

## MUSICAL EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONAL CRISES IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS OF MARRIAGE – A JOINT PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY AND MUSIC PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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**SUMMARY.** This study examines the marriage ceremony from the perspectives of pastoral psychology and music psychology, with a particular focus on the emotional dynamics of natural developmental crises and the emotion-regulating role of music. Marriage, as a transition to a new life stage, involves a significant psychosocial transformation, in which ambivalent emotions, such as joy, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear of commitment, all emerge. This study demonstrates how music – particularly personally selected, jointly enjoyed, or ritually embedded musical pieces – can contribute to the resolution of emotional tensions, identity integration, and a deepening of communication within the couple. Music does not merely appear as an aesthetic element in the wedding ritual but functions as an affective mediator: it structures experiences, aids in emotional reframing, and supports the constructive processing of a crisis. Jointly listening to music creates an opportunity for reflective dialogue and becoming aware of the mourning process surrounding past relationship experiences, as well as aiding in reinforcing to concept of commitment. The study also integrates the theological and cultural-historical dimensions of marriage, highlighting that music, as one of the oldest ritual elements in human culture, can serve as an important tool for the emotional stabilization of relational transitions. The study's interdisciplinary approach contributes to music psychology research by interpreting the function of musical experiences within the psychological context of a specific life event, namely marriage.

**Keywords:** marriage, music psychology, emotional regulation, natural crisis, ritual, relationship dynamics.

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## “Behold, Here Is the Moment, Our Happy, Divine Hour Arrived”<sup>2</sup> – archaic emotional and cultural-historical contexts

### To acquire – to possess – to dominate

The quote in the title is taken from the Hungarian translation the first act of Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, sung by Susanna and Figaro as they prepare for their wedding. However, as we shall see, this scene is accompanied not only by unclouded happiness but also by an ambivalent feeling, “happy uncertainty”.<sup>3</sup> The intrapsychic process of acquiring – possessing – dominating is also evident in the experiment that pointed to the evolutionary origins of gender differences. In an American study examining selectivity, half of the women agreed to a subsequent meeting with a stranger of the opposite sex; 6 percent went to his apartment, and 0 percent wanted to have sexual intercourse.<sup>4</sup> Among men, 50 percent were also willing to meet again, but 69 percent went back to their apartment, and 75 percent would have gladly taken the woman to bed. This study also supports the notion that women are characterized by a need for long-term relationships, while men are characterized by the process of quickly acquiring, possessing, and dominating. Evolutionary psychology offers effective insights into the similarities and differences between men and women, which have been supported by research spanning nearly 10,000 individuals and 37 cultures, extending as far as the Zulu tribes of South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Janet S. Hyde, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, considers gender differences to be primarily of social origin, and she believes that social learning<sup>6</sup> and social roles influence mate selection.<sup>7</sup> Women’s mate

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<sup>2</sup> Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus: *The Marriage of Figaro*. Libretto: Lorenzo Da Ponte 1786 (Trans. to Hungarian by Dezsó Vidor), Act I, Duet of Susanna and Figaro.

<sup>3</sup> Gábor Hézser: *Pasztorálpaszichológiai szempontok az istentisztelet útkereséséhez (Pastoral-Psychological Perspectives on the Search for Worship)*. *Theoretical and Practical Possibilities*. Budapest 2007, Kálvin János Publishing House, 160.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, Russell D. and Hatfield, Elaine: *Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers*. In: *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, Vol. 2, 1989, No. 1, 39–55.

<sup>5</sup> Buss, David M.: *Gender differences in mate selection have evolutionary origins*. In: Atkinson – Hilgard: *Psychology*. Budapest 2005, Osiris Publishing House, 174.

<sup>6</sup> According to behavioral theory, roles and behavior are learned through reward and punishment. In contrast, research by Canadian psychologist A. Bandura suggests that this occurs through the observation of others’ behavior. See Bandura, Albert – Walters, Richard H.: *Social Learning and Personality Development*. New York 1963, Holt Rinehart and Winston. In German: *Lernen am Modell. Ansätze zu einer sozial-kognitiven Lerntheorie*. Stuttgart 1976, Klett.

