified at the cross, where the same title, “woman”, is spoken again, constituting a “second good news”: “Woman, behold your son” (Jn 19:26). Here, Mary moves from the role of mother of Jesus to that of mother of the Church, represented by the beloved disciple. This evolution shows that the Wedding at Cana anticipates the fulfilment on Golgotha, where the “hour” of the Son will manifest itself perfectly (Vincent, 1997).

Jesus’ mention – “My hour has not yet come” – introduces a central theme of the Gospel of John: the “hour” as the moment of complete revelation. In the context of the Wedding at Cana, the “hour” should not be reduced exclusively to the passion and resurrection but should be understood as the beginning of the path of messianic manifestation, the inauguration through “signs” of the divine work. The water turned into wine is an anticipatory sign of the Eucharistic transformation, where the wine becomes the Blood of Christ. Thus, what begins at an earthly wedding fulfils its meaning in the “eschatological wedding” between the heavenly Bridegroom and His Church.

Mary, through her presence and intercession, is called to be a witness to the entire course of the “hour”: from Cana to Golgotha. She undergoes an inner transformation, from “here is the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38) to “be it done to me according to your word,” assuming not only biological motherhood but also spiritual motherhood within the new creation. Analogously, marriage means more than a natural union: through the presence of Christ, it becomes an alliance transfigured by grace, a space of fidelity, fruitfulness, and communion in God (Ceroke 2020).

The significance of wine in this context is decisive. In a culture where the lack of wine brought shame to the groom’s family and called into question the stability of the new household, Jesus’ intervention transforms humiliation into glory, shame into blessing, and human precariousness into divine abundance. Therefore, the Wedding at

Cana becomes a dramatization of the Covenant: human marriage, with all its fragility, is assumed, restored, and raised to the status of a sacrament by the presence of the messianic Bridegroom.

Mary's instruction to the servants – “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5) – remains, in this key, not just a momentary exhortation, but a fundamental rule for any Christian conjugal life: submission to the word of Christ, obedience to His will, and complete trust that He transforms lack into fullness.

The words of the Mother of God addressed to the servants – “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5) – constitute not just a simple pragmatic exhortation, but an actual act of faith and an expression of man's collaboration with the grace of God. Mary's intervention is based on her unique experience as a mother who, even before Jesus's birth, understood the reality of her Son's divinity and preserved it in her heart through an attitude of expectation and obedience. Her previous statement, “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3), is not a simple statement of a material lack, but a delicate presentation of an essential need for the smooth running of a Jewish wedding, where wine was a symbol of joy, communion, and conjugal fruitfulness.

Far from being a simple human appeal, Mary's request has the value of a faith-filled intercession. She does not ask for a natural solution, but anticipates a miraculous intervention, thus highlighting her role as the “New Eve”, who presents man's need before God with total trust. Jesus' apparent distancing in the reply “What is that to me and to you, woman?” (Jn 2:4) does not diminish this certainty but rather intensifies it: Mary does not interpret the answer as a refusal but continues with a gesture full of trust – “Do whatever he tells you” –, anticipating the miracle.

In the nuptial logic of the event, this imperative given to the servants has a fundamental symbolic value. Marriage, as a biblical reality, presupposes mutual obedience, willingness to cooperate, and openness to the will of God. These are precisely the features found in Mary's instruction: the servants are invited to enter actively into the dynamics of the miracle, not just to wait passively. They are not told, “He will tell you what to do,” but rather, “Do whatever he tells you.” This formulation emphasizes the primacy of obedience to the Word, a necessary condition not only for resolving the current situation, but for the transfiguration of the whole of existence.

Thus, Mary not only offers a practical solution to the problem of a lack of wine but also proposes a universal theological principle: the correct attitude of man toward God is unconditional availability to fulfill His will, even when the instructions exceed natural

logic. In the conjugal context, this principle is translated into mutual trust between spouses and an orientation of family life according to the divine will, which confers stability, fruitfulness, and fullness.

