

A body is held together by its joints. If what is "joined and knit together by every ligament" (4:16) is "out of joint," or stiff with arthritic stubbornness, or swollen with hubris, the body does not function as intended. Paul names eight major "joints" in the body of Christ, six in the home (wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, children, parents), and two in the workplace (slaves and masters, corresponding to workers and employers in our workplaces). In the body of Christ, it is the joints between family members and fellow workers that keep the body functioning, in good repair, "fit" to live "to the praise of his glory." If the joints between family members or workers on the job are not functioning, if there is no suppleness in the joints making for easy coordination, the body is not "fit" because the parts do not fit.

* * *

Of the several relationships that Paul names in household and workplace, it is the marriage of husband and wife that he deals with most extensively. No other relation that we enter into is more complex and difficult and demanding, or more fulfilling and pleasurable and satisfying. Similarities between marriage and church are extensive. Paul makes the most of them as he simultaneously draws us into the ways we understand and participate in both marriage and church.

Marriage and church are both composed of relationships that are a bold assault on the individualism in both society and church — the *sin* of individualism, the sin of wanting to have my own way with God, my own way with my spouse, my own way with my children. If maturity, growing up in Christ, insists above all on relationships — relationships of trust and adoration with God, relationships of righteousness and love with one another — observing and meditating on what takes place in marriage is an excellent way to acquire the insights and develop the habits of heart that parallel what takes place in church.

Robert Frost wrote a poem on marriage with a striking image that has always seemed to me to be as much about church as about marriage. He wrote the poem in celebration of his daughter's marriage. The poem observes that the intimacy of marriage provides a

freedom not "chiefly to go where you will" but a different kind of freedom, a "swiftness, not for haste," but rather to live together in graceful, unforced, rhythmic coordination: "wing to wing and oar to oar."⁷

Intimate relationships within the husband-and-wife "one body" of marriage are not static but dynamic, in constant, swift, and moving mutuality: "wing to wing and oar to oar." Intimate relationships within the head-and-members "one body" of church are not static but dynamic, in constant, swift, and moving mutuality: "wing to wing and oar to oar."

* * *

Paul is obviously interested in marriage as a primary life setting in which the Holy Spirit brings the love and righteousness, the love and singing, the ways we talk and the ways we forgive into the practice of resurrection. He gives thorough attention to it. He knows both how central and complex it is and how demanding and difficult. Margaret Miles, in a rigorous discussion that insists on the fundamental ascetic provided by family and marriage for an embodied, not just a conceptual, maturity in Christ, posts the witness of Clement of Alexandria, who "regarded marriage as a strenuous spiritual discipline; he saw the celibate life as luxurious by comparison with the demands of life in the world, the cares of a home, and the responsibilities of raising children."⁸

But Paul, with marriage as background, is even more interested in church as the primary life setting in which the Holy Spirit brings all the operations of God to maturity in us. Five times in this section (Eph. 5:22-32) Paul pairs church and marriage in various ways, but his last word is church: "This mystery [marriage] is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (5:32 RSV). Marriage is a mystery, how a husband and wife can "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," experiencing marriage as a way to mature in love

7. Robert Frost, "The Master Speed," *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 300.

8. Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 99.