<sup>7</sup> Hyde, Janet S.: *The Effect of Social Learning and Social Roles on Mate Selection*. In: Atkinson-Hilgard: op. cit. 175.

selection is determined primarily not by appearance<sup>8</sup>, but by success. According to research by Eagly and Wood, women in various societies have less power than men.<sup>9</sup> This is confirmed by a study showing that in the United States, women earn less, and only 12% of middle managers and a mere 1% of top executives are women.<sup>10</sup> (The situation is similar in Hungary.<sup>11</sup>) According to this, the dominant role in positions of power goes to men, while women are primarily occupied with household duties and child-rearing. According to Péter Popper, men have always sought to possess women: they locked them away in harems and burned them at the stake on charges of witchcraft. The driving force behind this is primarily men's fear of women. It is interesting that in Arab culture, the marriage broker sniffs the bride-to-be, and if she "does not smell right," he prefers to withdraw from the matchmaking.<sup>12</sup>

According to family therapist Brennen, marriage has never been a private matter,<sup>13</sup> since tribes, families, and relatives were also involved; therefore, it has had a "social aspect" from the very beginning.<sup>14</sup> We can thus say that the initial rites of "marriage" and long-term relationships are among the most ancient elements of human culture.<sup>15</sup> When two people marry, it is not only do two individuals that are joined together, but also two families, who complement and enrich one another with their traditions, customs, and knowledge, while also creating crises. According to Edward T. Hall, when

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<sup>8</sup> Feingold, Alan: *Gender differences in the effects of physical attractiveness on romantic attraction: A comparison across five research paradigms*. In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 59, No. 5, 1990, pp. 981–993.

<sup>9</sup> Eagly, Alice H. and Wood, Wendy: *The Origins of Sex Differences in Human Behavior: Evolved Dispositions Versus Social Roles*. In: *American Psychologist*, Vol. 54, No. 6, 1999, pp. 408–409.

<sup>10</sup> Rhode, Deborah L.: *The Difference "Difference" Makes. Women and Leadership*. (Ed.), Stanford, California 2003, Stanford University Press, 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ksh.hu/interaktiv/eurostat/womenmen/bloc-2d.html?lang=hu> (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> Hall, Edward T.: *The Hidden Dimension*. New York 1966, Anchor Books Editions – Doubleday, p. 73. Smells have their own psychology, and it would be worthwhile to conduct research on whether the smells or scents of our Reformed churches are appealing or repulsive, as it is a proven fact that we cannot pay close attention to the words addressed to us if we are simultaneously struggling with emotions triggered by a scent or smell. It is interesting to note that a healthy person can distinguish between 10,000 and 40,000 different smells, with women being able to distinguish more than men. In: Cain, William S.: *Olfaction*. In: Atkinson, Richard C. - Herrnstein, Richard J. – Lindzey, Gardner, & Luce, R. Duncan (Eds.): *Stevens' Handbook of Experimental Psychology*. Vol. 1, New York 1988, Wiley Press, 409–459.

<sup>13</sup> Brennen, Barrington H.: *Marriage is a Public Affair*. <http://www.soencouragement.org/marriage-is-a-public-affair.htm> (March 3, 2026).

<sup>14</sup> Hézser Gábor: *Pasztorálpszichológiai szempontok az istentisztelet útkereséséhez (Pastoral Psychology)... op. cit.* 161.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

people from different cultures interact, they do more than just converse, as what is also at work there is a finely tuned, culturally conditioned mechanism. When cultures meet,<sup>16</sup> if one culture adopts anything from another, it must first adapt it to its own needs; that is, if the old and the new do not fit together, they may be contradictory.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes people fall in love with their own fantasies, their own ideas, or the image they project onto their partner, which, as living together reveals, turns out to be an illusion, and that is when the problems begin. According to Béla Hamvas, people live in a culture of possessions, where the exchange and acquisition of possessions, the struggle for them, and the improvement and enhancement of the quality of life's necessities distract people from genuinely living life.<sup>18</sup> This has carried over into human relationships as well: however, the pursuit of possession can lead to dependency, in which one cannot be happy.

### **A natural crisis occurs before marriage. Recommendations for personal music selection**

Pastoral psychology distinguishes between two types of crises: the natural or developmental crisis and the reactive crisis.<sup>19</sup> The former, in which the Church is present through its rites, is triggered by various changes, such as adolescence, the baptism of a child, death, and marriage. These are the crises that everyone experiences and goes through sooner or later. Separation from the family and choosing a partner, as life-defining events, “burden the immature and undeveloped personality’s coping abilities”.<sup>20</sup> However, crises are like Janus from Roman mythology: they have two faces – they can threaten development, but at the same time, they are also its prerequisites. Before marriage, doubt, uncertainty, and panic may arise, with the most important question being: “Did I make the right choice?” Other studies also confirm that marriage involves a crisis. For example, Steve Burns, an American stress researcher, created a scale that makes it easy to measure personal stress. On a scale of 100, marriage scores 45 points.<sup>21</sup> In 2016, a nearly 500-page

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Berne lists various types of marriages based on the letters of the alphabet. These are the A, H, I, O, S, V, X, and Y types of marriages, where, for example, O “represents a marriage that goes round in circles, getting nowhere until death or divorce puts an end to it all.” Berne, Eric: *Sex in Human Loving*. Bungay, Suffolk 1973, Penguin Books Ltd, 134–135.

