

Marriage: Win-Win or Win-Lose?

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POITOU, FRANCE – This weekend, we celebrated the oldest win-win deal in human life: marriage.

On Saturday afternoon, we drove 10 miles or so to Le Dorat.

The medieval town sits on a hill in the green Limousin countryside, with the remnants of a defensive wall still along the western side.

The town sits on the frontier between two regions, which were once distinctive – not only in the lay of the land, but also in the stone underneath and the people above.

East and north of Le Dorat are flattish regions of limestone, where people once spoke the “oil” form of French. To the south and west, granite is the stone at hand, and the people used the “oc” form of French (as in Languedoc).

Both “oil” and “oc” mean yes, which today we hear in the ubiquitous “oui.”

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Ancient Bones

During the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, this area saw a lot of win-lose deals, as armies and brigands marauded over northern Aquitaine.

But we were not going to Le Dorat to kill or plunder. No, it was not a win-lose deal that tempted us there, but a win-win deal of the most ancient variety.

So we drove around the perimeter of the town and then turned onto one of the tiny, twisty streets to find a place to park.

The “collégiale” is a massive church, down the hill slightly from the of town. Though a Catholic church, it is a monument to win-lose deals run wild.

Burnt and looted in 866 by the Normans, it was rebuilt then burnt again by attackers from a neighboring town in 1013. Rebuilt again, it was burnt again in 1080.

The present large, heavy, gray-granite Romanesque structure is the result of the rebuilding in the 12th century... and heavy fortification (to prevent more win-lose deals) in the 15th century.

In the middle ages, Le Dorat combined temporal and spiritual authority. Today, the town has little political importance.

But the bones of two saints – Theobald and Israel – still rest in the crypt below. And every seven years, they are brought out and paraded through the streets.

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My name is Ted Benna, the guy who created the first 401(k) savings plan. I have [an important warning](#) for anyone planning to use their 401(k) or IRA to retire. There are [3 great dangers](#) I see coming that could cut your accounts by up to 40%. One of these could happen before AUGUST 1st. For the full scoop, [click here](#)...

All Guns Blazing

We took our places in the pews just as the organ began. Like the assault on Verdun, it opened up with all guns blazing.

Stones shook. Plaster fell from the ceiling. The massive instrument looked as though it was installed about the same time as the bones below. As it gathered force, our inner organs vibrated in sympathy.

The thunder probably would have awakened Theobald and Israel, too, had they not shared the deep, innocent slumber of the angels.

The ceremony began with the grandparents and the mother of the bride, led to their seats in front. Then came the crucifer leading the priest, who was in turn trailed by a small group of children, dressed in white, carrying candles.

Finally, the bride and her father – each with an equal mixture of joy and solemnity on their faces and 600 eyes following them – slowly and inexorably made their way down the aisle like an incoming tide.

“We are here today to celebrate the marriage of these young people,” the priest began. “But we celebrate much more than that. We reaffirm our own vows, to each other, to the church, and to God.”

In all candor, we quickly lost track of what the presiding cleric had to say. So we take the liberty accorded to us – really, the only real lagniappe of our lowly trade – to tell you what we think he should have said...

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Getting Together

“Marriage is a sacrament in the church. But the church did not create marriage.

“Men and women have been getting together – for better or for worse – ever since Adam met Eve. No law requires it. No PhD in sociology invented it or manages it.

“There are no manuals on how to do it, either... at least as far as we know. And many of those who have done it more than once – that is to say, the experts – advise against it.

“And yet, it happens. It's been happening – though in many different forms and with many different rituals and myths attached – for thousands of years.

“And it happens now in almost every country, nation, tribe, culture, and community – and certainly the civilized ones –

throughout the world.

“It is not always easy. Marriages often fail. Even the best of them have their depressions and wars. And yet we keep at it.

“And most of the people at this wedding, too, have come here like the dumb beasts going up the gangway onto the Ark – two by two.

“Of course, we don’t know why... All we know is that they do. We know, too, that men and women can do things together that neither can do on his or her own – things the government can’t do... the church can’t do... the army can’t do... even billionaires and TV entertainers can’t do...

“Only men and women can do the one thing that we all depend on, providing the most common good of all: bear the fruit that is us. Together, in a mutually beneficial win-win deal – each bringing what the other lacks – they create something that is more than what they are.

“Alone, they are just two more or less happy people. Together, they may be miserable. But there may soon be more of them – three... or four... or more.

“And they may go forth and dominate the whole planet and, who knows, maybe eventually the universe.”

That’s the thing about win-win deals, we interject. You don’t know who will win.

And sometimes – as in a failed marriage – both parties may feel like losers.

But win-win deals – the joining of man and wife, the connecting of buyer with seller, the matching of investment with entrepreneur – are not only what make the world go round. They also push it forward.

Winningest Deal Ever

“There are those who will tell you,” our imagined sermon continued, “that you no longer need two people to have children... that you no longer need marriage... and that love is not limited to something just between men and women.

“Yes, they are right. Certainly, you don’t have to be married to be happy. In my experience, happy people divide neatly into two camps – married women and single men. Or sometimes the opposite. Heck, I’m not even married myself, for Pete’s sake. So what do I know?

“And maybe we have arrived at a new era when you don’t need men and women to work together to have children or to raise them. And maybe the division of labor has been forever altered by the new technology, so men no longer need to hunt and women no longer need to gather.

“Statistically, married people live longer... and are wealthier. Whether it is worth it or not is a matter of opinion. But I’m talking about something more than happiness or opinion.

“I’m talking about more than what you want or what I want. I’m talking about something so sublime and so profound, it had to be conceived in the mind of God, not man.

“Man’s role may have changed. He may no longer be the hunter or breadwinner. But he is still a fool. Woman’s role may have changed, too. But she still has to let him know it. That division of labor is at the foundation of our species and our civilization.

“So I am here, like the many generations of priests before me, to join these two people in the winningest win-win deal ever: marriage.

“You may now kiss the bride.”

Regards,