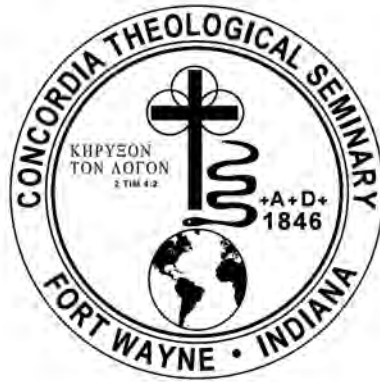


# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 81:3-4

July/October 2017

## *Table of Contents*

---

### **The Ninety-Five Theses and Why They Are Still Important**

Cameron A. MacKenzie ..... 195

### **In Search of Celebrating the Reformation Rightly: Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* as the Banner of the Reformation**

Naomichi Masaki ..... 213

### ***Pfarramt*, Geography, and the Order of the Church: A Formal Opinion from Wittenberg**

Mark D. Nispel ..... 239

### **Luther's Use of Apologetics**

Adam S. Francisco ..... 249

### **Antichrist in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions: The Relevance of Reformation Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 for the Church Today**

Charles A. Gieschen ..... 263

### **Will the Real Martin Luther Stand Up?**

David P. Scaer ..... 281

### **The Story of Salvation, the Genesis of a New Creation, and a Bold Proclamation: Luther Lessons for the Present Crisis**

Peter J. Scaer ..... 299

<b>Restoring the Great Litany in the Lutheran Church</b>	
Benjamin T.G. Mayes .....	321
<b>Research Notes</b> .....	331
Demon Possession and Exorcism in Lutheran Orthodoxy	
<b>Theological Observer</b> .....	337
2017 Commencement Speech	
A Tribute to Donna Preus	
Culture: Friend or Foe?	
A Living Breathing Instrument and Its CPR	
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	351
<b>Books Received</b> .....	377
<b>Indices to Volume 81 (2017)</b> .....	381

#### Errata

There is an error on page 339 in the research note by Benjamin T.G. Mayes, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession Comparison Chart,” *CTQ* 80:3–4 (2016). A line was accidentally omitted. The missing line reads as follows:

Of Confession and Satisfaction [Triglot, etc.]: XII (VI) 1–81 [Tappert, etc.]: XII 98–178

## **The Story of Salvation, the Genesis of a New Creation, and a Bold Proclamation: Luther Lessons for the Present Crisis**

**Peter J. Scaer**

### **I. Introduction: The Present Crisis**

We are living in a time of crisis. At the core of our present difficulty is a radically new understanding of sexuality, marriage, and humanity, with profound implications for our society, as well as our church.<sup>1</sup> Many of our young people have been led astray. Sheep and shepherds are confused and afraid. To those who are still unaware or apathetic, Erick Erickson and Bill Blankschaen have famously warned, “You will be made to care.”<sup>2</sup>

Sherif Girgis argues that we are entering into a New Gnosticism. According to the tenets of this budding religion, the body is incidental to our true identity. “We are subjects of desire and consent, who use bodily equipment for spiritual and emotional expression,” writes Girgis.<sup>3</sup> We are, as it were, ghosts in the machine. Our true self is the inner person. The body and its members are the tools by which we conduct our business. Accordingly, we are who we say we are, apart from any physical or created reality. Such thinking was crystallized by Justice Kennedy in the 1992 Supreme Court decision *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Writing for the court’s plurality opinion, Kennedy grandiloquently opined, “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”<sup>4</sup> Such a pronouncement may sound naive or flighty, but it is hardly benign. David Azerrad describes this movement in terms of unfettered autonomy: “We are all sovereign individuals, radically free to fashion and refashion ourselves into anything we so please at any point in our lives. Man is the

---

<sup>1</sup> To understand how marriage has been redefined in our present context, see Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> See Erick Erickson and Bill Blankschaen, *You Will Be Made to Care: The War on Faith, Family, and Your Freedom to Believe* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Sherif Girgis, “Obergefell and the New Gnosticism,” *First Things*, June 28, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/06/obergefell-and-the-new-gnosticism>.

<sup>4</sup> *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

---

*Peter J. Scaer is Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and Director of the M.A. Program at Concordia Theological Seminary. He may be contacted at [peter.scaer@ctsfw.edu](mailto:peter.scaer@ctsfw.edu).*

undefined animal. He is *auto nomos*—self legislating.”<sup>5</sup> We would add, as well, self-creating, self-justifying, and therefore radically selfish.

Such thinking is corrosive to societal bonds and community life. As Robert George notes, “If we take the Gnostic view, then human beings—living members of the human species—are not necessarily persons. . . . Those in the embryonic, fetal, and early infant stages are *not yet* persons.”<sup>6</sup> A human body is not enough to define a human being as truly human. This makes it easier, notes George, “to justify abortion; infanticide; euthanasia for the cognitively impaired; and the production, use, and destruction of human embryos for biomedical research.”<sup>7</sup>

This liberty of self-definition is a strike against reality itself and undermines the freedom of others. If one has an unquestionable right to define one’s own existence, then the other person must play along or be punished. It becomes impossible to affirm a person without affirming his self-proclaimed identity. “COEXIST” bumper stickers, a plea for tolerance, have become a demand for conformity. Girgis writes, “For the New Gnostic, then, a just society cannot live and let live, when it comes to sex. Sooner or later, the common good—respect for people as self-defining subjects—will require *social approval* of their self-definition and -expression.”<sup>8</sup> Bruce Jenner is now Caitlyn. Whether the emperor is wearing no clothes or a dress, we must nod and smile—or else.

