

A Word for Sheepdogs

“NAKED AND UNASHAMED” is the natural condition of our first parents in Eden. It was not good that Adam was alone, so the LORD God created a woman out of his own body and joined the two together and they became one flesh in their conjugal union. But we can't go back to Eden. Sin has intervened and Satan, that old serpent, continues to raise his ugly head, wreaking havoc on God's good design of sex and marriage.

Matthew Wurm turns his pastoral heart and mind to the important question of how we are to live out our vocations as male and female, single and married, in a world that is spiritually empty and adrift on a sea of sensuality, helpless before the prevailing winds of our time. In schizoid fashion our society cloaks its sexual life in privacy, yet at the same time brazenly flaunts its deviances in public.

His insight is that sex within marriage is the public activity of husband and wife whom God has joined as one and within whose union we glimpse the eternal marriage of our heavenly Bridegroom and His earthly bride, the Church. Now more than ever before, seelsorgers need to give voice to a biblically informed understanding of this foundational virtue of every embodied child of God: to lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed.

- *Dr. H. L. Senkbeil*



Marriage and Sexuality: Public or Private

Pastor Matthew E. Wurm

Marriage was created in the Garden of Eden before the fall into sin. This paper invites the reader to get a glimpse of the original intent of marriage before sin entered its context. The first married couple was barred from the graces that attended them as they walked with the Lord in the Garden. Sin certainly still separates us in our relationship with God and with our fellow man. We are forever corrupted by our first parents' original sin in the Garden, but God provides another way for us to walk with Him and still affords us manifold blessings in marriage outside of that first Garden. He does so in the Divine Service. There He invites us into His presence to be led by Him, provided for by Him, forgiven by Him, clothed by Him, and strengthened for our daily work by His Word and Spirit.

This paper will assess and respond to current trends in marriage, encourage the good order of marriage in the face of confusion and opposition, and direct the reader to receive the Divine Service as the redeemed and glorious bride of Christ — the Church. This

paper aims to give practical counsel to lift up the estate of marriage as God ordained it and also emphasize the many and great spiritual blessings given in marriage through our distinctly different sexes.

Introduction:

The common practice for youth to practically learn of marriage and sexuality is to glean from those with the least experience and knowledge of the matter — their sexually active peers. Their budding understanding of marriage comes from the media, perceptions of direct observation, and ever changing marriage parameters that flow through their social media avenues. Ironically, the typical adolescent or young adult does not usually learn much formally from those most experienced or trained in matters of marriage and sexuality such as parents, grandparents, church members, and pastors. Instead, the general practice of those who are the most mature and have the greatest perspective of marriage and sexuality is to remain silent in their teaching and let the next generation flounder in foolish mistakes as if nothing was learned from the previous generation's errors.

Dr. Bruce Hartung, professor emeritus of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, once remarked that there are three major life changes during which one should seek professional counseling: 1) before marital engagement; 2) immediately after the birth of the first child; and 3) after the last dependent child has moved out of the house. In this paper, I will focus on the rationale and content of pre-marital counseling.

Everything changes after engagement within the structure of our societal norms. Almost immediately the “big date” is set and money is put down on reception halls, DJ's and invitations, binding both parties together in worldly contractual obligations before the mar-

riage license is signed and sealed. Naively, this pressure of contractual obligations and expectations made known to the world via social media impedes the honesty with which couples enter into the upcoming married estate. Honesty in all matters of discussion necessary to understand the blessings and trials of matrimony is in part withheld because one is already bound to the effects of the “big date.”

I have had the opportunity, on occasion, to do pre-engagement counseling and it has afforded more honesty in participation and better perceived outcome than after the “big date” is set. Much of what follows in this paper is based upon the content of these sessions as I seek to paint a Godly portrayal of marriage and our sexuality as God has designed it and given it to us, as man and woman for our blessing, and for the blessing of society as a whole.

In a Table Talk collected by Conrad Cordatus on the Annoyances and Blessings in Marriage, it was recounted,

On the day after the Circumcision Dr. Martin [Luther's] infant child cried so that nobody could pacify him. The doctor and his wife sat there sadly for a whole hour. Afterward the doctor said, “These are the annoyances of marriage, and on their account everybody avoids marriage. We all fear the caprice of wives, the crying of children, bad neighbors. So we want to be free, not bound, in order that we may remain free lords and seek after whoredom.”¹

Luther went on to say,

By his grace and through his Word, God has restored marriage, the magistracy, and the ministry of the Word in order that we may see that these are divine ordinances, although they used to be regarded as mere masks. Married couples used

“We want to be free, not bound, in order that we may remain free lords and seek after whoredom.”

¹ Luther, M. (1999). Vol. 54:177.

to think that their being tied to each other was more a custom than an ordinance of God. Similarly civil rulers didn't know that they were serving God but thought they were bound to ceremonies.²

May God, by His grace and through His Word, restore marriage again to be known as a divine and holy order where His praise is heard and seen.

