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Your Big Wedding Day Temporal Goal in Church Marriage Rituals

1. *Introduction and Research Problem*

When a random number of bridal couples are asked what they consider important in the form and content of their marriage ceremony, they usually answer that it must be personal and they must be able to recognise themselves in it.¹ In his research Michels² found that nowadays couples feel they need a personalised marriage ritual that deviates from the standard pattern. Civil marriage officers and pastors, too, tend to provide “customised” rituals. Where does this need for a personalised ritual come from? It stems from the structure of liturgies that accompany pivotal moments in people’s lives, such as baptism, marriage and burial. These occasions are experienced as merging with the great mystery of life³. In ritual studies they are considered to be rites of passage.⁴

Marriage rites, then, are seen as marking a major change in the lives of the bridal couple and their social environment. Although ritual scholars are currently debating whether one can still speak of a status transition in modern society,⁵ marriage represents a focal ritual in people’s lives. It marks a major change, possibly a confirmation of many gradual changes, or maybe a combination of all of these. Whichever is the case, it remains a big moment. These changes have not only a social but also a temporal dimension. Through church marriage rituals couples demonstrate that a particular phase of their lives is over, and a new phase has begun.

In pivotal moments such as the marriage ritual people in a sense reconstruct their lives. From

that decisive vantage point they review their past and look at their future. In their sermons pastors often describe how bride and groom first met each other. The selection of hymns and texts, too, tends to incorporate biographical elements. There may be references to deceased (grand)parents. Besides looking at the past, there are glimpses into the future. The “journey ahead together” is a recurring theme. Attention is drawn to troubled times that the couple are bound to experience. The origin of the relationship is sought in the past (how did they meet each other?). Its destiny is sought in the future (will they still be together?). But the couple’s lives are not reconstructed in a personal, immanent perspective only. The past/origin and future/destiny are also viewed in a Christian, transcendent perspective – that of the origin and destiny of all Christian marriages. Points of reference are the creation story, the marriages of the patriarchs and the metaphor of the couple as a sign of Christ’s love for the Church.

Because marriage rituals are in a process of being personalised and are increasingly “customised”,⁶ the focus on the immanent aspect of the relationship’s origin and destiny may be sharpened at the expense of its transcendent aspect. When it comes to the couple themselves, to what extent do they still adopt a transcendent perspective on their origin and destiny? The question is even more pressing for other participants in the marriage ceremony, the couple’s relatives and friends. After all, the couple chose to have a Christian marriage ritual; the wedding guests did not.

These questions are approached from participants’ views of the marriage ritual (both bridal

couples and wedding guests). We confine ourselves to Roman Catholic marriage rituals. The foregoing problems crystallise in the following research questions: (1) To what extent do participants in church marriage rituals distinguish between a transcendent and an immanent conception of the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship? (2) To what extent do participants in church marriage rituals agree with these conceptions of the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship?

In our contribution we explore notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship from participants' views of church marriage rituals. In the next section we elaborate our research problem into research questions. In the third section we discuss various views of the couple's origin and destiny based on the theories of Halbwachs and Assmann. Section 4 describes the new measuring instrument we devised for these views, and in the next section we deal with the results. In the analysis we first determine to what extent respondents discern the various dimensions that we identified. Then we look at their agreement with these dimensions and the correlations between them. The final section presents some tentative conclusions based on our answers to the research questions and certain issues for further discussion and research.

2. Conceptualisation of Time

In the previous section we divided our research problem into two research questions. In this section we present our conceptualisation of the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship, distinguishing between an immanent and a transcendent temporal perspective. We then formulate hypotheses about the influence of religious socialisation on the two temporal perspectives, following our description of religious socialisation in the preceding chapter. Finally we formulate hypotheses about the influence of conceptions of marriage on notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship.

This subsection first describes M. Halbwachs' and J. Assmann's general theory of collective memory and how it determines the way people regard the present and the future. We also explore how collective memory operates in feasts. We then apply this general theory to church marriage rituals.

2.1. Communicative and Cultural Memory and Images of the Future Generally

We have said that a marriage ceremony represents a pivotal moment in a person's life. It is at such moments that people take a look at their lives. The ordinary course of day-to-day life breaks down and time assumes a different aspect. Memory plays a major role here. In this subsection we consider two perspectives on time in relation to memory and their implications for the present and the future. They are communicative memory and cultural memory. We also examine the way cultural memory cuts across communicative memory during feasts.