This New Gnosticism has more recently taken flight in the creation of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive pronouns. This is not about creating a safe space for the confused; it is an aggressive campaign against those who dare take note of bodily reality. A person is no longer he or she, but may in fact be xe or zir, or even, like Yahweh himself, a plural singularity. While we may be tempted to dismiss all this as nonsense, we should be slow to chuckle. These new pronouns, like much else in our age of political correctness, are trip wires and traps destroying careers, shattering reputations, and stifling speech and thought. Anthony Esolen warns, “Do not dismiss the pronominal wars as nonsense. Do not assume that the warriors are merely daft. Do not mistake the pale horse and its rider for snowflakes or mittens or bunnies or anything else that is soft and inoffensive and trivial. The pale horse and its rider aim to destroy.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> David Azerrad, “Justice Kennedy and the Lonely Promethean Man of Liberalism,” *Public Discourse*, July 9, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/07/15286>.

<sup>6</sup> Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” *First Things*, December 2016, 34, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/gnostic-liberalism>, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” 34.

<sup>8</sup> Girgis, “Obergefell and the New Gnosticism,” 2, emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Esolen, “Pronouns, Ordinary People, and the War over Reality,” *Public Discourse*, October 13, 2016, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/10/17811>.

This New Gnosticism is both individualistic and, according to an internal logic, totalitarian. Push away the Ten Commandments, and you end up with 613 rules in their place. Abandon natural law, and you end up with ten thousand regulations.

The first great wave of trouble came with the passage of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), which mandated that employers cover the cost of contraceptives. Hobby Lobby, noting that many contraceptives are also abortifacient, took the matter to court. Arguing that the mandate infringed on their First Amendment rights, as codified in Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), Hobby Lobby narrowly won its case. This first wave also broke on our Christian organizations, schools, and social agencies. As Mary Eberstadt notes, "The so-called contraceptive mandate forces Christian charities to participate in the disposal of products that Christian doctrine holds to be sinful."<sup>10</sup> Notoriously, the government sued the Little Sisters of the Poor. Similar trouble has come on Christian universities.

The second wave of the attack came as the result of the Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which declared natural marriage laws unconstitutional. In his minority opinion, Justice Samuel Alito warned, "I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this prophecy has proven true. The list of victims grows longer.<sup>12</sup> Brendan Eich lost his position as CEO of the Mozilla Corporation after donating to a marriage amendment in California. Catholic Charities of Boston had to stop providing adoption services because they would have otherwise been forced to place children for adoption in gay families. Aaron and Melissa Klein lost their bakery after declining to bake a cake celebrating a same-sex wedding. Barronelle Stutzman happily employed and served gay people at her flower shop, but when she declined to use her artistic talents to celebrate a so-called gay wedding, she was taken to court and lost her livelihood. Kentucky clerk Kim Davis was mocked and ridiculed and even spent time behind bars after she refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Closer to home, the Wyoming Commission on Judicial Conduct and Ethics recommended that the court remove Municipal Judge Ruth Neely, a member of an LCMS congregation, after she told a curious reporter that she would not perform same-sex marriages.

---

<sup>10</sup> Mary Eberstadt, *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), xxii.

<sup>11</sup> *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. \_\_\_ (2015). For a review of the judicial opinions on both sides, see Ryan T. Anderson, *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2015), 59–84.

<sup>12</sup> For a list of casualties, see Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 85–104.

The third wave, the transgender movement, quickly followed. The logic was inescapable. If man and woman do not matter to marriage, who can claim them as meaningful categories in any other area of our existence? Houston provided hope when a majority of its population voted down a referendum on gender-neutral bathrooms. But since then, victories have been few. Most recently, North Carolina came under attack for a bathroom policy based on the distinctions of male and female. As in the Indiana RFRA debate, big business came down on the side of the secular left. For a chilling picture of what this looks like on a local level, open up the December 2016 issue of *First Things*, where Katherine Kersten's article "Transgender Conformity" tells the story of Nova Classical Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota. A student, claiming to be gender "non-conforming," entered the school. As a result, all K-5 students were required to read *My Princess Boy*. When some parents protested, a firestorm arose, and parents were branded publicly as bigots. Gender-neutral pronouns and bathrooms for "gender neutral" students followed. Yet it was not enough. The child's parents withdrew their "daughter" from the school. "On March 24, 2016, they filed a complaint with St. Paul's Department of Human Rights, claiming the school had denied their 'daughter' the ability to 'undergo a gender transition' in a 'safe and timely way.'" <sup>13</sup> We should in no way imagine that our own Lutheran schools will somehow be spared from this.

After years of holding a privileged place in society, Christian identity now comes with a price tag. The 2016 presidential election may offer hope for a brief reprieve, but there are no guarantees. As Mary Eberstadt notes in the title of her latest book, "It's dangerous to believe."<sup>14</sup>

Though many are ringing the warning bells, still others remain in denial. Surely, the world will come to it senses, and reason will prevail. Yet our Lord reminds us, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Matt 10:22).<sup>15</sup> Again, he says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). Perhaps, what we took to be the peaceful norm was really an exception.

---

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Kersten, "Transgender Conformity," *First Things*, December 2016, 27, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/transgender-conformity>.

<sup>14</sup> Eberstadt, *It's Dangerous to Believe*.

<sup>15</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## II. Persecution: A Historical Perspective

The preacher reminds us, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). Though history may not repeat, it surely rhymes. Communism produced millions of twentieth-century martyrs. Islam continues to take its toll. But what of the rise of secularism in the West? What will that look like? Where can we go to better understand the challenges we face?