Responding to Currents in Marriage:

We need not look too far to realize that marriage is in crisis in the West. Stanton, in his book *Why Marriage Matters*, notes, "The 1960's, the period of American history typically referred to as the beginning of the "sexual revolution," ushered in the great divorce between the exercise of sexuality and the institution of marriage. Society seemed to be claiming that the two no longer needed one another."³ Since that time single young men and women have begun to pursue one another outside of the structure and oversight of parents and other familial relationships. Contraceptives in many forms have been offered inexpensively or free of charge to those who ask. Societal magazines, shows, and other media have promoted the message that it is healthier to engage in sexual activity outside of the lifelong, monogamous commitment and secure contract of marriage. The popular functional understanding of sexual health is defined as active, robust, satisfying and not mundane. Yet the research declares just the opposite. Of all sexually active people, the group that enjoys the highest amount of physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction are the faithfully married to one spouse over a lifetime with findings on average 27% higher and more in pleasure and satisfaction than other groups such as cohabitating pairings and those with more than one spouse or cohabitating partner in a lifetime.⁴

The research undeniably shows that

the popular notion that if married people have sex, it's only enjoyable on occasion, but mediocre at best, is far from the truth. Within the bounds of marriage, and with only one life-long partner, is the best predictor of sexual, physical and emotional happiness. The research shown in Stanton's analysis of marriage today confirms God's design for marriage in Holy Scripture as described by Christ in Matthew chapter nineteen, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."⁵

This confusion and disdain toward the holy estate of marriage is not a recent development. King Solomon was persuaded by women of pagan lands to redefine for himself marriage as he saw fit and fell away from the Lord for a time. As St. Paul brought the Gospel message to Gentile lands, he also brought with him a higher and holier understanding of marriage and sexuality to promiscuous, polyamorous, homosexual, and polygamous Greeks. Throughout history the holy estate of marriage has been challenged by the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh because God called it good in the Garden of Eden before the fall into sin. Luther warned in his writings,

For this reason young men should be on their guard when they read pagan books and hear the common complaints about marriage, lest they inhale poison. For the estate of marriage does not set well with the devil, because it is God's good will and work. This is why the devil has contrived to have so much shouted and written in the world against the institution of marriage, to frighten men away from this godly life and entangle them in a web of fornication and secret sins. Indeed, it seems to me that even Solomon,

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² Luther, M. (1999). Vol. 54:177-178.

³ (Stanton, 1997), 33.

⁴ *Ibid*, 42.

⁵ Matt. 19:4b-6.

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although he amply censures evil women, was speaking against just such blasphemers when he said in Proverbs 18[:22], “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.” What is this good thing and this favor? Let us see.

The world says of marriage, “Brief is the joy, lasting the bitterness.” Let them say what they please; what God wills and creates is bound to be a laughingstock to them. The kind of joy and pleasure they have outside of wedlock they will be most acutely aware of, I suspect, in their consciences. To recognize the estate of marriage is something quite different from merely being married. He who is married but does not recognize the estate of marriage cannot continue in wedlock without bitterness, drudgery, and anguish; he will inevitably complain and blaspheme like the pagans and blind, irrational men. But he who recognizes the estate of marriage will find therein delight, love, and joy without end; as Solomon says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing,” etc. [Prov. 18:22].

Now the ones who recognize the estate of marriage are those who firmly believe that God himself instituted it, brought husband and wife together, and ordained that they should beget children and care for them. For this they have God’s word, Genesis 1[:28], and they can be certain that he does not lie. They can therefore also be certain that the estate of marriage and everything that goes with it in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God. Now tell me, how can the heart have greater good, joy, and delight than in God, when one is certain that his estate, conduct, and work is pleasing to God.⁶

In our work as pastors, we are fighting an

uphill battle not just to regain a godly sexual ethic and understanding of marriage, but to simply define them in ways our people, so inundated by the over-sexed culture in which we live, can understand. For far too long the church has taken a quiet approach to the topic on which all of society springs. We must speak and give voice and clear vision to the earthly blessings of marriage as instituted by God and the spiritual blessings of it as a holy order created by God in the Garden of Eden before mankind’s fall into sin. Everything in the estate of marriage in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God. Marriage is a good and honorable estate.

The LGBTQ movement has changed the understanding of marriage almost entirely. One necessary key change for the general acceptance of same-sex marriage was the divorce in mind of the action of sexual unions in marriage and the product of that union. There is no possibility of a product coming from homosexual sexual unions so therefore the purpose of marriage is not to procreate but for self-fulfillment. Marriage has become understood now as self-affirming, self-satisfying, self-fulfilling and not primarily self-giving through procreation and service to neighbor and society. Simply put, marriage is about “ME” and the sexual actions of marriage are likewise only about “ME” and others have no business to judge what is done within the intensely private marriage bedroom.

Scripture’s structure for marriage is also in direct contrast to the popular egalitarian view of marriage that goes something like this, “Of course I believe that a wife should be subject to her husband. And a husband should be subject to his wife.” Or an egalitarian might say, “I will be subject to my husband as soon as he is subject to me.” And so, as egalitarians understand marriage, there is no difference in roles between men and women. There is no unique leadership role, no unique authority, for the husband nor for the wife.

⁶ Luther, M. (1999). Vol. 45:37–38

Everything is fluid, interchangeable. There is simply mutual submission. This egalitarian view fits in nicely with the advance of feminism but sets up a disharmony for marriage when times get tough and vital and right decisions have to be made.