Memory is not just individual but also collective. The reason a person remembers certain details but not others is because each person belongs to

- 1 The research questionnaire on which the study presented in this article is based includes the following open questions: "What do you consider important in the content of a marriage ceremony?" and "What do you consider important in the form of a marriage ceremony?"
- 2 T. MICHELS: *Daarom hebben wij stenen ringen: Recente ontwikkelingen rond het ritueel van de huwelijksluiting*, Tilburg: Michels, 2004, 196-201.
- 3 G. LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed: Een kritische bezinning op de plaats en de gestalte van het christelijke ritueel in onze cultuur*, Baarn: Gooi & Sticht, 1999, 262.
- 4 A. VAN GENNEP: *Les rites de passage: Etude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil; de l'hospitalité de l'adoption; etc.*, Paris: Nourry, 1909; V.W. TURNER: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge, 1969 (The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures; 1966).
- 5 G. LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed*, 26of., for example, maintains that people still experience marriage as a transition.
- 6 The study by T. MICHELS: *Daarom hebben wij stenen ringen*, 173f., indicates that present-day bridal couples describe the marriage ceremony as exuberant rather than as traditional and impersonal. Preparations also take much longer.

a social group, a collective. The collective provides the person with a frame of reference for reconstructing her memories. It entails certain points of reference that are shared and discussed by the collective. Because individuals belong to various collectives, their recollections of the same event differ.⁷ Memory is always a social reconstruction of the past, but not every look at the past is a memory. There is a distinction between history and memory. History begins where memory stops. At the point where a social group ceases to be interested in a particular era historiography starts. Historiography has its own perspective. The focus is on events that demarcate different eras. Collective memory, by contrast, hinges on continuity, because it is what unites the group and shapes its identity. Thirdly, history adopts just one perspective. Although historiography can never be objective, it has a reputation for objectivity. Memory is basically manifold, because it belongs to different individuals, each with his own frame of reference comprising contact with diverse groups.⁸

Collective memory can assume various forms. We distinguish between two of these. The first is communicative memory. It comprises the group's collective experience; hence it dates back at most eighty to one hundred years. It is based entirely on oral transmission and represents an everyday perspective on time. Then there is cultural memory, which focuses on certain fixed points in history that determine the group's collective identity. It includes not only historical moments but myths and legends as well. The two forms of memory are transmitted in different ways. Communicative memory is handed down to a greater or lesser extent by all group members, mainly orally. Cultural memory is transmitted officially in special forms and sign systems. This gives them a sacred character and they impart – mostly transcendent – meaning. All group members share their communicative memory. This does not apply to cultural memory. There are special occasions for sharing cultural memory.⁹ One major medium is feasts. They could be calendar or seasonal feasts like Christmas and Easter, but also feasts to mark

special occasions in a person's life. A church wedding clearly falls into the second category.

Feasts are relevant to the way the two forms of memory coexist. In day-to-day living people operate in ordinary time. Daily life is subject to chance; it is contingent. On the whole life is organised functionally. In the affluent Western world transcendent meaning hardly features in everyday life. Finally, a lot of daily life is spent on automatic actions and habits that are quite banal, in the sense that they have no deeper meaning and are not pondered in any depth. The temporal perspective of such mundane things is that of communicative memory. The things people do show strong continuity with what people have always done. Ordinary life is governed by what group members still remember and tell each other. But feasts cut across everyday life. In contrast to the contingency of ordinary life, feasts are orchestrated: most feasts proceed according to a more or less rigid score or script. Actions are governed by a fixed structure according to criteria other than functionality, such as aesthetics. In contrast to the lack of meaningfulness of everyday life, feasts abound in meaning. They can trigger reflection but also euphoria, breaking down the restraint and reserve of ordinary life. Finally, feasts are also marked by repetition, but not that of mindless, banal routine. Actions have deeper meaning than just the self-evident.¹⁰