<sup>17</sup> Edward T. Hall: *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 139.

<sup>18</sup> Béla Hamvas: *Patmos II*. Budapest 2004, Medio Kiadó /Works of Béla Hamvas 4/, 26–30.

<sup>19</sup> Gábor Hézszer: *Újra szárnyra kapni (Taking Flight Again)*. Târgu Mureş 2014, Lector Publishing, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Péter Osváth: *Az életciklus-krízisek jelentősége (The Significance of Life Cycle Crises): Psychopathology and Suicidal Behavior*. In: *Neuropsychopharmacologia Hungarica*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2012, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> Barnard, Christiaan: *50 Ways to a Healthy Heart*. Munich, 2000, ECON Ulstein List Verlag, p. 89.

book was published on marriage, offering practical guidance for the Big Day – from the first steps through the church wedding to the thank-you notes.<sup>22</sup>

Quoting József Eötvös, Péter Popper says that marriage is a good thing; the only problem with it is that it lasts a long time. Historically, marriages were indeed shorter, as one of the partners could quickly fall victim to various diseases or wars; women often died in childbirth.

The *psychosocial crisis*<sup>23</sup> marks a radical change in life circumstances: roles, living arrangements, finality and irreversibility, compromises, the temporary disharmony in the sexual relationship, and the new rhythm of daily life alarm and unsettle many. Counteracting loneliness: a child is born because they are a “tool child” or a “functional child,” whose mission is to hold the marriage together and keep a couple that is already drifting apart united. Establishing shared norms and addressing important issues (the idea of childlessness, how many children they want, where they want to live, career opportunities, etc.). The process of separating from one’s parents is complicated by the presence of so-called “invisible family members”<sup>24</sup> – siblings, parents, etc. – whom the spouses bring into their marriage, which can also exacerbate and intensify the crisis. All of these natural crises are not pathological or neurotic in and of themselves, as they are part of the growth process. However, they can become so if the soon-to-be-married couple acts as if they do not exist and sweeps them under the rug.<sup>25</sup>

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We recommend listening to songs that can help ease the feelings associated with natural crises and guide you through them. Since we also offer songs that are not exclusively known as Christian music, we encourage listeners to pray with the words of David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24) The following Hungarian language songs can also be listened to together by those about to be married, so that these two different types of people – whom Gary Chapman, a Christian marriage counselor, calls “dead seas” (where information arrives but no reaction follows) and “babbling brooks” (unable to hold onto

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<sup>22</sup> Weiss, Mindy and Levine, Lisbeth: *The Wedding Book: An Expert’s Guide to Planning Your Perfect Day—Your Way*. New York 2016, Workman Publishing, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Hézszer Gábor: *A pásztori pszichológia gyakorlati kézikönyve (A Practical Handbook of Pastoral Psychology)*. Budapest 1995, Kálvin János Publishing House, 127.

<sup>24</sup> Kozma Zsolt: *Pojmenika*. Cluj-Napoca 2000, Misztótfalusi Kis Miklós Press Center, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Márti Csanády: *Kincsünket cserépedényben őrizzük (We Keep Our Treasure in Earthen Vessels)*.” <https://ujember.hu/kincsunket-cserepedenyben-orizzuk/> (March 3, 2026).

information on their own)<sup>26</sup> —can experience their feelings together. Nothing demonstrates how important the feeling of love is to humanity better than the text of the Latin poem “*Song to the Muses*,” found in Oxford’s Bodleian Library, which dates from the 5th century and is one of the oldest written records of secular music.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1

Number	Title	Author	Context
1.	<i>Esküvő</i>	Sztevanovity Zorán	Sharing the blessing received from You
2.	<i>Egyszer</i>	Rúzsza Magdi – Presser Gábor	You could propose to me / You could buy me a diamond ring / And then you could pretend / As if you really existed
3.	<i>Sokat vártam rád</i>	Durkó Heléna & Tóth Dávid	You are the one God gifted me
4.	<i>Eljön a nap</i>	Varga Ildikó & Kovács Elena	God, protect their steps, guide their lives
5.	<i>Hogyan mondjam el neked</i>	Szenes Iván	“How can I tell You, / What cannot be, / For there are no words, / Only imagination” <sup>28</sup>
6.	<i>Most kell eldöntenem</i>	Demjén Ferenc	It’s up to you whether you win or lose with me... I’ll take care of you.
7.	<i>Köszönöm, hogy vagy nekem</i>	Bon Bon	And I know that I’m staying here for good.
8.	<i>Átfaad vagyok</i>	Csézy	Life is carefree when I’m waiting for a partner

### Divorce as a Traumatic Factor

According to clinical psychologist Kitty Almásy, the more someone rejects the possibility of divorce, the greater the risk to their marriage.<sup>29</sup> Those preparing for marriage may be unsettled by statistics indicating that

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, Gary D.: *A házasság négy évszaka (The Four Seasons of Marriage)*. (Trans. Zsuzsanna Mirnics), Budapest 2017, Harmat Publishing, 141–142.