Some look to the earliest days of Christianity for comparison. In his book *Sexual Morality in a Christless World*, Matthew Rueger concludes, “Secular society is moving ever closer to Rome in its assessment of Christianity. The message of Christ is despised, and Christians are seen as bigoted and unloving.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in the first three centuries, Christians suffered harassment, banishment, and economic loss. The need to pay homage to the divine emperors made social, political, and business transactions problematic.<sup>17</sup> While we remember the martyrs, it is good to remember that the greatest temptations came when Christians were called to make minor gestures to the imperial deity. As Larry Hurtado writes, “And yet it seems clear that the aim of Roman authorities was not particularly to execute Christians, but to turn them from what the authorities (and large numbers of the public at large) saw as a perverse and dangerous allegiance. That is, the object was not death but conformity to the demands of imperial authority.”<sup>18</sup> It was difficult to be a Christian and hold down a job or to rise up in society. Members of professional guilds were placed in untenable situations. As Hurtado puts it, “If you were the member of a vocational guild, such as bakers or fishermen, what should you do at meetings when the tutelary deity of the guild was honored, e.g., with a libation?”<sup>19</sup> While such a world may seem foreign to us, Christians are already making decisions that have put their careers in jeopardy. Others, by not acting, are placing their souls in jeopardy. In the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the question is posed, “Why, what harm is there in saying ‘Lord Caesar,’ and offering incense . . . and thereby saving yourself?” (*Mart. Poly.* 8.2).<sup>20</sup> Threatened with an hour of fire, Polycarp recalled the greater fire of eternal judgment. As the Lord had remained faithful to him, so also he would remain faithful to the Lord. Later we are told, “Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian” (*Mart. Poly.* 12.1). That will be the ultimate question for us as well. Are we willing

---

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Rueger, *Sexual Morality in a Christless World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 41.

<sup>17</sup> For the difficulties of being a faithful Christian in the Roman Empire, see Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2016), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Translations taken from *The Apostolic Fathers: With an English Translation by Kirsopp Lake, vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

to bear the name of Christ, to claim our identity? What will Christian business people do when asked to fly the rainbow flag or participate in a gay-rights march? What will Christian schools do when funding is threatened? Will Christian counselors remain silent? Will Christian doctors perform sex-change surgeries? In an age of identity politics, in which every person has the right of self-definition, we will be hard-pressed simply to say, “No, I am a Christian.”

As we consider this in a historical perspective, our present challenge may prove greater, at least in one regard. In the early church, Christians were bringing a new message to a pagan empire that knew nothing of Christ or the church. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa were interested in what Paul had to say (Acts 23–25). When St. Paul brought Christ to Athens, he was introducing an unknown God. However, among the cultural elite of our time, God is known and yet despised, as are those who bear his name.

Indeed, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that this secular worldview has been internalized by our own people. Years of watching *Will and Grace* and the constant barrage of propaganda have taken their toll. As Mary Eberstadt writes, “A prominent Christian journalist has confided that his biggest fear in life is that his own children will grow up to hate him, because they will believe the terrible things said about the faith in public these days.”<sup>21</sup> The greatest danger is not that many Christians will be persecuted, but that those who call themselves Christians will simply abandon the Bridegroom for the sake of expediency. Told that we are haters, they will believe it. “And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matt 10:36).

### III. Recovering Reformation Boldness: A Call for Courage

Given the dangers of the present situation, we do well to ask what applicable lessons we might draw from the Reformation and from Luther in particular.

Justification by faith is the great doctrine of the Reformation. But when most people think of Luther, they think of his courage. Few people can tell you what the Ninety-Five Theses were all about, but in their mind’s eye, they can see Luther nailing them to the door of the church. Though they might know little of the Augsburg Confession, they can hear Luther say, “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.” Historians may correct us on the details, but these two stories capture the spirit of the Reformation in all its boldness. Conscience may be misinformed or ill-informed, but without it, all is lost. Therefore, we still say with Luther, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God . . . because acting against one’s conscience

---

<sup>21</sup> Eberstadt, *It’s Dangerous to Believe*, xxi.



is neither safe nor sound.”<sup>22</sup> Given the circumstances, Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” sounds fresher than ever: “And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won.”<sup>23</sup>

It is also important to note that this is not just about us as Lutherans. We are called to stand with others who face the fire. Given our baptismal identity, it is a matter of corporate solidarity. Christ’s face is not now seen, but it becomes apparent to us in the least of our brothers (Matt 25:45). “If one member suffers, all suffer together,” Paul says (1 Cor 12:26).

Princeton Professor Robert P. George rallies us to the cause:

The lynch mob is now giddy with success and drunk on the misery and pain of its victims. It is urged on by a compliant and even gleeful media. . . . And so, who if anyone will courageously stand up to the mob? Who will resist? Who will speak truth to its raw and frightening power? Who will refuse to be bullied into submission or intimidated into silence? . . . If we refuse to surrender, we will certainly be demonized; but everything will depend on whether we refuse to be demoralized. Courage displayed in the cause of truth—and of right—is powerful.<sup>24</sup>

Such cries for courage echo the Reformation spirit as well as the biblical witness. Entering into the dangers of the promised land, Joshua cried out, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the *LORD* your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh 1:9). To the storm-tossed church, straining at the oars and in danger of capsizing, the new Joshua says, “Take heart; *ἐγὼ εἰμι*. Do not be afraid” (Mark 6:50). Courage begins with the knowledge that our Good Shepherd is present (Ps 23:4), secure in the promise that in losing our life, we will find it (Matt 10:39).

Will we be ready if persecution should come our way? Presumption is foolhardy, but courage is a muscle that must be exercised. “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much” (Luke 16:10). Our Lord adds, “For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Matt 13:12). If we are afraid to speak to our own people, we stand little chance if we are dragged before governors and kings (Matt 10:18). If we are ashamed to speak of such basic matters as bride and groom among the faithful, how will we be faithful to our heavenly Groom when much more is on the line?

---

<sup>22</sup> Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 39.

<sup>23</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 262:4.

<sup>24</sup> Robert P. George, “Who Will Stand?” *First Things*, April 5, 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/04/who-will-stand>.