In a more profound sense, “Do whatever he tells you” anticipates Christ’s Eucharistic command: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25). The miracle of Cana, where water is turned into wine, prepares the miracle of the Paschal Supper, where wine becomes the blood of the Savior, the guarantee of the new and eternal Covenant. Thus, Mary proves to be not only a witness but also an active participant in the divine plan of salvation, transforming lack into fullness and shame into blessing.

Mary’s expression, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5), summarizes the fundamental attitude of the Mother of God: obedient faith, obedient hope, and obedient love. It is precisely these interior dispositions that led God to direct His “love” towards humanity, choosing Mary as the instrument of the Incarnation. In the logic of this obedience, man’s correct relationship with the heavenly Father does not consist in anticipatory knowledge of the entire divine plan, but in active trust and obedience to His word. Biblical history confirms this principle: the chosen people had to cross the Jordan before the waters parted (Jo 3:13), and Israel had to trust in the promise of “passing over” into the promised land without seeing the complete fulfilment beforehand (Brown 1970).

In the same way, at Cana, the servants are asked to do only one thing: to do whatever Christ tells them. Filling the stone jars with water – a simple, repetitive, and tiring gesture – highlights the fundamental reality of faith: active waiting, the patience that becomes a channel through which God’s power is manifested. The miracle does not occur instantly, but because of this willingness to listen to the end.

Symbolically, the Wedding at Cana is an icon of the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity. If at the fall of Eden Adam and Eve experienced mutual rupture and reproach (Gen 3:13), at Cana, Jesus and Mary restored to humanity the possibility of a new communion. The lack of wine signifies the rupture of the bond between humans and God, the absence of joy and the fullness of life, which marks the existence of fallen man. The intervention of Jesus, mediated by Mary, inaugurates a new time of grace: the union between God and man, prefigured here by a human wedding, opens to the great messianic Wedding between Christ and His Church.

The symbolism of the vessels and the wine also highlight the characteristics of this marriage. The old wine, destined for fleeting pleasure or ritual formalism, is exhausted. It represents the limits of the Law, the letter that cannot give life. In contrast, the new

wine, transformed by Christ from water, is the sign of an inexhaustible joy, of divine mercy. If stone vessels were used for the purification rituals prescribed by the Law, the new wine brought by Christ indicates the overcoming of legalism and the establishment of a new life in holiness. This is the essence of His mission: to change an existence marked by sin into one transfigured by grace.

Mary, by saying “They have no more wine,” not only indicates a material lack, but presents to her Son a petition for all humanity. Her gesture conceals at the same time filial trust, anticipated gratitude, and hopeful intercession. She thus opens the way to the Eucharistic banquet, where the wine will be transformed into the blood of Christ, given for the life of the world (cf. Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) (Lenski 1961).

In the light of this pericope, marriage is presented not only as a social contract but as a privileged space for encountering God. It becomes the setting in which human shortcomings and fragility are assumed and transfigured by the presence of Christ the Bridegroom, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy. Thus, the Wedding at Cana sacramentally anticipates the reality of Christian marriage: a communion marked by obedience, trust, and active participation in God’s salvific plan.

The Evangelist John, introducing the account of the miracle at Cana of Galilee, provides precise details regarding time and place: “on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee” (Jn 2:1). This chronological and geographical reference, although apparently neutral, is interpreted by exegetes as having a poetic and symbolic value, with profound biblical and theological implications. The image of the wedding, recurring in the Old Testament, is one of the richest in meaning, representing the covenant between God and His chosen people (Ex 34:10-16; Dt 5:2-10; Is 54:4-10; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:4-25).

In the biblical tradition, Yahweh is described as the God of Israel, Creator, Redeemer, Father, and as the Bridegroom of His people. Israel is the beloved, though often unfaithful, bride. Through the prophets, God expresses his steadfast love and fidelity that overcome sin, calling the people to return to their first love (Jer 2:2), to abandon spiritual adultery and idolatry. Thus, the marriage covenant becomes a metaphor for the bond between God and Israel, and divine fidelity is presented as stronger than human sin.