<sup>27</sup> Menuhin, Yehudi and Davis, Curtis W.: *The Music of Man*. Ontario, Canada 1979, Methuen Publications 2330, Milland Avenue, Agincourt, 78.

<sup>28</sup> <https://songbook.hu/lyrics/86064/hogyan-mondjam-el-neked> (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>29</sup> Kitty Almási: *Hűtlenség (Infidelity)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNMMyuEFa7vQ> (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

nearly half of all marriages end in divorce.<sup>30</sup> According to a Eurostat survey, recent demographic data show that in recent decades the number of marriages has decreased in the EU, while the number of divorces has increased. At the same time, an increase in the proportion of children born to cohabiting couples has also been observed.<sup>31</sup> All of this may trigger a further natural crisis among those planning to marry. The possibility of marital breakdown must be taken into account, but with appropriate prevention, this too can be avoided. Throughout church history, Protestants have often been accused of readily separating quarreling spouses. According to Péter Nádudvari,<sup>32</sup> divorce is a possibility, but he adds: “If we do not want to stumble here, let us not go against Scripture, and although human laws list many reasons, let us hold fast only to Scripture”.<sup>33</sup>

The teachings of Scripture can be embodied in everyday married life, as illustrated by the following two short stories: the first was shared with his readers by Harold J. Sala, and it testifies to an important form of “prevention”. On their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the husband was asked what the secret to a long marriage was. He recounted that on their wedding day, his father-in-law had given him a gift, saying that it contained everything he needed to know about marriage. The wedding gift was none other than a gold watch, on the face of which was the following inscription: “Say a few kind words to Sarah! That is the secret to a good marriage”.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Barbara de Angelis, an American psychologist, recommends kissing our partner for at least 20 seconds every day. This releases positive energy.<sup>35</sup>

“It’s as if I’m not living my own life” – according to psychotherapist Mária Angster,<sup>36</sup> her patients often say this in therapy, and they themselves don’t know the exact reason why their relationships are falling apart.<sup>37</sup> As noted above, nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, which means that half of young people getting married come from families where divorce has

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<sup>30</sup> According to Coelho, “even the most beautiful melody in the world will sound terrible if the strings are out of tune.” In: Coelho, Paulo: *The Spy*. (Trans. Viktória Nagy), Budapest 2016, Atheneum Publishing, 111.

<sup>31</sup> Eurostat: *Marriage and divorce statistics*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Marriage\\_and\\_divorce\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Marriage_and_divorce_statistics) (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>32</sup> Péter Nádudvari (c. 1670–1726), Transylvanian Reformed presbyter, ecclesiastical writer.

<sup>33</sup> Sándor Bíró – Mihály Bucsay – Endre Tóth – Zoltán Varga: *A Magyar Református Egyház története (The History of the Hungarian Reformed Church)*. Sárospatak 1995, Theological Academy of the Reformed College of Sárospatak, 250–251.

<sup>34</sup> Sala, Harold J.: *Something More Than Love*. Denver 1983, Accent Publishing, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Barnard, Christiana: *op. cit.* 159.

<sup>36</sup> Mária Angster – Chair of the Research Committee of the International Society of Constellation Work (ISCA).

<sup>37</sup> Mária Angster: *A családállítás (Family Constellation)*. In: Emőke Bagdy – Zsuzsanna Mrinics – Erika Nyitrai (Eds.): *Transperszonális pszichológia és pszichoterápia Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy*, Budapest 2011, Kulcslyuk Publishing, 487.

already occurred, and this has an impact on their decision to marry. The parent who left the family earlier is present in the young people's lives, as they either return by the time of the wedding or do not attend it. Whether their absence or their presence, it reopens painful wounds in the lives of those about to marry.