Inasmuch as feasts cut across everyday reality, cultural memory will supersede communicative memory. The myths, rituals and symbols that are centre stage give the world new meaning that extends beyond the age of the present generation. This meaning is governed by primeval stories that are not set in ordinary time. The collective from which the individual derives her identity is extended to a broader community dating back to (primordial) beginnings. During the feast everything acquires a fresh meaning that transcends ordinary time. Myths, rites and symbols effect some sort of renewal of collective identity with its concomitant meaning and group cohesion.¹¹

2.2. *Communicative and Cultural Memory and Images of the Future in Church Marriage Rituals*

So far we have dealt with the distinction between communicative and cultural memory, images of the future generally and their interplay during feasts. We shall now apply it concretely to church marriage rituals. Through their images and metaphors rituals evoke notions about the origin and destiny of the relationship. Liturgical language (words, gestures, objects) affects people. It functions as symbolic language that connects humans with God's grace, and only to a lesser extent as descriptive language, an exposition of what is happening.¹²

In the case of church marriage rituals we find, as noted already, a sharper focus on communicative memory and images of the couple's future. Their lives before they met each other are reviewed, how they came to know each other and reached a decision to get married. Then the problems and challenges they will face in the future are considered and the couple are wished a happy life together, sometimes accompanied by sound advice.¹³

If we examine the variants of church marriage rituals discussed and prescribed in the literature, we find that the ordinary temporal perspective is augmented with one that accords with cultural memory. In this perspective the origin is Christian salvation history, the history of the God of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth, a God who concerned himself with his people since creation began and was incarnated as a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. This salvation history was recorded in the Bible as well as in other Christian texts. It still makes itself felt in the present and must/can influence the lives of Christians, who conduct themselves as children of God and disciples of Jesus. Christian salvation history also has implications for the future, since God has a purpose for his creation: its consummation in the end-time, the dawn of his kingdom. Just as cultural memory cuts across communicative memory during feasts, so liturgical services generally are marked by a different temporal perspective. It

entails remembering what God has meant to the human race in the past (anamnesis), seeks to effect a re-enactment and actualisation of that salvation history in the ritual, and on the basis of that new salvific perspective reaches out to the future.¹⁴ Church marriage rituals locate the origin of marriage in God's creation of man and woman as helpmeets for each other (Gn 2,18-25; Mt 19,3-12; Mk 10,1-12; Lk 16,18). The destiny of the couple is expressed in the nuptial blessing. God's blessing on marriages is recounted, for example, in the case of the patriarch Isaac (Gn 24,60) and in the story of Tobit (Tob 7; 8). Marriage is also an image of God's bond with humankind (e.g. Hos 1-3; Jer 2,3; 13,20-27; 31,3-5; Ez 16; 23; Is 49,14-50,3; 54,4-5; 62; Eph 5,22-33), and more especially Christ's love for the Church. Hence the couple's destiny is to be a sign of God's love for humankind or Christ's love for his Church.

In church marriage rituals these biblical meanings of marriage are applied to the couple. The texts are read, are echoed in the hymns and the sermon, and recur in specific liturgical texts like the addresses of the officiant and the nuptial blessing. The marriage of the couple here and now is integrated into the series of biblical and Christian marriages in the past and thus acquires

- 7 M. HALBWACHS: "Het collectief geheugen", in: M. ELCHARDUS (ed.): *Sociale wetenschappen klassiek*, vol. 5, Leuven: Acco, 1991, 7-9, 13-15.
- 8 J. ASSMANN: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Beck, 1992, 42-45; M. HALBWACHS: "Het collectief geheugen", 17-34.
- 9 J. ASSMANN: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 50-53.
- 10 J. ASSMANN: "Der zweidimensionale Mensch: Das Fest als das Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses", in: J. ASSMANN: *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1991, 13-30, at 14-17.
- 11 Ibid. 23f.
- 12 L.-M. CHAUVET: *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2001, 83-101.
- 13 T. MICHELS: *Daarom hebben wij stenen ringen*; A. SCHEER: "Peilingen in de hedendaagse huwelijksliturgie", in: *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 63 (1979), 259-317.
- 14 M. THURIAN: *Leucharistie: Mémorial du Seigneur; Sacrifice d'action de grâce et d'intercession*, Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963, 29-35.

historical meaning. The couple are marrying *because* God destined man and woman for each other. They are commanded to be a sign of Christ's love for the Church and of God's covenant with his people. Finally they can rely on God's blessing on their future, because God blesses their marriage just as he blessed the marriages of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel. God is present at their wedding just as Jesus was present at the wedding at Cana.