On top of the challenge that we face from the secular feminist movement, we also face a challenge from within the Christian Church on the matter of love, authority and submission. A quick glance at the “marriage” shelf at the local Barnes & Noble reveals little to no help in regaining a godly understanding of marriage and sex. Rather, we get the American self-driven, self-help, somewhat Christianized popular book of the day.

Chip Ingram’s book, *Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships: God’s Prescription for Enhancing Your Love Life*, states that God’s prescription for relationships is 1) become the right person, 2) walk in love, 3) fix your hope on God and seek to please Him through this relationship, and 4) if failure occurs, repeat steps 1, 2, and 3.⁷ If you fail, try harder and bargain with God some more. It’s all up to you. What a message of despair! It’s up to you to get special mojo from God so that you can improve your life. It is easy to see why the book has sold so well and been so influential. It advertises to our selfish nature to do it for the self and not in love for the other. It is also plain then to see why marriages are in such a crisis in our churches if this is the kind of direction the mainstream Christian receives on marriage and lasting relationships.

Emerson Eggerich’s book *Love & Respect; The Love She Most Desires – The Respect He Desperately Needs*, does no better. Jesus doesn’t show up until page 271 and for that, just a quote on how unconditional love and respect will be rewarded to you when you do your part in following God’s commands.⁸ Marriage and sexuality is “ME”-driven in America.

From the effects of birth control that divorce the purposes of sex and marriage to popular Christian marriage books, everything is about “ME”.⁹

This is the world we live in, but we need not despair. We also have a prime opportunity to faithfully proclaim the Law declaring that no help comes from “ME” and the Gospel pronouncing that all help and all love comes down from above as it is given with authority to those in authority to enact its authority in absolutism.¹⁰ The *Matrimony Address* from the Lutheran Service Book Agenda says it so well:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and before His Church to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity’s fall into sin.

In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. This estate is also commended to us by the apostle Paul as good and honorable. Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into in-advicably or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another. Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. God also

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⁷ (Ingram, 2005) 50.

⁸ (Eggerichs, 2004) 271.

⁹ (Calles-Barger, 2003) 71.

¹⁰ Lilian Calles-Barger wrote a marvelous book and assessment of contemporary sexual views. In her book she lays out how the “pill” changed the social dialogue that first began as a disconnection of sex from procreation as it quickly moved to disconnect sex and marriage. The trajectory of that disconnect is still in motion as sex and gender have become disconnected as well. The losers in these movements are the ones the movements sought to free – women and those troubled by gender dysphoria. The effects are not what we were created for in the beginning but the work of the deceiver who always wants to take what God has called “good” and make it “evil”. Our work as pastors and faithful laity is to restore “good” by proclaiming the clear Law and Gospel that the Holy Spirit may do His work of faith and restoration in a world of upside-down beliefs.

established marriage for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer Him their praise.

For these reasons God has established the holy estate that [name] and [name] wish to enter. They desire our prayers as they begin their marriage in the Lord's name and with His blessing.¹¹

The rite of Holy Matrimony is public. Marriage is not private. It is public. Everything about it is public. The same is so for sex. Sex is public. Just because the action is done in private does not mean that it does not have wide and far-reaching public, societal effects. The declarations of intent, vows, and pronouncement all give structure and blessing to the estate that God called “good” before the fall into sin. Through the rite of Holy Matrimony, all gathered there to hear and participate recall and give thanks for the created order blessings and pray for spiritual blessings upon the couple and all of society. Marriage grants manifold graces and it will always be worth defending, for it is good.

Jesus spoke up to defend the holy order of marriage against the permissive and liberal pharisaical school of Rabbi Hillel in Matthew chapter nineteen when the Pharisees challenged him on the definition of marriage and permission to divorce.¹² He defended the holy order by citing the created order in Genesis chapter two. Jesus says the two will become one flesh and from the order of that union that creates life, order within much of the rest of creation is upheld. Husband and wife become mates and team up, as it were, to have dominion and take care of the rest of creation — the land, animals, and everything else. Their combined efforts and perfect complementary attributes lay the foundation for the care of all things earthly. Where husband and wife remain monogamous, children thrive and are stably raised to

be stable parents in turn. More work and more care for all things are provided through this created structure of natural stability and complementary features. It is the cornerstone for all of society and affords manifold blessings to all.

Our nation is not experiencing the first-ever battle over the definition of marriage as it was created to be, and this battle will not be the last. Our comfort in the uphill battle for marriage and a godly sexual ethic is knowing the blessing of it as a created and holy order where God the Father works to bring forth life, God the Son works forgiveness and the undying commitment of love and God the Holy Spirit strengthens faith and creates faith in the lives of the children that spring forth from divinely instituted marriage.

The *Matrimony Address* states that we are gathered as witnesses to a public action before members of the public. It is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin. This little sentence gives us the clue that there is something divinely special about the institution of marriage and thereby our own sexuality. What else in this world do we still retain from the Garden of Eden after the fall into sin? Nothing. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden as their perfect communion with God was broken, but their marital union to each other remained. Though the estate of marriage is certainly wrought with sin by sinners possessing all seats within, its design and purpose has not changed. Unlike the human nature, which became intrinsically flawed after the fall, marriage still remains by created design doing the proper thing it was created to do — create and uphold society and all things over which man has dominion.

