



Belief Brief – What’s an annulment?

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Reflection

What’s an Annulment?

The Church teaches that the bond of marriage is permanent.

However, in contemporary society, divorce is a reality that is challenging and often an extremely difficult experience to all involved.

But divorce does not bring marriage to an end and a properly celebrated marriage is presumed valid, unless proven otherwise by the competent authority – The Marriage Tribunal.

An annulment is not the Catholic version of a divorce.

Rather, it is a declaration by the Church, after the Tribunal’s formal inquiry stating that at the time of consent, where vows were exchanged, at least one of the parties lacked an intention or capability required to establish the binding commitment of marriage as understood by the Catholic Church.

In making this declaration, the Church does not deny that a real relationship existed, nor does it imply that the relationship was entered with ill will or moral fault.

Also, the declaration of nullity does not affect the legitimacy of children from the union.

The Marriage Tribunal, through its formal inquiry, is seeking the truth in justice, in mercy and in love.

Not to place the blame or establish a guilty party.

For those seeking an annulment, it should be a process that involves healing and spiritual growth.

Reflection Questions

1. How is a divorce different from an annulment?
2. Why does annulment concern only the time of consent (at the wedding ceremony)?
3. How might going through the process for an annulment provide a time of healing and spiritual growth?

Teaching from the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Annulments:

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Question 348:

348. When does the Church allow the physical separation of spouses?

The Church permits the physical separation of spouses when for serious reasons their living together becomes practically impossible, even though there may be hope for their reconciliation. As long as one's spouse lives, however, one is not free to contract a new union, except if the marriage be null and be declared so by ecclesiastical authority.

The *Compendium* is available in 14 languages. For the complete list and links, go to: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc/index.htm>

See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Two, Section 2,

Chapter 3, Article 7 for Church teaching on the Sacrament of Matrimony (paragraphs 1602-1666). Nullity and the bond of marriage are specifically mentioned within this context, in paragraphs 1629; 1639-1640; and 1649. The appropriate references to the *Code of Canon Law* appear in the footnotes for these paragraphs.

The *Catechism* is available in 9 languages. For the complete list and links, go to: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc/index.htm>

For Further Reading

1. Catholic Marriage Tribunal, Archdiocese of Toronto, "Frequently Asked Questions" <https://www.archtoronto.org/catholic-marriage-tribunal/Pages/Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>
2. Joseph M. Champlin, "10 questions and Answers about Annulment," in *Catholic Update*, published by Liguori Publications. <http://www.liguori.org/10-questions-about-annulment.html>