Just as two temporal perspectives converge in feasts generally in the form of communicative and cultural memory, so the past and future of the couple's relationship are viewed both immanently and transcendentally in church marriage rituals. Accordingly we approach participants' notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship in terms of four dimensions: (1) transcendent origin: the couple's relationship originates from the fact that God created man and woman for each other; (2) immanent origin: the couple's relationship originates from the fact that bride and groom met each other and together built up their relationship; (3) transcendent destiny: the destiny of the couple's relationship consists in the love between God and human beings; (4) immanent destiny: the destiny of the couple's relationship is in their own hands.

3. *Data Collection and Measuring Instrument*

The previous section dealt with notions and dimensions of the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship. In this subsection we describe our data collection and the measuring instrument we constructed based on our conceptualisation stated above. We will use this to measure our respondents' notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship.

3.1. *Data Collection*

To answer our research questions and test our hypotheses we used the data we collected from January to June 2005. From the total number of

Roman Catholic parishes in the Netherlands we drew a random sample of 150 parishes. The pastors or pastoral volunteers involved in marriage services in these parishes were requested to ask prospective bridal couples to take part in the study. A maximum of three couples per parish participated. Shortly after the wedding they completed a questionnaire, in which they supplied the particulars of six guests. Because we wanted a sufficient number of respondents who were not church members, three of the six guests had to have been, or planned to get, married in the church, and three of them people who did not have or want a church marriage. These six people were also asked to complete a questionnaire.¹⁵ Thus the population from which we drew our sample consisted of participants in Catholic marriage rituals, and our findings can be generalised to that population.

Not all parishes had weddings in the research period. Especially (according to the pastors) aging parishes had no weddings at all. In the end we had a list of 131 bridal couples and 169 of their guests. Of the 300 questionnaires circulated 216 were completed and returned (71%). Of these 81 were from couples (74%) and 55 from wedding guests (25%). Among the respondents 162 (75%) were church members: 151 Roman Catholics (70%) and 11 members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (5%). Fifty-four respondents were not church members (25%).

3.2. *Measuring Instrument*

We measured notions about the origin and destiny of the relationship by presenting respondents with a questionnaire comprised of a closed question and sixteen items. The question reads: "*When two people get married one often thinks about the origin of their relationship and their future. Thinking back on the wedding ceremony, could you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?*" The sixteen items are based on the conceptualisation described in section 2 and respondents had to indicate how much they agreed with each.¹⁶ The items are based on indicators

Table 1: Indicators of measuring instrument for origin and destiny

Dimension	Actor	Temporal perspective
Transcendent origin	God	origin
Immanent origin	bride and groom	basis
Transcendent destiny	God	future
Immanent destiny	bride and groom	future

corresponding with the dimensions of the conceptualisation. Indicators give the actor and the time. Items appear in the next subsection where we describe the factor analysis. Table 1 presents the dimensions and the corresponding indicators. There are indicators for actor and temporal perspective.

In the items for the transcendent origin dimension the actor is God. He created man and woman for each other. The temporal perspective is origin. For the immanent origin the couple themselves are the actors. Their union is *based* on a relationship they themselves built up. In the items for transcendent destiny God is again the actor. His act is to love humankind, and the couple are the sign of that love. The destiny of the couple's relationship lies in God's love for humans, so it has a future. In the items for the immanent destiny the actors are the couple themselves. The future of their relationship is in their own hands. Hence the temporal perspective is their future life together inasmuch as they themselves are able to continue their relationship.

4. Results

The previous section shows our data collection and the measuring instrument we constructed based on our conceptualisation in the previous section. This tool allowed us to measure our respondents' notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship. In this section we will present the results of our data collection and analysis. First we describe to what extent our conceptualisation is reflected in the participants'

answers to our questionnaire. Then, we report to what extent the participants agree with the notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship.