The address goes on to mention that marriage is for unity in heart, body and mind for companionship, help, and support as created order blessings, certainly more than just a dispassionate contract of agreement. It was ordained for delight,

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¹¹ *LSB Agenda*, 65.

¹² (Gibbs, 2010), 949-950.

holiness and honor that the marriage might function to bring about the spiritual blessings of bringing another soul life and availing that soul to the gifts Christ has to give within His Church. Marriage was ordained for the good of all creation and in the very public rite of Holy Matrimony, prayers of those gathered are requested as the couple endeavors to enter this holy estate.

The physical and earthly blessings of marriage are many and plain to see. Those who work for a stable marriage enjoy the lowest levels of alcoholism, lowest risk of suicide, lowest habitual smokers, lowest prevalence of mental disorders, and lowest feelings of loneliness.¹³ Of course, the spiritual blessings of marriage are likewise many, but more difficult to see. St. Paul explains the blessings in Ephesians chapter five as he wraps up by saying that this mystery is profound and that he is actually referring to Christ and the Church.

Marriage in Ephesians 5:

St. Paul lays down a helpful structure in Ephesians chapter five of how husband and wife are to interact. Their life is to be a mirror of how Christ cares for His bride, the Church and how the Church gladly subordinates to Him out of love for all that He gave to make her His own. The spiritual blessings of marriage become muddled and even harder to see when the husband abrogates his God-given headship of the relationship either because of his own sinful laziness or fear of offending the will of his wife. Our English translations of Ephesians chapter five hamper bold teaching on this point in regard to the spiritual headship of marriage.

All English translations separate verse 21 from the rest of the context through a paragraph break. However the Greek text ties the two verses together with the verb Ὑποτασσόμενοι (being subordinate) in verse 21 because there is no verb in verse 22. Because of the φόβω (fear) of

Christ we willingly subordinate ourselves within the order and structure that God the Father set forth. Subordinating to one another out of reverence for Christ applies to the whole unit (5:21-6:9) where wives/husbands, children/parents, slaves/masters all have their appropriate place under Christ.

In previous generations some people did speak of “mutual submission,” but never in the sense in which egalitarians today understand it.¹⁴ Today egalitarians understand it to be mutual submission of equal amounts and importance across the board. However this is a novelty in all of Christian history up until the advent of feminism. Daniel Doriani references Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Henry Bullinger, John Calvin, Charles Hodge and others to note that though they mention mutual submission it is a quality that modified relationships, not as a structure that defined relationships.¹⁵ If the principle of mutual submission annuls the command that wives should submit to husbands, then logically it nullifies the command that children should obey their parents. The underlying principle potentially undermines authority structures at work, in the church, in schools, and in the state as well. With good biblical warrant, theologians of the past asserted that God ordained authorities in all these spheres for the good, especially the good order of society. Of course no one pushes the principle of mutual submission to its end. No one thinks parents should tell their children, “It’s time to go to bed” and expect responses such as, “Okay, but it’s time for you to go to bed too.” But if feminists do not follow the idea of mutual submission to its conclusion, they must explain why they follow it one time and not another.¹⁶

Parents have the authority from God to discipline their children in love. Masters and employers have authority given to them by God over their workers knowing that they too are under the authority

Of course no one pushes the principle of mutual submission to its end.

¹³ (Stanton, 1997) 74-95.

¹⁴ (Grudem, 2002) 45.

¹⁵ (Grudem, 2002) 211-217.

¹⁶ Richard Eyer in his book, *Marriage is Like Dancing*, makes just the same point saying, “For all the positive advances in women’s rights in our society, many husbands are willing victims of the negative side of a feminism that demands husbands and wives share equal responsibility for leadership in a marriage. Those who promote gender neutrality claim that if there is any submission at all in marriage, it needs to be a two-way street. The wife should submit to the husband and the husband should submit to the wife. Some Christians quote Ephesians 5:21 to support this. The phrase, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” is taken out of context from that which actually states the reverse meaning. The verses that follow provide illustrations to show the meaning and nature of this submission. These illustrations are of husband-wife, child-parent relationships, and slave-master relationships. (Eyer, 2007) 41.

The model for learning how this works is Jesus Christ and his selfless giving in the face of outward resistance.

of the Master who is in heaven.¹⁷ Workers are to serve with a sincere heart as servants of Christ, as we all, wives/husbands, children/parents, slaves/masters come under the authority of Christ and gladly and willingly submit to Him. Christians gladly submit to Him because of His commitment toward us making us glad to come under His authority for His authority declares that we are protected from the evil one, that all our needs in this life and the life to come are provided and that all our sins are forgiven. He leads and we gladly come under His authority because we know it is good. Likewise, when the husband leads as Christ leads in protecting, providing, and loving his wife as Christ loved His bride the Church by dying to forgive her and make her holy, the wife gladly submits to his authority for his authority is the position of love.