Before marriage, both have surely experienced the end of several relationships. That is why it is important to fully grieve and mourn these, as an encounter with a former first love can disrupt the marital relationship – for example, if it signals “how emotionally significant a role that person still plays in our lives”.<sup>38</sup> It can also happen that nothing came of the first love, yet the person remains emotionally anchored to it. A lack of commitment can therefore also stem from the fact that emotional detachment from the previous love has not occurred. The greatest danger to the individual and the relationship is posed by “momentary or prolonged emotional tensions”,<sup>39</sup> which attack our mental balance.

As the number of divorces, as *social interactions*,<sup>40</sup> increases, the number of remarriages among those getting married is also rising. The “phantom image of the first wedding”<sup>41</sup> can disrupt the harmony of the second wedding. The worst thing is when both the pastor and the couple try to sweep the “phantom image of the first wedding” under the rug. Therefore, a pastoral conversation is essential, during which there may be a process of saying goodbye to the first marriage and wedding, as well as “burying” and mourning those emotions.

Although there are ups and downs and crises in relationships and marriage, the solution is not to walk away, but rather the true art lies in trying to pull the relationship out of this low point (Popper). Endre Gyökössy, when discussing marriage, explains that “love must be learned” in order to save us from “coupled loneliness,” uncertainty, a sense of being lost, and feelings of desolation and alienation.<sup>42</sup> Listening to music together or individually provides an opportunity to devote time to our feelings and to each other, and to create the space and time for a breakthrough toward one another, for a love that endures with one another.

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<sup>38</sup> Ferenc Pál: *A magánytól az összetartozásig (From Solitude to Belonging)*. Budapest 2014, Kulcslyuk Publishing, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Péter Popper: *Lelkek és göröngyök (Souls and Pebbles)*. *Psychological Writings*. Budapest 2005, Saxum Publishing, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Babbie, Earl: *A társadalomtudományi kutatás gyakorlata (The Practice of Social Research)*. (Trans. Gábor Kende and Margit Szaitz), Sixth, revised edition, Budapest 2008, Balassi Publishing, 112.

<sup>41</sup> Hézsér, Gábor: *A pásztori pszichológia gyakorlati kézikönyve (Pastoral Psychology)... op. cit.* 162.

<sup>42</sup> Endre Gyökössy: *Magunkról magunknak (About Ourselves, for Ourselves)*. Budapest 1998, Szent Gellér Publishing House, 137–138.

## Scriptural elements of the marriage ceremony

In the Old Testament, marriage is described as “*the day of the heart’s joy*” (Song of Songs 3:11); nevertheless, there is no “independent and general term designating the institution of marriage.”<sup>43</sup> The לֵב שִׂמְחָה, that is, the *joyful heart*, strengthens the immune system and protects health, for a cheerful heart is good medicine (Prov 17:22). The expression חֲסֵר לֵב, meaning “*lack of heart*,” does not refer to emotional coldness related to love, but rather to thoughtlessness (Prov. 10:13). When Delilah, for example, complains to her husband, Samson, that אֵין אֵת וְלִבִּי, meaning “*your heart is not with me*,” she means “you do not share your secrets with me”.<sup>44</sup> The expression עַל-לֵב הַנֶּעֱרַךְ, “*to his heart*,” belongs to the language of love, which signifies not only beautiful words but also aspiration.<sup>45</sup>

According to Tillich, the “father-figure God” who appears at the dawn of creation,<sup>46</sup> who created man as male and female, emphasizes in Genesis 1:27 both unity and sexual difference. Legally, the man is בֶּעַל אִשָּׁה, that is, *he possesses the woman* (Gen. 21:3), who is בְּעֵלִית בֶּעַל, the man’s property (Gen. 20:3).<sup>47</sup> The man and woman belong to each other as the body and the rib, which is why in the Old Testament, marriage is not simply a relationship but a community,<sup>48</sup> denoted by the concept of the covenant. This is also emphasized in Malachi 2:14, where it refers to the woman to whom her husband was unfaithful as וְאִשְׁת׃ בְּרִיתִי (the woman of the covenant). Andreas J. Kostenberger also highlights the idea of the covenant in his study, in which he formulates five fundamental principles regarding God’s marriage

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<sup>43</sup> Wolff, Hans Walter: *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. Gütersloh 1973, Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 205.

<sup>44</sup> Wolff, Hans Walter: *op. cit.* 73.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Tillich, Paul: *Létfátorság (The Courage to Be)*. (Trans. István Szabó) Budapest 2010, Theological Literary Association, 266.

<sup>47</sup> According to studies by McKee and Sherriff, in 1957, 93% of male participants rated men as slightly or significantly superior to women. 86% of female respondents indicated the same. In: McKee, John -P. Sherriffs, Alex C.: *The differential evaluation of males and females*. In: *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 25, 1957, No. 3, 356–371. Interestingly, in 1985, Werner and LaRussa repeated the study and observed that men were still rated as superior to women, although the gender gap had narrowed. In: Werner, P. D. & LaRussa, G. W.: *Persistence and change in sex-role stereotypes*. In: *Sex Roles*, Vol. 12, 1985, No. 9–10, pp. 1089–1100.