Indeed, fidelity in matters great and small became the trademark of Luther's preaching. Not surprisingly, Luther's boldness for the gospel carried over into his teaching on marriage. Consider Luther's essay *The Estate of Marriage*. He laments, "How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage."<sup>25</sup> Why is the topic of marriage a cause for angst? Luther explains, "I am reluctant to do it because I am afraid if I once get really involved in the subject it will make a lot of work for me and for others."<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, in Luther's day, marriage matters were muddled. Virginity was touted as a great ecclesiastical virtue, while civic brothels were largely condoned and sanctioned. According to Carter Lindberg, "Prostitutes were thought to purify a town by draining off excess male energy as a sewer drained off waste."<sup>27</sup> The end of monastery life made things even trickier. As Paul Strawn notes, "With the emptying of the monasteries in the early 1520's, over ten percent of the population of Germany changed not only their place of residence but also their way of life, most notably when it came to marriage."<sup>28</sup> Confusion reigned at every level. As such, Luther knew that by speaking about marriage, he would be stepping on many toes. He says, "The shameful confusion wrought by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations, that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter nor to hear of it."<sup>29</sup>

We feel Luther's pain. In a recent article, Brian Saunders asks, "Is the church becoming more comfortable with divorce?"<sup>30</sup> Forty years ago, we could have asked this question in search of an answer. Now, it is purely rhetorical. Homosexuality can be difficult to talk about, as is also the transgender phenomenon. Even gay marriage, though the law of the land for only a couple of years, is treated as if written on golden tablets. We might be tempted to despair.

At an anniversary celebration such as this, it would be easier to speak about Luther at the Diet of Worms than to open up a whole other can of worms.

---

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522): vol. 45, p. 17, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

<sup>26</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.

<sup>27</sup> Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Struggles with Social-Ethical Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169. See also Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 80–84.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Strawn, "The Theological Conundrum of Marital 'Relations' According to Luther," in *Marriage, Sex, and Gender in the Lutheran Church Today: In Light of the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. John Maxfield (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2015), 64–65.

<sup>29</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Saunders, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Parish and Parsonage," in *Marriage, Sex, and Gender in the Lutheran Church Today*, 118.

Yet, speak we must, as Luther himself reminds us, saying, “But timidity is no help in emergency; I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly.”<sup>31</sup> For us, it is a simple matter of fidelity in “an evil and adulterous generation” (Matt 12:39; 16:4). To whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:48). The one who is faithful unto death receives the crown of life (Rev 2:10). But if we aspire to be the faithful bride in the holy city of the new Jerusalem, we must proclaim the bridegroom who alone has the power to save. To do that, we must speak of marriage rightly.

#### IV. Can Luther Be a Theological Guide?

Though Luther’s problems were not ours, we do well to consult with those who are not wearing our culturally tinted glasses. Before we can talk to our people about gay, lesbian, and transgender issues, we need to teach them about our creation in God’s image, God’s intended plan for marriage, and the meaning of our fallen condition. To put it another way, in order to understand what a thing is not, we must learn and teach what a thing is.

It may encourage us to recognize that Luther also had to build from the ground up, beginning with foundational matters. He writes,

No one has either preached or heard what marriage is. No one has looked upon marriage as a work or estate which God has commanded and placed under worldly authority, and therefore everyone has treated it as a free man does his own property, with which he can do as he wishes, without any qualms of conscience.<sup>32</sup>

So it was, so it is.

#### V. Our Human Nature: Body and Soul

Indeed, we could do worse than return to a reformer who lectured extensively on the book of Genesis. The New Gnosticism teaches that only the inner person matters. Luther teaches that though our humanity is fallen, God is a good creator, and the physical life has significance. The New Gnosticism teaches that marriage is a human construct, tied to emotional needs, apart from the physical reality of the conjugal union. Luther teaches that marriage is a one-flesh union, oriented toward the begetting of children.

---

<sup>31</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.

<sup>32</sup> Luther, *The Abomination of the Secret Mass* (1525), AE 36:314.

Luther addresses our human nature in his lectures on Genesis: “Thus Adam had a twofold life: a physical one and an immortal one.”<sup>33</sup> A human being, far from being a ghost in the machine, is a body-soul union, what Robert George calls “a dynamic unity: a personal body, a bodily self.”<sup>34</sup> Like the beasts, Luther teaches, man has need of food and drink, yet he is also created in the image of God, which Luther notes is “an indication of another and better life.”<sup>35</sup> Body and soul, we are created in God’s image. In a world that considers the body insignificant, and yet deplors body shaming, Luther’s words hit home: “The man is not to despise or scoff at the woman or her body, nor the woman the man. But each should honor the other’s image and body as a divine and good creation that is well pleasing to God himself.”<sup>36</sup>

Given that the culture is offering another message, indoctrinating our children at an early age, we need to be intentional, as was Luther, in teaching our children the fundamentals. This means telling the Bible stories and offering lessons to young and old. In the catechisms, Luther offers a primer on what it means to be a human being and how to think about marriage. In his explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism, he writes that God has not only “made me and all creatures,” but he has also given me both “body and soul,” along with “all my members” (SC II).<sup>37</sup> For Luther, we are a body-soul unity, and our physical life matters.

## VI. Marriage and the Created Order

Luther includes marriage among God’s many physical gifts, adding, “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have” (SC II). Again, in his explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther says that we pray for “a devout husband or wife” and “devout children” (SC III).

At first glance, Luther’s catechetical lists may seem disappointing. In his explanation of the First Article, the gifts of wife and children are placed after such pedestrian items as clothing and shoes and before land and animals. In his explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, the gifts of a devout spouse and devout children are nestled incongruously between land, animals, money, and goods on the one side, and good government and good weather on the other. But that may be

---

<sup>33</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), AE 1:57.

<sup>34</sup> George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” 34.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion* (1522), AE 45:57.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:18.

<sup>37</sup> Small Catechism quotations are from *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, copyright © 1986, 1991 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Luther's very point. Marriage is not only a spiritual blessing, but it is also a created good, a gift, and part of God's physical creation.

Luther addresses the topic of marriage more fully in *The Estate of Marriage* (1522). Luther writes, "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, and they can be certain that he does not lie."<sup>38</sup> Luther's word is as relevant as ever. Before so-called gay marriage took hold, our own people came to see marriage as a work of man, not God. Couples insist on designer wedding services, write their own vows, and eschew the church for so-called destination weddings. In every way, they show that they think of their marriage as a product of their own desire. The trouble, as we have seen, is that if we can create marriage, we can also dissolve it. This makes marriage unstable, leaving people vulnerable. As we move forward, we may do well to put less emphasis on the marital vows and more on the words of Christ: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6).