Eyer states, "The Christian husband's sinful self has been crucified with Christ, so his vocation in marriage is to "walk in newness of life" and love his wife as Christ loved the Church and "gave Himself up for her."¹⁸ Love does not bargain and make deals saying, "If you give me this, I'll give you this at a reduced rate." Think of what a disaster it would be for our Christian faith if Christ, enacting His love for His bride the Church had said, "If you give me this amount of praise and promise to do that amount of work, only then I will give you my love and my gifts as you so desire." We would come to think we were entitled to His love and end up despising His gifts. Possibly the church in some places is at this point already.

Bargaining for God's grace is not the way things work within His Church or within marriage. God's grace does not bargain; it gives freely to the other for the benefit of the other and their unity in marriage, enacted as husband and wife because of the knowledge of Christ's graces afforded to His bride, the Church. The model for learning how this works is Jesus Christ and his selfless giving in the

face of outward resistance. Love is leading through selfless giving for the husband and for the wife love is selfless submitting. When God's graces in Christ give the faith to love in word and deed, the dance of marriage is a beautiful thing, both marriage and in the Church.

Marriage in Genesis 2 and 3:

In Genesis the Lord God states that it is not good for the man to be alone, so He makes a helper fit for him and calls her good, and creation, now that woman is given to man and man to woman, He calls very good. We cannot call an evil good or a good evil. Marriage is good and whatever is good the devil will seek to desecrate and destroy.

Genesis 2:7, 18-24 is the suggested pericope for the rite of Holy Matrimony in the *LSB Agenda*, yet the reading leaves out verse 25, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."¹⁹ In the following chapter, after the fall, the man and his wife were still married but no longer naked and not ashamed. They were clothed, ashamed, and hiding, yet still married.²⁰ Everything in their life and their relationships with all creation changed at that moment of sin, save for structure and purpose of the holy estate of marriage. Their relationship with God changed as they could no longer walk with Him. Their fellowship with God was broken. The man's relationship with the land and animals that he had charge over changed. There was aggression and now death. The ground would now produce thorns and thistles and man would have to work tirelessly to provide for himself and his family as work became toil and not joy. Man's default position would become laziness because of the curse of the ground. Not only would he struggle against the ground and all creation that once was in communion with him, he would be at odds with the one the Lord God formed from his own flesh for his own flesh and benefit. The mess of fallen marriage began.

¹⁷ Eph. 5:9 (ESV).

¹⁸ (Eyer, 2007) 45.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:25.

²⁰ A comparative analysis of Gen. 2:25 and Genesis 3 necessarily leads to the conclusion that it is not a question of passing from "not knowing" to "knowing," but of a radical change in the meaning of the original nakedness of the woman before man and of the man before the woman. This change emerges from their burdened conscience as a fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:11). This change directly concerns the experience of the meaning of one's own body before the Creator and creatures. That is confirmed later by the man's words, "I heard the sound of your step in the garden, and I was afraid, because I am naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10). (Paul II, 2006) 172-173.

For woman, her ultimate gift and unique blessing of the ability to bear new life would not be pure joy any longer, but full of pain and disdain for the precise thing God created her to do. Her default position would no longer be the faithful help-mate of her husband as a full, one flesh partner in the care and dominion of all creation but she would seek to usurp the order of creation and become the head and not the help-mate. The creation and order of things that God had called good had become contaminated by sin and accursed. Everything except the estate of marriage.

Yes, in marriage one sees the curse of the fall into sin at work as the man works lazily and succumbs to lethargy and in so doing abrogates his divine headship to another, be it society, a child, an acquaintance or most often his spouse. The curse at work in the woman makes her react and swell up as the head of the marriage as her husband has abrogated his specific work of provision. She then assumes the headship outside of her created order and harangues the man for not doing things right. No longer is she the help-mate but the head. She then must set aside her God-given order from the Garden. The blessings specific to her as woman and mother of that which was formed within her now take a back seat as she does the work man was created to do in his God given order. Neither she nor he serve in joy any longer, but rather under the curse according to the curse. Life is not good anymore, yet a vestige of the good that was given to Adam and Eve before the fall into sin is still there. They are no longer two, but one and God has joined them together — this has not changed.²¹

In marriage, glimpses of Gen. 2:25, “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed,” remain in part, though not fully. These glimpses come because of Christ who blesses the couple with His presence and gift of forgiveness. This is a verse that should not be left out of the pericopal reading in a

wedding service for it is of paramount importance. First, everyone in attendance at the wedding and reception knows exactly what the newly-wed couple will be doing later that night after the reception ends. They will be married and they will be doing what married couples do unabashedly. There is absolutely no reason to be ashamed of sex within marriage for that is the purpose for which God created man and woman and gave them to each other in marriage. The crisis is the lack of shame in sex outside of marriage.

We have this completely backwards in the practice of the church, however, and we may, in part, be reaping the consequences of our lack of teaching on marriage and sexuality. Because we have not specifically taught on this matter more than a cursory gloss in confirmation class on the Sixth Commandment, we have generations of members who have no vocabulary to speak of the blessings of marriage and sexuality aside from what they glean from the depraved selfishly sex-driven world in which they daily live.

Our bodies are meant to serve others and not just ourselves, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Ga. 5:13). Our sexual complementarianism is meant to join us as one to make another through procreation, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Our differences in physical makeup, mental and even emotional structure are meant to make us stronger and help us to defend one another and, most importantly, the family. “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a three-fold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:12). Marriage is meant to teach us how to fear and love and sacrifice for one another, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21).