<sup>48</sup> According to Dymphna Cusack, true marriage is “ecstasy and security.” In: Cusack, Dymphna: *Ketten a halál ellen (Two Against Death)*. (Trans. Miklós Vásárhelyi) Bucharest 1968, Irodalmi Könyvkiadó, 251.

covenant.<sup>49</sup> The New Testament equivalent of this is *κοινωνία*<sup>50</sup>, which means that “in marriage, there must be a constant flow in the sexual, spiritual, material, and every other realm in which the partners live alongside one another, but also within one another and for one another.”<sup>51</sup>

The consequences of the Fall do not leave marriage untouched, for mutual accusations and leading one another into sin, difficulties in bearing children, domination within marriage, and laborious work are all consequences of sin.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, part of the formal ceremony of the wedding was that the bride appeared veiled (Gen 24:65), followed by music, noise, and revelry (Jer 7:14; Mk 2:18–20). The groom paid the bride’s father a *מָהָר*, that is, a *betrothal gift*,<sup>53</sup> which formalized the engagement<sup>54</sup> and brought the groom’s rights into effect; he then proceeded solemnly to the wedding feast (Matt 25:1), and the wedding celebration lasted seven days (Judg 14:12). Nevertheless, we do not know much about the wedding ceremony itself.

Under the heading “*Marriage as a Moderated Sexual Ethos*” Theissen presents three statements made by the Apostle Paul to the early Christians regarding marriage, which Paul “formulated from the perspective of his own self-restraint”.<sup>55</sup> According to the apostle, within marriage, obligations are bilateral even in the sexual sphere: “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (1 Cor 7:4) The verb *ἐξουσιάζει* (*ἐξουσιάζω*, *ν*) means *to have the right or power over something, to have control over something, to exercise power or dominion*.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the spouse surrenders their own *ἐξουσία* on the altar of reciprocity. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul sees the meaning of sexual life within marriage not in procreation, but in the sexual union itself. This is why he admonishes

<sup>49</sup> The permanence, sanctity, intimacy, reciprocity, and exclusivity of marriage. Kostenberger, Andreas J.: *The Bible’s Teaching on Marriage and Family*. <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF11J34.pdf> (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>50</sup> *κοινωνία* – community, close (inner) relationship, brotherhood, sense of community, participation, sympathy, help. In: Varga Zsigmond J. (ed.): *Görög–magyar szótár (Greek–Hungarian Dictionary)*. Budapest 1996, Kálvin János Publishing House, 547.

<sup>51</sup> Zsolt Kozma: *Pojmenika. op. cit.* 53.

<sup>52</sup> Zsigmond J. Varga: *op. cit.* 576.

<sup>53</sup> According to Exodus 22:16, the *bridal price* was a fixed amount known to everyone: “If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall pay the bridal price and marry her.” Deuteronomy 22:29 sets the bride price at fifty shekels of silver.

<sup>54</sup> “*I betroth you*” can also be translated as “I legally acquire for myself”: *אָשֵׁר אֶרְשֶׁתִּי לִי* (2 Sam 3:14), *וְאָרְשֶׁתִּיךָ לִי* (Hos 2:2).

<sup>55</sup> Theissen, Gerd: *Az őskeresztyénség élményvilága (The World of Experience and Forms of Behavior in Early Christianity.) The Psychology of Early Christianity*. (Trans. Csaba Szabó) Budapest 2008, Kálvin János Publishing House, 420–422.

<sup>56</sup> Zsigmond J. Varga: *op. cit.* 335.

spouses not to abstain from sexual intimacy for long periods, as this gives Satan an opportunity to tempt them: “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Cor 7:5) At this point, Theissen states that the purpose of marriage is sexual relations.

We supplement Theissen’s – or more precisely, the Apostle Paul’s – thoughts with the words of Péter Popper, who, citing Milán Füst,<sup>57</sup> stated that marriage is like a four-legged table; if any one leg is missing, the table tips over. These are as follows: a shared or similar lifestyle, love (and acceptance), sexuality, and economic partnership. In summary, we can say that a happy marriage is a state of grace that is given to a person as a gift.