In fact, because it is part of God's good creation, the estate of marriage can be known also through natural law. As such, marriage is not simply a revelation from God but also a recognition of reality. Marriage, with its expectations of permanence, exclusivity, and monogamy, is tied to the reality of the one relationship that alone can produce children and is best equipped to care for them. In his lectures on Genesis, Luther writes, "Moreover, the pagans, too, realized that there was nothing more proper and more advantageous than this close relationship of married people. Hence they declare that according to natural law a wife is necessary and should maintain her inseparable association until death."<sup>39</sup> This basic truth can be explored quite apart from the Scriptures, because it is written into reality itself and is conducive to human flourishing.

## VII. Marriage and the Created Order: Oriented toward Children

Marriage is part of the created order. It is also the way that God continues to create. One reason gay marriage so easily became the law of the land is that our society long ago forgot what marriage actually is. Divorce, cohabitation, and the trend toward disconnecting marriage from children have all paved the way.<sup>40</sup> These three are connected. Divorce disregards the needs of the children based on the desire of adults. A couple that cohabitates most typically thinks of a child as an unwelcome

---

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:38.

<sup>39</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), AE 1:138.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of this, see Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

surprise. The trend of intentionally childless couples adds to the mix. As such, people's conception of marriage has changed from a conjugal union oriented toward children into what Bradford Wilcox calls "primarily a couple-centered vehicle for personal growth, emotional intimacy, and shared consumption that depends for its survival on the happiness of both spouses."<sup>41</sup> To put it another way, if marriage is no longer about children, or even about the other, then it is all about me. This is no accident.

Margaret Sanger's Planned Parenthood revolution fought precisely to separate the sexual union from both marriage and procreation, claiming, "The most serious evil of our times is that of encouraging the bringing into the world of large families. The most immoral practice of the day is breeding too many children."<sup>42</sup> Sanger turned sex from mutual love to a radical and even religious self-fulfillment: "Through sex, mankind may attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, which will light up the only path to paradise."<sup>43</sup> Since sex was oriented to self and not to other, marriage itself became the enemy. Sanger writes, "The marriage bed is the most degenerative influence in the social order."<sup>44</sup> In the 1960s, feminism and the sexual revolution, aided by the pill and abortion, turned Sanger's vision into reality. Irina Dunn famously said, "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle." Seizing on the opportunity, Hugh Hefner espoused a philosophy in which boys could play, apart from any responsibility. Not surprisingly, divorce rates have skyrocketed, and marriage has become optional. Not coincidentally, gay marriage has taken hold even as marriage has lost its grip. At today's wedding celebrations, there is plenty of icing, but little cake.

As Heidi Stevens, a columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, writes,

As marriage becomes increasingly optional—no longer necessary for child-bearing, economic survival or social acceptance—individuals who decide to tie the knot can approach their union as a relationship designed to, above all else, foster a happier, healthier life. And they can tailor and nurture theirs accordingly.<sup>45</sup>

Reinventing marriage, Stevens notes, will lead not simply to polygamy, but also to group marriage and temporary marriage. In this way, gay marriage is more than

---

<sup>41</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox and Elizabeth Marquardt, eds. *The State of Our Unions 2010: When Marriage Disappears* (Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project, 2010), 38.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* (New York: Dossier Press, 1966), 57.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Maxwell Reprint Company, 1969), 237.

<sup>44</sup> Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, 161.

<sup>45</sup> Heidi Stevens, "Reinventing Marriage for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Chicago Tribune*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/sc-fam-1014-rethinking-marriage-21st-century-20141007-story.html>.

a redefinition of marriage, it is the unraveling of marriage. When the definition of marriage is no longer tied to the conjugal union that alone produces children, marriage may be anything and ultimately nothing. Such thinking leads to what sociologists commonly call “the end of marriage.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet, the basic fact remains: not every marriage need lead to children. But every child is the product of a male-female union. Biologically, there is no way around this. In the First Article of the Creed and the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther puts spouse and children together. He also pairs marriage and children together in his *Exhortation to the Knights of the Teutonic Order*: “For this reason God has done marriage the honor of putting it into the Fourth Commandment, immediately after the honor due himself, where he commands, ‘Honor your father and mother.’”<sup>47</sup>

Seeing that it was not good for man to be alone, God created Eve from Adam’s rib, thus creating the possibility of community, what Luther calls “the common good.”<sup>48</sup> Eve was not simply a partner; together, she and Adam could carry out “the magnificent work of begetting and preserving his kind. Therefore, ‘good’ in this passage denotes the increase in the human race.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, we say marriage is oriented toward children. In an age of declining birthrates, this is worth pondering.

Arguing from natural law, Ryan Anderson makes the same point: “The marital act is comprehensive—it unites the spouses in heart, mind, and body—and is thus oriented toward a comprehensive good—the procreation and education of new persons.”<sup>50</sup> This does not mean that every marriage will result in children, but natural law recognizes that every child comes from one union and one union alone. For that reason, marriage between one man and one woman is lifelong, exclusive, and permanent. Since marriage is oriented toward children, we do well to read the Scriptures but also to explore with our people what marriage is and how it contributes to the common good.

Indeed, while the church continues to struggle with the question of birth control, Luther’s words are bracing, even shocking: “‘Be fruitful and multiply’ is not a command. It is more than a command, it is a divine ordinance which is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore.”<sup>51</sup> For Luther, it is the very nature of the male-female union to be productive. As such, marriage is a testimony and means by which

---

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relationships* (Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Luther, *An Exhortation to the Knights of the Teutonic Order That They Lay Aside False Chastity and Assume the True Chastity of Wedlock* (1523), AE 45:154.

<sup>48</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 1:115–116.