They will be married and they will be doing what married couples do unabashedly.

²¹ Derek Kinder in his “Genesis” commentary says that in light of the curse of Gen. 3:16, pain and bondage now appear on the horizon. The phrase, *your desire shall be for your husband* (RSV), with the reciprocating *he shall rule over you*, portrays a marriage relation in which control has slipped from the fully personal realm to that of instinctive urges passive and active. “To love and to cherish” becomes “To desire and dominate.” While even pagan marriage can rise far above this, the full intent of sin is always towards it. An echo of the phrase, in 4:7b, *sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.* (ESV), conjures up still more vividly its suggestion of the now fallen jungle where beasts lie in wait with the desire to dominate and ultimately kill. (Kinder, 1967) 71.

Grace in Marriage:

Marriage is a holy and honorable estate, and the fact that it was given to us in the Garden before the fall into sin is of no slight importance. In this day and age, when godly values and ethics are exchanged for the god of sexual freedom, expression and experience, we are really not much different than the world that the Gospel of Christ Jesus has pierced so many times before in human history. Only by God's grace do people know the graces that are given in the gift of marriage and rightly-used sexuality.

The greatest spiritual blessing of marriage is forgiveness and the practice of forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.²² Lauren Winner in her flashy-titled book, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*, recounts her path in life from non-Christian to Christian and how Christianity imparted a missing piece to her life through marriage and chastity. She lived the popular culture's understanding of sex and marriage for a time and found it to be an empty way of life. She says in her book that the thing that began the transformation from sexual and marital emptiness to fulfillment in marriage and sex was, "my own dawning awareness of sexual sin began with the rite of reconciliation."²³ She went on to say,

To confess my sin to a brother or sister — whether or not that confession happens in formal sacramental space with a member of the clergy — is to unfold my sin in the hearing of a godly person who can meet me on my level, talk to me about it, and assure me of God's forgiveness. Most of us live, after all, in relative ignorance — we speak in ignorance, pray in ignorance, and have sex in ignorance, because we are not awake; because our moral lives are not well enough formed to know whether the shape they are taking is right or wrong, grey or black or white. Confession puts us in the company of

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people who can speak truth in love to us, about our sin, about the need for amendment of life.²⁴

Winner is a member of Christ Episcopal Church in Charlottesville, Virginia, the worshiping community to which she dedicated her book. However, I propose that our Lutheran understanding of God's graces housed in the Word and Sacraments have more to offer than simply confession and amendment of life. Holy Absolution is pronounced and new life is granted for the amendment of life. All this grace comes down from above, not from below nor from within. This grace of forgiveness breathes new life as the words of Holy Absolution flow into the confessor. The old has gone, the new has come. The chasm between God and man because of sin is crossed over in the words of Christ that pronounce forgiveness. The gate at the Garden of Eden is peered into as life is spoken into existence again as forgiveness is pronounced. Though we will not know that kind of perfection this side of the final resurrection, we get a glimpse, a little foretaste of it in the grace that flows from the Word and Sacraments.

Dr. Robert Kolb mentioned in one of the first classes I took at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, entitled "Lutheran Mind," that those of us who were single should remain so and not endeavor to be married. He went on to say that the worst part of marriage is when your spouse comes to you, repents, and says, "Will you forgive me?", you are bound to forgive. The selfish and prideful flesh that is brought into that holy union does not want to forgive the other half of that one-flesh union, but it must for it is joined to something more holy than itself. The flesh of that spouse that is joined to the flesh of the other spouse in the one-flesh union of marriage is likewise joined to the flesh and blood of Christ who atoned for the sins of the whole world. The reality is that forgiveness and life flow from Christ into those united in holy matrimony with God's blessing and that for-

²² Colossians 3:11-19, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. ¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." (ESV).
²³ (Winner, 2005) 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

giveness flows from spouse to spouse because of Christ and His love for His bride, the Church, us. To withhold forgiveness is to withhold Christ and withhold life from not just the spouse you are at odds with because of the sin and weakness of the flesh, but to withhold life from yourself. Forgiveness sustains marriage and forgiveness is quite possibly the greatest blessing of God's graces in marriage.

In Christian marriage we get a glimpse into that perfect garden also, as we know this holy estate was given to man and woman in the Garden before the fall into sin, before the shame of nakedness. In holy matrimony the new life of Christ is constantly breathed into husband and wife through the Divine Service where God breathes out His life-giving words and physically gives out His life-giving flesh and blood. Before God we confess our sin and we kneel or stand in naked shame before His presence. Yes we seek to cover over our sin and shame just as Adam and Eve did, but our kind Father still seeks us out, forgives us and clothes us with His Son. Before the altar we bring our naked shame and all the sins we know He sees, yet because of our baptism and Christ's forgiving love, we stand cleansed and forgiven. We are presented as the bride of Christ and seated at a foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet feast without end. We are not ashamed, for the Gospel is upon us and all our sin has died upon the tree of shame — the cross. We enter back, in part, to get a glimpse of the communion between God and man in the Garden before the fall into sin.