### The Christian Interpretation of Marriage

In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch<sup>58</sup> recommends that marriage should not take place without the bishop’s consent and the community’s knowledge, and that “all this should be done for the glory of God”.<sup>59</sup> Tertullian,<sup>60</sup> who in his work *Ad uxorem*<sup>61</sup> (written around 203) asked his wife to remain a widow after his death, and later, in his work *De monogamia*,<sup>62</sup> engaged in a sharp debate against women and men who remarried, similarly to Ignatius of Antioch, urged for the necessity of a bishop’s consent before marriage. St. John Chrysostom<sup>63</sup> honored virginity and abstinence from sexual relations until the day of marriage as a sign of triumph.<sup>64</sup> The purpose of the marriage rite was to solidify the betrothal relationship, to transform it into a more secure and lasting institution, and to emphasize the solemnity of the marriage itself.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Milán Füst (1888–1967), writer, poet, aesthetician.

<sup>58</sup> Saint Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 107), Bishop of Antioch until his death.

<sup>59</sup> Ignatius: *The duties of husbands and wives*.

[https://biblehub.com/library/ignatius/the\\_epistle\\_of\\_ignatius\\_to\\_polycarp\\_and\\_the\\_ephesians/chapter\\_v\\_the\\_duties\\_of\\_husbands.htm](https://biblehub.com/library/ignatius/the_epistle_of_ignatius_to_polycarp_and_the_ephesians/chapter_v_the_duties_of_husbands.htm) (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>60</sup> Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225), Latin patristic thinker, one of the apologists.

<sup>61</sup> Tertullian: *Ad uxorem*. (Translated by the Rev. S. Thelwall)

[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0160-](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0160-0220,_Tertullianus,_Ad_Uxorem_[Schaff],_EN.pdf)

[0220,\\_Tertullianus,\\_Ad\\_Uxorem\\_\[Schaff\],\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0160-0220,_Tertullianus,_Ad_Uxorem_[Schaff],_EN.pdf) (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

<sup>62</sup> Rankin, David: *Tertullian and the Church*. New York 1995, Cambridge University Press, 163–165.

<sup>63</sup> John Chrysostom (c. 344–407), theologian, Church Father, Patriarch of Constantinople.

<sup>64</sup> Chrysostom, John St.: *On Marriage and Family Life*. (Translated by Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson), New York 2003, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 12–13.

<sup>65</sup> Lajos Dolhai: *A házasság szentségének liturgiátörténete (The Liturgical History of the Sacrament of Marriage)* [https://www.epa.hu/02900/02970/00888/pdf/EPA02970\\_vigilia\\_2014\\_08\\_566-572.pdf](https://www.epa.hu/02900/02970/00888/pdf/EPA02970_vigilia_2014_08_566-572.pdf) (Accessed on March 3, 2026).

St. Thomas Aquinas drew the foundations of his doctrine of marriage from Roman law, expanding upon them with Christian teaching. Thus, the purposes of *procreatio prolis and communicatio operum*, as known in Roman law, were linked to the teachings<sup>66</sup> of *in quantum inter fidelis est, significatio Christi et ecclesiae*.<sup>67</sup> In the time of the Angelic Doctor, marriage became a sacrament, the purpose of which was “the establishment of a marital union that is indissoluble”,<sup>68</sup> and according to Roman canon law, “*nudus consensus facit nuptias*,” that is, it is contracted by mutual consent.<sup>69</sup> According to the Council of Trent, the betrothed must prepare for marriage through confession,<sup>70</sup> and on the wedding day, the priest receives the couple at the church door.

According to historian Steven E. Ozment, “*in fact, it was not Protestantism that was the first intellectual movement to come to the defense of the institution of marriage*”,<sup>71</sup> Luther, who after taking his monastic vows had declared that “*by God’s grace I do not desire a wife*”,<sup>72</sup> later denied the sacramental nature of marriage, calling it a *secular matter* and treating it as a civil affair.<sup>73</sup> Although the reformer called marriage “God’s most beloved gift”,<sup>74</sup> he did not regard it as a sacrament.<sup>75</sup> He emphasized this in his work *\*Esketési Könyvecske\** (Booklet on Marriage), published in 1529 along with the *\*Small Catechism\**, where he refers to the wedding and marriage as a “worldly matter” (*weltlich Ding*).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Dezső Buday: *A házasság bölcselete (The Philosophy of Marriage)*. (Study) Budapest 1901, Published by Zsigmond Politzer, 76–77.

<sup>67</sup> Procreation and Community Service... Among the Faithful, as a Sign of Christ and the Church.

<sup>68</sup> Niesel, Wilhelm: *Az evangélium és az egyházak (The Gospel and the Churches. A Textbook of Symbolism)*, (Trans. Tamás Juhász), Cluj-Napoca 1979, University-Level Unified Protestant Theological Institute, 101.