The prophets also announce the coming of the messianic days in the form of an eschatological wedding, when God will renew the broken bond with His people and “engage” them again in eternal love, faithfulness and mercy (Is 54:4-8; 62:5; Hos 2:18,21-22) (Stienstra 1993, 120-2). This eschatological wedding is described as a universal feast,

in which all nations will participate, and Jerusalem will be presented as an adorned bride (Is 62:2-5). In this perspective, the abundance of wine (Am 9:13-14; Is 25:6) becomes a symbol of joy and messianic salvation (Rusconi 2008, 75-85).

In this context, the story of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) takes on major theological importance. Jesus' participation in the wedding (Jn 2:2) indicates the beginning of the messianic time: the presence of the Bridegroom announced by the prophets (La Goia, 2003, p. 216). The miracle of the transformation of water into wine, as the "first sign" (Jn 2:11), marks the beginning of the new and eternal alliance. In Jesus, God's faithful love, revealed throughout the entire history of salvation, reaches its peak. He is the Bridegroom who fulfils and perfects the prophecies, inaugurating the new covenant with His people.

This interpretation is also confirmed by the Apocalypse, where the image of the messianic feast reaches its fullness: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" (Rev. 19:9), and the New Jerusalem is presented as the bride adorned for her Bridegroom (Rev. 21:2, 9-10; 22:17). Cana thus becomes a prefiguration of the eschatological wedding between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride (Perdoli 2007, 192-215).

Therefore, the wedding at Cana is not just an account of a miracle, but a symbolic proclamation of the matrimonial character of the messianic mission. It emphasizes the continuity between the Old and New Testaments: marriage as a covenant, God's faithfulness to His people, and the messianic joy inaugurated by Christ. The event shows that marriage, in the Old Testament and Johannine logic, is the privileged image of the communion between God and humans, transformed into a whole reality by the coming of the divine Bridegroom.

### Conclusions

In the Old Testament, marriage does not appear as a social convention but as a divine institution, founded by the Creator at the dawn of creation, intended to ensure not only the continuity of humanity but also the communion between man and woman as a living icon of divine harmony. Even if sin has altered this order, paving the way for polygamy and other imperfect forms of family life, the ideal of monogamy – the indestructible unity between husband and wife – remains the fundamental benchmark that God reveals, and Christ restores it in its fullness.

In this light, the Song of Songs proves to be a proper theology of conjugal love, where eros, friendship, and fidelity intertwine in a complete communion. The poetic language of the book is not a simple aesthetic exercise but a proclamation that conjugal love, lived in exclusivity and mutual dedication, becomes the space of holiness and authentic freedom. The relationship between the bride and groom is depicted not as a power or possession relationship, but as a living exchange of affection, admiration, and support, revealing the divine will for the family: a unity founded on love, fidelity, and mutual respect. Thus, the Song of Songs transcends its era and remains a perennial model for any marriage, reminding us that the true beauty of love lies in its deepening fidelity to God and in the communion between the spouses.

But the supreme meaning of marriage, in the light of Scripture, is revealed when it becomes a metaphor and icon of the covenant between God and His people. From the pages of the prophets, God presents Himself as the Bridegroom of Israel, the One who remains faithful even when His bride proves unfaithful. Divine fidelity, stronger than any sin, announces the new and eternal engagement that will be fulfilled in Christ. This vision reaches its peak in the Wedding at Cana of Galilee, where Christ, by turning water into wine, inaugurates the messianic time and reveals the sacramental character of marriage. Conjugal joy is no longer just the result of human resources but becomes a gift of grace. The lack of wine – a sign of human insufficiency and fragility – is transformed by the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom into the abundance of divine joy.

Thus, marriage reveals its true meaning: not just a social contract, but a mystery in which the communion between husband and wife participates in the communion between Christ and the Church. It becomes the living icon of the eternal covenant, through which God shows his unwavering love for humanity. In this key, the Christian family is not just a unit of social life, but an ecclesial space, a small church, where the grace of God transfigures human love and raises it to the rank of sharing in divine love.

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