4.1. Dimensions

In section 2 we described four notions about the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship. But are these four notions also discernible in the minds of participants in marriage rituals? To answer this question we conducted a factor analysis. Below (table 2) we indicate the dimensions we identified theoretically for each item (theoretical domain) and which factors we found in the respondents' answers, together with the communality coefficients and factor loadings.¹⁷ On the basis of the factor analysis we constructed scales. The frequency distribution of the scores on each scale appears below the factor analysis.¹⁸ We used the scores on these scales to answer our second research question.

¹⁵ Because ours is what is known as a stratified sample, we conducted a variance analysis of notions about the goal of church marriage rituals before we proceeded with the other analyses. In this prior analysis we compared the variance of individual respondents with that of respondents grouped according to a specific wedding, with a view to possible clustering of wedding guests with the bridal couple concerned. At a significance level of 5% the difference between the two variances was significant. At a significance level of 1% it no longer was.

¹⁶ Scores range from 1 to 5, 1 representing "totally disagree" and 5 "agree totally".

¹⁷ Factor loadings below .20 are omitted.

¹⁸ Scale scores are calculated by summing respondents' scores on the items for each factor and dividing the total by the number of valid scores.

Table 2: Factor analysis of notions about the relationship's origin and destiny

Items	Theoretical domain	Communality	Transcendent origin	Immanent origin	Immanent destiny	Transcendent destiny
The creation of man and woman is the origin of the bond between the bridal couple	Transcendent origin	.77	.90			
The bond between the couple originates in the fact that God destined man and woman for each other	Transcendent origin	.88	.90			
The origin of the marriage bond lies in the fact that God created man and woman for each other	Transcendent origin	.86	.88			
The origin of the marriage bond lies in the fact that God made man and woman for each other	Transcendent origin	.86	.82			
The relationship that grew between the partners is the basis of their marriage bond	Immanent origin	.77	.21	.84		-.23
The marriage of bride and groom is grounded in the bond that formed between them	Immanent origin	.72		.79		
The marriage bond between bride and groom is the relationship that grew between them	Immanent origin	.57		.78		
The marriage bond is based on the bond that formed between a man and a woman	Immanent origin	.55		.66		

Items	Theoretical domain	Community	Transcendent origin	Immanent origin	Immanent destiny	Transcendent destiny
The future of a marriage is entirely in the partners' hands	Immanent destiny	.89			-.94	
The marriage partners hold the future of their marriage in their own hands	Immanent destiny	.85			-.93	
The future of this marriage bond lies entirely in the marriage partners' hands	Immanent destiny	.78			-.82	
The future of a marriage bond lies in God's love for humankind	Transcendent destiny	.81				.87
The marriage bond between man and woman has a future because of God's love for humankind	Transcendent destiny	.83				.85
Through God's love for humankind the couple's relationship has a future	Transcendent destiny	.82				.83
In God's love there is a future for the bond between the bridal couple	Transcendent destiny	.79			-.21	.75
Cronbach's alpha			.93	.77	.89	.87

Factor analysis¹⁹ of items in the scale for the origin and destiny of the relationship yields four factors, the items loading exactly as we had anticipated theoretically. Only one item has a high loading on two factors: “The marriage of a man and a woman has a future only because of the partners’ input.” This item has a high loading on both the social origin and the social destiny factor, but the factor loading on social destiny is the higher of the two, which conforms to our theoretical expectation. Hence the analysis con-

firms our theoretical distinctions, and we can label the factors in accordance with the dimensions that we discerned.

Our research question concerns the extent to which participants in church marriage rituals distinguish between a transcendent and an immanent perspective on the origin and destiny of the couple’s relationship. Our factor analysis permits the conclusion that they do make such a distinction.

4.2. Agreement

Table 3: Agreement with transcendent origin

Label	Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Disagree totally	1	14	6.5	6.5
Disagree	2	62	28.7	35.2
Neither agree nor disagree	3	62	28.7	63.9
Agree	4	69	31.9	95.8
Totally agree	5	9	4.2	100.0
Total □216 □1		100.0		

Respondents’ views on the transcendent origin of the couple’s relationship are very divided. About a third of them reject the notion; another third

neither agree nor disagree; one third subscribe to it.

Table 4: Agreement with immanent origin

Label	Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Disagree totally	1	0	0	0
Disagree	2	0	0	0
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4	1.9	1.9
Agree	4	97	44.9	46.8
Totally agree	5	115	53.2	100.0
Total □216 □1		100.0		

Nobody rejects the notion that the origin of the couple’s relationship is the relationship they have built up. A mere 1.9% neither agree nor disagree.