In the Divine Service, the order of things is significant and it helps us rightly order our days and lives. We do not enter into God's holy presence by bargaining with Him. We do not seek to stand as a head over Him as He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments, and we do not tell Him what He has do to for us. We, as the bride, simply respond in praise as we receive abundant blessings from His

gracious hand. When husband and wife attend the Divine Service together and stand naked together before the Lord in confession, they become strengthened in their marriage together as they are clothed again with forgiveness from above. The knowledge of their own forgiveness and naked shame now covered then drives them to love one another by forgiving one another, just as God in Christ individually forgave them. As they receive the Lord's body and blood at the rail they should not be flanking the children thinking that, if they hold their family together they will hold their marriage together before God, but the other way around. They should receive the flesh and blood of Christ hanging on to the one to whom Christ joined them in holy matrimony and declared, "What therefore God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6). That union, in both the created order and spiritual order sense, holds the family together. They receive Christ and then act as Christ to one another. They receive love to love one another. They receive forgiveness to forgive one another as they are both trained by the Divine Service to live, in part, as they were created to live in the Garden of Eden before the fall into sin. By experiencing and knowing what it is to be the bride of Christ in the Divine Service, their marriage and family are now informed and upheld. They have what they need to live a life of praise, a doxology, to the Holy Trinity.

In Holy Communion, our Groom comes to us, knowing all our sins of thought, word and deed and invites us to come into Him as it is He who comes into us making us partakers of all the graces of life everlasting. That bond of common unity strengthens us in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another, for now we have received goodness once again from the author of all good. We now have a good love to share with our spouse, our family, and our neighbors.

In holy matrimony, that joy of heaven

They should receive the flesh and blood of Christ hanging on to the one to whom Christ joined them in holy matrimony.

and grace of a glimpse into the Garden of Eden is given when bride and groom stand both emotionally and physically naked before one another. Unlike the Church's sinless Groom, worldly grooms stand naked and ashamed before their brides. All Adams and all Eves stand naked and ashamed of the words of loveless malice they have spoken to each other. They stand naked and ashamed as they know their spouse knows their own dark selfish desires and sin. They stand physically naked and ashamed, wishing that they could present themselves as something better for the one they love, but they cannot for sin's wrinkles, sags, and bags cannot be concealed. They both stand naked and ashamed in need of the same thing — God's grace in Christ.

The Christian who receives grace from the Divine Service receives love that covers over multitudes of sin. The husband who knows how he has been clothed by God in Christ imparts those graces to his wife enacting spiritual headship to present her holy and radiant by the words "you are forgiven in Christ." She responds in love and praise and with a heart willing to likewise forgive as she has been forgiven. Curtis and Adle put it this way, "As a wedding day and marital focus are centered around a promise, so, too, is the life of the Bride of Christ. We come to worship every Sunday to hear again that promise made to us by Christ, the perfect groom. Nothing will separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Each church service functions as a vow renewal of that sure word."²⁵ We are there to be fed and forgiven to feed and forgive others in turn.

God's graces to us do not just begin and end in the Divine Service but continue out into our baptized, everyday lives. The remembrance of baptism that begins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, reminds us that we are saints who stand before God's throne, cleansed and redeemed. We have been made holy by the washing

of water with the Word and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We are joined to Christ. Kleinig states rightly that if we were to come before God's holiness as unclean sinners, we would be undone, but God provides a solution to that problem through our union with Christ in Holy Baptism. He says, "As we confess our sins, we put them on Christ's shoulders. We also pray for pardon and cleansing. His forgiveness makes us pure in heart and righteous before the Father; it unlocks the door of heaven for sinners and admits us, covered with Christ's own holiness, into the Father's presence."²⁶ In Holy Baptism our sin and shame are covered by Christ's holiness. Through faith that repents and holds on to the promises of God in Christ we come into His holy presence and receive His touch of love in the Sacrament of the Altar. He gives us love that we might love and forgive others. He serves us so that we might serve one another. He clothes with garments that cover over our sin that we might see others clothed as we are clothed and unashamed.

The greatest comfort that we have as Christians in a world where marriage, as God ordained it, will always be challenged to fit the passing worldview, is the ever constant Word and work of God through the Church. As an encouragement to all those aspiring to be wed, the married, and all Christians who instruct on matters of marriage, I will conclude with an excerpt from Herman Sasse's sermon entitled *The Church Lives! A Sermon on Acts 2:42-47 for the First Sunday After Trinity*:

The church of all times lives from the doctrine of the apostles.

But does it really? Must not the church adjust its message to the contemporary situation? The reproach of not moving with the times was heard in Germany through the 18th and 19th centuries from those who held a naïve faith in progress. Why go on preaching the same as

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others.*

²⁵ (Adle, 2015), 36.

²⁶ (Kleinig, 2008), 276.

Peter did in the Acts of the Apostles? How many theologians, indeed whole churches, finally had enough! They did not continue in the apostle's doctrine. They preached something else. Forty years ago they preached sermons on Goethe and Schiller. They preached the current view of the world, although most world views are lucky if they last as long as 30 years. And the churches did not become fuller, but emptier. And rightly so. For since 1848 any member of German society could read in the newspaper every morning as he drank his coffee what the latest and only acceptable world view is. For this I do not need to go to church. But where the church continued in the apostles' doctrine, there the congregation remained.