<sup>49</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 1:116.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:18.

the story of Genesis continues among us. As Luther notes, “He creates them so they have to multiply.”<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps, though, the people of Luther’s time were not all that different from us. As Luther long ago said, “Today you find many people who do not want to have children.”<sup>53</sup> The same holds true today. In an age of birth control and abortion, we must engender a lively sense of God’s continuing work of creation in the blessing of marriage. If we were not so blinded by sin, Luther says, “We would marvel at procreation as the greatest work of God, and as a most outstanding gift we would honor it with the praises it deserves.”<sup>54</sup> As an added bonus, our churches would be fuller.

### VII. Male and Female He Created Them: A Binary Humanity

While we endeavor to teach natural marriage, the transgender issue has now come to dominate our cultural landscape. At last count, Facebook recognizes fifty-eight genders. The January 2017 special edition of *National Geographic* touts the “Gender Revolution,” featuring a nine-year-old transgender child. While we speak of man-woman marriage, the very categories of man and woman are falling into disuse.

Though such thinking would have been as foreign to the Reformation as it was to our grandparents, Luther does have something to say on the issue. Drawing on Genesis, the reformer strongly endorses a binary humanity. “We may be assured,” writes Luther, “that God divided mankind into two classes, namely, male and female, or a he and a she.”<sup>55</sup> For Luther, the human being consists of both body and soul in unity. “Therefore,” Luther adds, “each one of us must have the kind of body God created for us.”<sup>56</sup> Does Luther have anything to say to our present-age problems of gender identity and transgenderism? Indeed, he adds, “I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man: we do not have that power. But we are exactly as he created us: I am a man and you are a woman.”<sup>57</sup> These complementary differences make possible procreation and aid in the raising of those children. Luther writes, “He created man and woman differently (as is evident) not

---

<sup>52</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:18.

<sup>53</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), AE 1:118.

<sup>54</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), AE 1:118.

<sup>55</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.

<sup>57</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:17.



for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God” (LC I 207).<sup>58</sup>

Bruce, or now officially Caitlyn, Jenner, might demur. Luther’s basic insight is that we are not our own creators. The fact that we are male or female is not incidental to our identity, but is inherent in it. This may lead us to think about the body scientifically, in terms of the X and Y chromosomes. It may also lead us to sociological research, which demonstrates that men and women are not only different, but that they also are complementary.<sup>59</sup> We may turn to studies that show there is no such thing as parenting, but only mothering and fathering. This will take some time, but science, the social sciences, natural law, and the breadth of historical experience are on our side. Reading Luther’s observation of self-evident truths is a good starting point. Generational wisdom is our friend. Grandpa might just be on to something.

### VIII. Marriage as a Societal Matter

Many see marriage as a private matter, a consensual relationship between two individuals, a private contract. “How does my gay marriage affect your relationship?” society asks. “Let the world have gay marriage, and we will keep our biblical one,” we respond. Such thinking, as we have noted, is naive. Gay marriage depends not only on our tolerance but also on our approval.

Even apart from that, marriage laws matter. Luther understood that marriage serves a societal function and that a healthy community depends on it. Luther writes, “The estate of marriage, however, redounds to the benefit not alone of the body, property, honor, and soul of an individual, but also to the benefit of whole cities and countries in that they remain exempt from the plagues imposed by God.”<sup>60</sup> Such plagues today may include venereal diseases, but also vulnerable and impoverished women, lost children, and aimless men. As President Obama noted, “We know the statistics—that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely

---

<sup>58</sup> The Large Catechism quotations are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox notes, “Among the many distinctive talents that mothers bring to the parenting enterprise, three stand out: their capacity to breastfeed, their ability to understand infants and children, and their ability to offer nurture and comfort to their children.” Fathers “excel when it comes to discipline, play, and challenging their children to embrace life’s challenges” (“Reconcilable Differences: What Social Sciences Show about the Complementarity of the Sexes and Parenting,” *Touchstone* 18, no. 9 [2005]: 32).

<sup>60</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:44.

to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools, and twenty times more likely to end up in prison.”<sup>61</sup>

In his essay *On Marriage Matters*, Luther deals extensively with marriage as a public institution. Luther, for instance, opposed secret betrothals apart from parental consent and public knowledge, not simply on biblical grounds, but also on the grounds that women would be left unprotected with no rights.<sup>62</sup> For Luther, “A secret engagement should yield to a public one.”<sup>63</sup> Otherwise, legal and financial problems would follow.

Luther likewise speaks about the case of men who abuse the marital relationship for financial gain and then leave their wives with the responsibility of raising their children alone. After a number of years, such a man returns “and relies on her having to take him back when he comes, and on the city and house being open to him.”<sup>64</sup> In such cases, Luther says, “It would be high time and necessary for the authorities to issue a stern decree and take severe measures.”<sup>65</sup> For, in abandoning his wife, “Such a villain shows his contempt for matrimony and the laws of the city.”<sup>66</sup> These laws are in place precisely to ensure that a husband provides the “duty, food, service, provision, etc., that he owes them.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, marriage is not a private matter, because it affects both the spouse and the children and is a drain on the society that is forced to step into the breach. As such, it is a matter of justice and a matter for the law.

Luther’s insights should lead us to discuss how marriage functions in society today. Within our own culture, the redefinition and dissolution of marriage has been especially harmful to women and children, leaving them vulnerable. Gay marriage takes the matter a step further and purposefully leaves a child without a father or mother.

Luther understood well that marriage also serves to keep men out of trouble. As Luther notes, men who have sex before marriage end up “plunging into immorality rather than grooving to maturity.”<sup>68</sup> For good reason, Luther quotes the proverb “Early to rise and early to wed.”<sup>69</sup> Marriage protects the woman and channels a man’s strengths toward good ends. Luther writes, “Because from that there come

---

<sup>61</sup> Barack Obama, “Obama’s Speech on Fatherhood” (speech, Apostolic Church of God, Chicago, IL, June 15, 2008), [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/06/obamas\\_speech\\_on\\_fatherhood.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/06/obamas_speech_on_fatherhood.html).

<sup>62</sup> Lindberg, “Luther’s Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues,” 169.