The immanent origin of the relationship is accepted almost unanimously (98.1%).

Table 5: Agreement with transcendent destiny

Label	Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Disagree totally	1	13	6.0	6.1
Disagree	2	38	17.6	23.6
Neither agree nor disagree	3	79	36.9	60.5
Agree	4	79	36.6	97.1
Totally agree	5	5	2.3	99.4
Missing	2			
Total □216 □1		100.0		

Less than a quarter of the respondents (23.8%) reject the notion that the future of the couple's relationship lies in God's love for humankind;

36.9% are ambivalent, and a slightly larger proportion (38.9%) agree with the notion.

Table 6: Agreement with immanent destiny

Label	Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Disagree totally	1	0	0	0
Disagree	2	10	4.6	4.6
Neither agree nor disagree	3	33	20.4	25.0
Agree	4	85	39.4	64.4
Totally agree	5	77	35.6	100.0
Total □216 □1		100.0		

The notion that the future of the relationship rests entirely in the couple's hands is rejected by 4.6% of the respondents; 20.4% neither accept nor reject it, and 75% agree.

Our second research question concerns the extent to which the transcendent and immanent notions about the origin or destiny of the relationship are endorsed by participants in church marriage rituals. We have described the frequency distribution of the four notions. Regarding the origin, we found that whereas the notion of a transcendent origin is endorsed by only one third of the respondents, virtually all of them agree with an immanent perspective. Immanent destiny, too, is almost universally accepted, while a good third

subscribe to the transcendent variant. It seems that respondents find the immanent view more acceptable. The striking thing is that one third of them find a transcendent origin acceptable, while almost all of them agree with an immanent origin. To some extent, therefore, the same people endorse both a transcendent and an immanent notion about the origin and future of the relationship. To these people the two notions are not mutually exclusive, since they agree with both. Yet factor analysis shows that they are indeed seen as separate dimensions.

¹⁹ Oblimin, minimal eigen value 1.

4.3. *Interrelationship of Notions about the Origin and Destiny of the Relationship*

We explored the correlation between the four variables construed on the basis of factor analysis, namely transcendent origin, immanent origin, transcendent destiny and immanent destiny. Table 7 below gives the correlation coefficients.

The table shows three significant correlations: between transcendent origin and transcendent destiny (.54), between immanent origin and immanent destiny (.33), and between transcendent

destiny and immanent destiny (-.26). As may be expected, the transcendent notions correlate positively and significantly. The same applies to the immanent notions. Remarkably, transcendent origin does not correlate significantly with immanent origin, whereas the same two notions about destiny do show a significant negative correlation. That implies that the two notions on the couple's future are mutually exclusive, since the more respondents agree with the transcendent notion, the less they agree with the immanent one.

Table 7: Correlations between transcendent and immanent origin and destiny

	Immanent origin	Transcendent destiny	Immanent destiny
Transcendent origin	-.04	.54**	-.11
Immanent origin		-.07	.33**
Transcendent destiny			-.26**

** : Significant at a reliability interval of 99%

5. *Conclusion and Discussion*

In the preceding section we answered our first and second research questions by means of a factor analysis and frequency distributions. In this section we draw some tentative conclusions from our study of the temporal goal of church marriage rituals. We then propose some issues for further discussion and research.

5.1. *Conclusion*

In this article we sought to determine to what extent participants in church marriage rituals have a Christian or transcendent perspective on the origin and destiny of the relationship in addition to a personal or immanent one. We did so on the basis of a theory of communicative and cultural memory, derived from Halbwachs and Assmann, that feasts such as weddings are occasions when our day-to-day perspective on time makes way for a mythical perspective, which includes cultural memory. As a result the present

is reinterpreted, and we gain a new perspective on the future. In other words, the present is interpreted in terms of cultural narratives, leading to a new vision of the future. For church marriage rituals this implies that the couple's wedding is interpreted in terms of Christian salvation history, with the focus on God's creation of man and woman for each other, and on the fact that He destines the couple to be a sign of His love for humankind.