<sup>69</sup> Huebner, Rudolf: “*A History of Germanic Private Law.*” (Translated by Francis S. Philbrick), New Jersey 2000, The Lowbook Exchange, Ltd., 598–599.

<sup>70</sup> Article 7: *The Sacrament of Marriage*. II. 1622.

<sup>71</sup> Ozment, Steven: “*When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe.*” Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Walther, Vilmos: *Luther jelleme (The Character of Luther)*. Budapest 2007, Bik Publishing House, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Lajos Müller: *A keresztyén házasság (Christian Marriage)*. Budapest 1921, Apostol-Nyomda Részvénytársaság, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Martin Luther: *Asztali beszélgetések (Table Talks)*. (ed. Zoltán Csepregi et al.), Budapest, 2014, Luther Publishing House, 678.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Luther: *Az egyház babiloni fogságáról szóló könyvecske (A Treatise on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church)*, (Trans. Endre Masznyik), Budapest 2005, Aeternitas Publishing, p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> Martin Luther: *Esketési könyvecske az egyszerű lelkészek számára (A Small Book on the Sacrament of Baptism for Simple Pastors)*. In: Pröhle Károly: *Luther Márton négy hitvallása The Four Confessions of Martin Luther*. Budapest 1996, Press Department of the Evangelical Church in Hungary, 104–107.

John Calvin, like Luther, although he did not regard marriage as a sacrament,<sup>77</sup> is considered innovative in that he placed the authority to legislate on marital matters within the joint jurisdiction of the civil government and the church.<sup>78</sup> In his work *Regulations on Marriage*, published in 1546, the Geneva reformer expounded on the impediments to marriage, with particular regard to age and parental consent.<sup>79</sup> Nothing demonstrates the extent to which Calvin emphasized the “*ordinatio et institutio divina*” perspective regarding marriage better than the fact that the Geneva ecclesiastical court he established granted a divorce in only 26 cases over nearly two decades (1541–1566).<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

At the ultimate intersection of the theological, psychological, and cultural-historical analyses presented in this study, music appears not merely as an accompanying phenomenon, but as a relational and affective force field. Marriage, as a natural developmental crisis, is an emotional transition in which uncertainty, joy, a sense of loss, and hope are all present simultaneously. Music can play a prominent role in the integration of these complex affective dynamics.

The structuring function of music lies in the fact that it provides a temporal framework for the experience: it marks the beginning, the climax, and the conclusion. At the same time, from a neuropsychological perspective, it is one of the most effective tools for emotional regulation. Listening to music together – especially when it comes to melodies with personal significance – activates autobiographical memory, enhances empathic resonance, and promotes emotional synchronization between the couple. Music, therefore, is not merely sound but a relational space.

The ambivalent emotions preceding marriage, the “happy uncertainty,” can be reframed through musical mediation. A well-chosen song or piece of music is capable of transforming anxiety into hope, uncertainty into trust, and individual narratives into a shared story. Music thus also serves an identity-

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<sup>77</sup> John Calvin: *Institutio 1536*. (Trans. András Victor) Budapest 1936, Published by the Hungarian Reformed Church, 249–250.

<sup>78</sup> Béla Nagy Sándor: *Kálvin egyházkormányzati alapelvei (Calvin's Principles of Church Government in Practice. With Special Reference to the 1541 Ordinances of the Geneva Church)*. In: *Theologiai Szemle*, New Vol. 3, 1959, Nos. 9–10, 328–329.

<sup>79</sup> Balázs Dávid Magyar: *Kálvin neveléstanának újszövetségi vonatkozásai (New Testament References in John Calvin's Pedagogy)*. In: *Református Szemle*, Vol. 106, No. 3, 2013, pp. 256–282.)

<sup>80</sup> Kingdon, Robert: *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995. 7.

integrating function: it constructs a “we” experience from the “you” and “I” experiences.

The relationship between ritual and music deserves special attention. Marriage is not merely a legal or social act, but a performative event in which music becomes the vehicle for the inexpressible. Melodies often sound where verbalization falters. Music thus has a transcendent function in the marriage ritual: it connects the individual emotional world with the communal and spiritual dimensions.

A relevant question for future research in music psychology may be how to empirically measure the impact of listening to music together on crisis resolution prior to marriage and on subsequent relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, it could be investigated to what extent ritual music contributes to long-term relationship resilience.

In summary, it can be said that in the process of marriage, music is not a decorative element but rather an affective and relational infrastructure. It forms a sonic bridge between the past and the future, uncertainty and commitment, individual history and a shared life journey. In this sense, music not only accompanies but also shapes the psychological reality of the birth of marriage.

*Translated from Hungarian by Juliánna Köpeczi*

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