To the world it is inexplicable that the church lives on, always preaching the same old thing. In fact, it is because the same old thing goes on being preached, the apostles' doctrine, that the church goes on living. This is because the apostles' doctrine is the everlasting Word of God to all men, to all nations, to all times. ... In this way, and in no other, did we also become members of the church. You also were added by the Holy Spirit when you were baptized. Baptism is not some symbolic action, an initiation rite done or devised by men. It is a sacrament of Jesus Christ. And in the sacraments God is already now at this time doing something with us which He plans to do at the end of all things. In a sacrament the future becomes a present reality; it is eternity that has become time. So it is in Holy Absolution, as that doctrine is confessed in our church. Already now the forgiving words, which free us from sin, speak to us the verdict of the Final Judgment. So in Holy Communion we are given the fellowship of the body and blood of Christ, which will not come to consumma-

tion until the end of all things. ... For all loving service proceeds from the altar. ...

But Christ's church did not come to an end. The call of God's Holy Spirit went out to the peoples of the heathen world, and they in their day were alive with the truth of these words: "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Nations pass away, but the church continues. And where there is a people which no longer has a future, there the church still has a future, because the future of the church is the future of Jesus Christ. Amen.²⁷ ☩

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²⁷ (Sasse, 1999), 132-136

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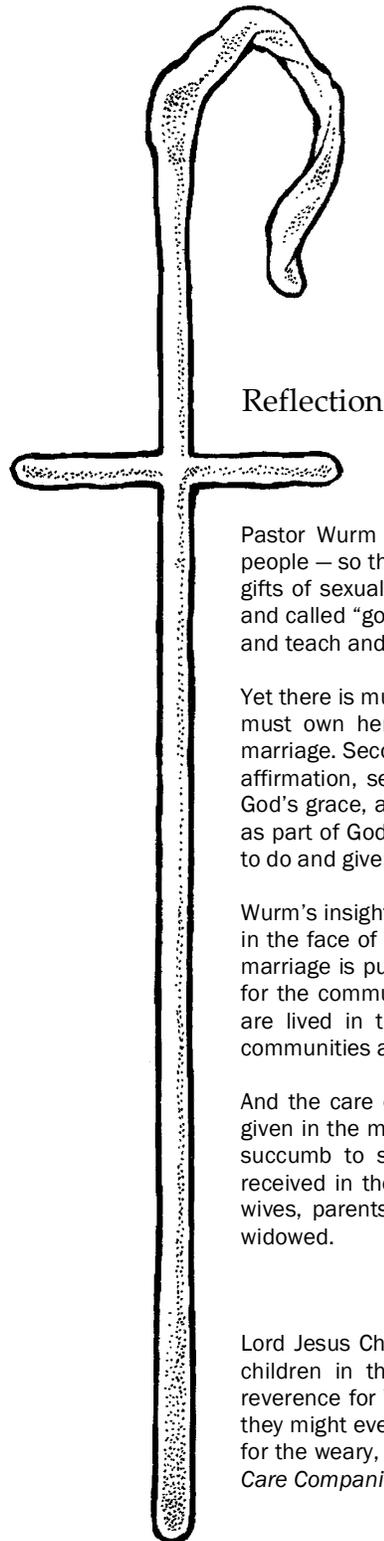
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Reflection

Pastor Wurm gives encouragement and counsel to the Church — her pastors and her people — so that we find our voices to speak to a fallen and yet redeemed world about the gifts of sexuality and marriage. These are, truly, gifts that God has designed and created and called “good.” But it is imperative — especially in these grey and latter days — to affirm and teach and live a higher and holier understanding and practice.

Yet there is much to confess and there is much to concern us. Indeed, the Christian Church must own her lack of proper and positive teaching about sexuality in and outside of marriage. Secondly, the idolatry of “me-ism” (evidenced by our “selfie” culture) asserts self-affirmation, self-definition and self-fulfillment as its “trinity.” Our response is to seek, by God’s grace, a clearer vision and to speak, by His grace, with a clearer voice. For marriage as part of God’s created design (before the Fall) is still to do and give what it was created to do and give: companionship and support, pleasure and procreation.

Wurm’s insights into the “public” nature of both marriage and sexuality must be articulated in the face of the temptation — even in the Church — to call and keep them “private.” But marriage is public. It is affirmed and supported by the community of the Church, and it is for the community of the world. So, also, sexuality is public. Faithfulness and monogamy are lived in the Church (and with the Church’s encouragement) as a blessing to the communities around us.

And the care of souls will always center on the gift of forgiveness. This is asked for and given in the marriages of Christ-followers — even as it is asked for and given to those who succumb to sexual temptation apart from or outside of marriage. This forgiveness is received in the Divine Service so that it might be shared by and between husbands and wives, parents and children, those single and those engaged, those divorced and those widowed.



Lord Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, embrace husbands and wives, parents and children in the arms of Your love and grace. Grant that all Your redeemed, in glad reverence for You, fulfill the vocations given them. Bless the homes of Your disciples that they might ever be a shelter for the defenseless, a fortress for the tempted, a resting place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home with You. Amen. [Adapted from *Pastoral Care Companion*, page 79]

- *Pastor Mark D. Barz*