

## *A Question about Weddings*

*Make marriage in any serious degree unstable, dissoluble, destroy the permanency of marriage, and the Church falls. Witness the enormous decline of the Church of England.*

*The marriage-tie, the marriage bond, take it which way you like, is the fundamental connecting link in Christian society. Break it, and you will have to go back to the overwhelming dominance of the State, which existed before the Christian era.*

Would anybody with nothing to go on but general knowledge guess the author of these remarks to be D. H. Lawrence? Soon they will be available in the context of the Edgeways selection of his critical work. They came to mind because of an item in the local free paper. “Two Hereford brides are hoping their dreams come true this weekend when they compete against each other . . . to win a dream wedding in a radio competition.” One of them “met the love of her life . . . when she was taking a career break in Blackpool. Now, nine years later, they are living back in Sarah’s native Hereford, and are the proud parents of Emily, who is nearly three, and 18-month-old Jennifer.”

This is worth a moment’s notice because it raises a good question about what marriage is. “Hairdresser Sarah said, ‘We didn’t think we could have children, so it was such a lovely surprise. But, of course, it has been a financial struggle which is why we haven’t been able to get married—the children come first.’ ”

The question is what these brides-to-be, and *The Hereford Journal*, and Radio Wyvern, and the world in general, understand by marriage. What if anything is the reason for marriage? The first one given by the Prayer Book has been reversed: “First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.” In Sarah’s case children, until the arrival of the radio competition, were what made marriage impossible.

Whatever modern marriage is, it demands a ceremony and a party costing, both of them, large sums of money. In the reported competition “the wedding package includes the rings, clothing, cars, cake, flowers, photography, hair, make-up, hen and stag nights and the venue for the ceremony and evening function.” Weddings are planned by the cohabiting couples as much as two years in advance. Everything is minutely organised: the venue (book a year in advance or you will be too late) the food, the entertainment. The question is what difference is made by the ceremony and how the married state is understood. The couple continue as before. No stigma has attached to their living together and having children without being married. After the ceremony, what has changed?

Answer: a great deal of money has been spent, and the seriousness of the occasion is measured by how much, as families in a neighbourhood used to compete about how much to spend on fireworks on November the fifth. Overheard from one bride-to-be: “But we can’t spend only twelve thousand pounds! Last time, only seven years ago, I spent eighteen!” What is going on in the minds of these couples, their friends and relatives, donors and recipients, as they prepare for and go through this tremendous event? Has it any meaning at all? if so what?

Lawrence published his thoughts eighty-one years ago. His prophecy about the overwhelming dominance of the state is as prophetic as his remarking the feebleness of the Church of England. The senselessness of present-day marriage is entirely the creation of the state, in the vacuum left by the Church.