<sup>63</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:267.

<sup>64</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:312.

<sup>65</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:312.

<sup>66</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:313.

<sup>67</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:313.

<sup>68</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:45.

<sup>69</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:44.

people who retain a sound body, a good conscience, property, and honor and family, all of which are so ruined and dissipated by fornication.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, when we look at our cities, where fatherlessness is a plague and the streets are dangerous, we see the wisdom of Luther’s insights.

Finally, we should add, while the government has God-given authority, the family comes first. When Luther speaks of the Fourth Commandment, his explanation is inclusive of civil government, “which, as we have said, belongs in the category of “fatherhood” as a walk of life, and is the most comprehensive of all” (LC I 150). Luther explains, “Through civil rulers, as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security” (LC I 150).

The order of these relationships is instructive. Governmental authority is an extension of fatherly authority, not the other way around. Marriage and family are written into creation itself and therefore have priority. What, then, of government? May a government establish laws that are contrary to nature or that redefine what has already been defined? No, for government acts in the stead of the family. As Luther says in his explanation of the Fourth Commandment, “God has given this walk of life, fatherhood and motherhood, a special position of honor, higher than that of any other walk of life under it” (LC I 105). Again, Luther says, “It is not a walk of life to be placed on the same level with all the others, but it is before and above them all, whether those of emperor, princes, bishops, or any other” (LC I 209). Marriage does not belong only to the church. Luther writes, “It is not a restricted walk of life, but the most universal and noblest, pervading all Christendom and even extending throughout all the world” (LC I 210).

### IX. Moving toward a Christological Anthropology

Thus far, we have taken a peek at Luther’s teachings on marriage and children and our creation in God’s image. In doing so, we shore up the bases. How, then, shall we build and how might the present crisis lead us to go forward?

In a compelling address to the 2016 LCMS convention, Ryan Anderson summed up our theological task in this way, “So for the Early Church, most of the arguments centered on the nature of God. They were about Christology and Trinitarian theology.”<sup>71</sup> A thousand years later, the debates turned toward “ecclesiology, soteriology, justification, and sanctification.”<sup>72</sup> Today’s debates, Anderson observed, center on anthropology. He writes, “The reason so many of our enemies

---

<sup>70</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), AE 45:44.

<sup>71</sup> Ryan Anderson, “Convention Speech: Special Presentation” (speech, 66th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, July 11, 2016), *Upon This Rock*, <https://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=4283>, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, “Convention Speech,” 7.

hate the church right now is because of three anthropological truths articulated in the very first pages of the Bible: that we are made in the image and likeness of God, that we're created male and female, and that male and female are created for each other."<sup>73</sup> It would be hard to gainsay Anderson's assessment. These basic truths are already proving to be the basis for positive ecumenical endeavors. The wonderful magazine *Touchstone* springs to mind. Within the great tradition, faithful Christians have much in common and much at stake. As we stand with fellow Christians, the bonds of friendship will be strengthened and goodwill fostered. What, then, we might ask, does the sixteenth century have to offer? What can we as Lutherans bring to the table, and how might we appropriate the Lutheran tradition for the present crisis?

We do well to form alliances with Catholic and Evangelical friends as we rediscover and appropriate the teachings of the early church fathers and rediscover what it is to be truly human. But this may also be an opportunity to take the matter further. As Lutherans, we recognize that the New Gnosticism is an attack not only on God as creator, but also on Christ who has entered our creation. Just as abortion is an assault on the Christ child, gay marriage is an attack against the bridegroom, and the gender wars take aim at the heavenly Father's Son. The desire to make wrong right is yet another way in which man tries to justify himself before a God he may claim does not even exist. In other words, our fight is not against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12).

Therefore, if we are to speak about man in his essence, we will speak about Christ, the man who defines our humanity. If we are to speak about Adam and his relationship to Eve, this will lead us to a discussion of Christ, the second and last Adam, and then to Christ and his relationship to the church.

As we draw from the Reformation tradition, we will focus on Jesus and work to demonstrate that creation is not, in fact, far from salvation, nor is the Second Article far removed from the First. In fact, we might wish, operationally, to put such distinctions to rest. Heresy has a way of sifting and strengthening. In facing the present challenges, we may well come to appreciate more fully that Genesis is not far from Revelation and is, in truth, a revelation in itself. Nor is Genesis far from the gospels, which are, in fact, a new Genesis.

Within Catholic circles, the question of humanity is often treated within a larger framework of Judeo-Christian values or the preservation of the common Western tradition, as can be seen splendidly in the work of Robert George.<sup>74</sup> Questions

---

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, "Convention Speech," 7.

<sup>74</sup> Robert P. George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

of marriage are rightly addressed within the realm of natural law. What is missing from that debate is the christological spark.

Likewise, within our own circles, many have shied away from the controversy, thinking that such topics as male and female, marriage and family, sex and gender, while important, are nevertheless peripheral to the gospel enterprise. We must recognize that our fidelity as a church is that of bride to a bridegroom. What may be lacking is a more holistic understanding of our humanity, a recognition that Genesis is gospel, and the gospel is a new Genesis. When we understand Adam and Eve, we have a picture of Christ and the church, and to undermine the one is to destroy the other. Indeed, marriage is central to the biblical message from beginning to end, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, centered on the Gospels themselves. All belong together, and when one string is pulled, the entire enterprise becomes unraveled.

Indeed, as Luther's children, we marvel that the reformer's turning point came in the reading of Romans 1:16–17. "There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith," marveled Luther.<sup>75</sup> This was Luther's gate to paradise. But as we read these verses, we move to Romans 1:18–32, where we see the paradise that was lost in idolatry and sexual fallenness, and then to Romans 5:12–21, where we meet the new Adam who will carry his bride across paradise's threshold. Even as we read Galatians, Paul's great epistle on justification, we see Christ has not only redeemed us (Gal 3:13), but he has also brought us a new creation (Gal 6:15).