By combining the distinction between an everyday perspective and a perspective based on Christian salvation history with the distinction between notions about the origin and destiny of the conjugal relationship we arrived at four dimensions: a transcendent notion about the origin of the couple's relationship, an immanent notion about its origin, a transcendent notion about its destiny and an immanent notion about its destiny. Factor analysis showed that our respondents in fact make a distinction between these four dimensions. They agreed almost unanimously that the couple's relationship has an immanent origin.

More than 80% agreed that it also has an immanent destiny. One third subscribed to a transcendent origin and a slightly larger proportion to a transcendent destiny. Thus the immanent variants are clearly preferred. Yet one can posit that a third of participants in church marriage rituals have a transcendent or Christian conception of the origin and destiny of the relationship.

5.2. Discussion

In our contribution we explored participants' perspectives on the origin and destiny of the marital couples' relationship. Elements of looking back and looking ahead are indeed discernible in the practice of church marriage rituals. The couple look back on their own past, especially the start of the relationship (how did they meet each other?), and how they reached the decision to get married.

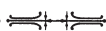
Halbwachs and Assmann's theory led us to conclude that church marriage rituals have both an immanent and a transcendent perspective on the origin and destiny of the relationship. Hence revisiting the path of the couple's relationship can be based on both their own history and Christian salvation history. It is not just a matter of their individual lives but also their religious life as people who have had a Christian baptism. This reconstruction has implications for the couple's present and their vision of their future destiny. The nature of the ritual should permit such a reconstruction as well. This concurs with Chauvet's view of the effect of sacraments, conceived of as symbols. Sacraments join (Greek: *sumballein*) Christ to the church or, more broadly, God with humankind, and within the church they join people together as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, they create or strengthen Christian identity.²⁰ Our study confirms Chauvet's view. By looking at the past and future of the marital couple in both an immanent and a transcendent perspective the lives of the

couple are reinterpreted and a connection between their biography and the Christian tradition is made.

A large majority of participants in church marriage rituals subscribe to the immanent origin and destiny of the couple's relationship. This accords with the finding of other studies that bridal couples increasingly want a customised, personal ritual. It is increasingly becoming *their* ritual and has less and less to do with religious tradition. Only one third of participants agree that the relationship has a transcendent origin and destiny. If we put the accent on the introduction of a different temporal perspective, informed by a reinterpretation of the present in terms of cultural history and a new perspective on the future, we may feel that this development impoverishes ritual. To what extent do participants in church marriage rituals still find these rites transcendentally meaningful if many believe they offer no more than a biographical perspective on the origin and destiny of the couple's relationship? Pastors and liturgists, too, should consider the meaning of the church's rituals and whether reinforcing the personal dimension does not diminish the transcendent meaning. Personal relevance is essential. Couples must feel that the ritual relates to them. The origin of their relationship and their future life together may be the focus. On the other hand it is not desirable that the ritual should centre entirely on the two of them. In fact, participants in the ceremony should experience the integration of their personal biography into salvation history, in the sense that this specific couple share in the salvation that God has destined for bridal couples.

An important issue for future research, then, is to gain more insight into the transcendentally meaningful element of the ritual and how that element should determine ritual practice.

²⁰ L.-M. CHAUVET: *The Sacraments*, 17.85-89.



• Summary

Temporal Goal in Church Marriage Rituals

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In this contribution the authors explore notions about the origin and destiny of bridal couples' relationships from participants' views of church marriage rituals. A church wedding can be a pivotal moment in a bridal couple's life, and on these occasions people tend to contemplate the past and the future. Using the time and memory philosophy of M. Halbwachs and J. Assman, the authors outline a temporal perspective that consists of four dimensions: a transcendental perspective on the past, a transcendental perspective on the future, an immanent perspective on the past and an immanent perspective on the future. During a church wedding ritual, the past is contemplated as the origin of the bridal couple's rela-

tionship. The future is interpreted as the destiny of this relationship. Based on this conceptualisation the authors have constructed a measuring instrument consisting of sixteen notions. In the questionnaire, which has been distributed amongst many participants in church wedding rituals, the respondents have been asked to express the extent of their agreement with each notion. Statistical analyses reveal that the participants do indeed make distinctions between the four dimensions which have been discerned. It has also been possible to measure to what extent the participants agree with the four factors regarding the origin and destiny of the bridal couple's relationship.