### X. Christ, Our Bridegroom

Given our present context, it is worth noting how intricately the stories of creation and redemption come together in Christ, the bridegroom. Marriage marks the beginning of creation and its heavenly destination, the beginning of the biblical story and its end.

In the Old Testament narrative, Adam is the groom, Eve the bride. We are all children of this one relationship, fractured by sin. With the choosing of Abraham, the figure of Adam began to fade into the background, as the universal became hidden in the particular. Hope centered on Abraham's seed, on Israel and the new exodus. Yet, the figures of the bride and groom were not entirely forgotten.

---

<sup>75</sup> *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings* (1545), AE 34:337. For a classic retelling of the story, see Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), especially 45–51.

The Song of Songs speaks of a more perfect conjugal love, a delightful groom and a delighted bride inhabiting a garden paradise.<sup>76</sup> Isaiah speaks of salvation, saying, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa 62:5). Even in the sorrow of bridal infidelity (Jer 2), the Lord looks forward to a new covenant that will restore true marital bliss (Jer 31:31–33).

The New Testament depicts the blossoming of this love. Drawing and building on Genesis, Paul writes, “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:31–32). This passage is familiar, but profound. Paul here claims that marriage itself, as it is written in creation, is a proclamation of Christ’s gospel love for his bride, the church. For Paul, Adam was “a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14), even as Christ is “the last Adam . . . a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). This Adamic imagery reminds us that the gospel is written into creation itself, even as marriage is an icon of the eternal bliss.

This marital imagery finds its consummation in the book of Revelation, where paradise is restored in the marriage feast of the Lamb. The heavenly multitude cries out, “‘Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’ ” (Rev 19:7–9). Apart from our faithful teaching of marriage, this imagery loses all meaning, leaving us with neither foundation nor hope.

### XI. The Gospels as New Genesis

The best teacher of marriage is our Lord himself. Drawing on Genesis, he defines marriage by our creation as male and female (Mark 10:6–9). As he teaches on marriage, so also he speaks about protecting and caring for children (Mark 9:42–50; 10:13–16).

But as we confront the New Gnosticism, we must take this one step further. We must show that the God of creation and the God of the gospel are one and the same. This new creation in no way nullifies the old creation but brings it to its climax. As such, creation and redemption are organically related. The First Article bleeds into the Second, even as the Second Article is to the First like branches to the vine.

---

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the garden paradise, see Christopher Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 263–273.

As such, the Gospels are not only the stories of our redemption but also witnesses to the new creation.

Luther famously loved the Gospel of John, which he considered “the one fine, true, and chief Gospel, far to be preferred over the other three, and placed high above them.”<sup>77</sup> The gospel of John begins by strongly echoing Genesis, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John’s Gospel then takes us to Christ’s first sign, performed at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12). In turning water into wine, Christ not only endorses natural marriage but also introduces himself as the ultimate bridegroom, the one who alone can bring joy and satisfaction as both the planter of the vineyard and the vine himself. John the Baptist says of Christ, “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom,” and then calls himself the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29). In the story of the woman at the well, John draws on Old Testament bridal imagery to demonstrate that Jesus has come to be the Groom, not only for Israel, but also for the Samaritans, and then for the nations.<sup>78</sup> This theme comes to culmination in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is a return to Eden: “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb” (John 19:41). Here, Jesus becomes like a seed planted in the ground (John 12:24). When Jesus arises from the ground, Mary Magdalene assumes him to be the gardener (John 20:15), and, indeed, as the true Adam, he is God’s true Son who brings the bride of the church, now symbolized by Mary Magdalene, back into paradise. This is a fitting end for a gospel that begins, “In the beginning,” and as such, it mirrors the theology of Revelation with its return to and renewal of paradise.

But we should not follow Luther in underestimating the synoptic witness. Like the fourth evangelist, Matthew also begins his gospel with a nod toward creation and the words βίβλος γενέσεως, that is, “the book of Genesis.”<sup>79</sup> Herein, Matthew announces in grand fashion that his gospel is also a book of creation. Indeed, what follows is a history of God’s act of procreation in a genealogy, which tells the story of begetting, that leads to the birth of Jesus, which is also called a “Genesis” (Matt 1:18). For Matthew, Jesus is the bridegroom, and his followers are the sons of the bridal chamber, the wedding guests, who feast in his presence (Matt 9:14–15). Matthew compares the kingdom of the heavens to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son (Matt 22:1–14). Again, in the parable of the ten virgins, the kingdom of the heavens is compared to ten virgins who took their lamps to await the coming

<sup>77</sup> Luther, *Preface to the New Testament* (1522), AE 35:362.

<sup>78</sup> See Peter Scaer, “Jesus and the Woman at the Well: Where Mission Meets Worship,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2008): 3–18.

<sup>79</sup> See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 4–54, who argue that the entire Gospel is a type of Genesis.

of the bridegroom (Matt 25:1–13). All of this leads to a climax in which our new generation comes through Baptism, and we are invited into a family in which God is our Father.

Luke likewise links Jesus to Genesis through a genealogy that goes back to Adam (Luke 3:38). Perhaps more strongly than any of the Gospels, he ties the resurrection to the eighth day, the consummation of creation.

## XII. Stories to Tell

When reading the Gospels, Luther famously loved the words of Jesus more than his works, saying, “If I had to do without one or the other—either the works or preaching of Christ—I would rather do without the works than without the preaching. For the works do not help me, but his words give life as he himself says [John 6:63].”<sup>80</sup> But now, more than ever, we must return to the narrative of our salvation, to the unfolding story of a bride and groom that leads to the ultimate consummation of Christ and his church. Our own people have been led astray not simply by the doctrines of our culture, but also by the stories our culture tells, by the television shows, movies, and books. In such an environment, we do well to heed the words of Jesus as he offers his Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me.” If there is anything our culture needs right now, it is remembrance. Our society is like the man in the book of James who looks in the mirror but forgets what he looks like (Jas 1:23–24).

Surely, the roots of our problem can be traced back to no-fault divorce, and even further to the pill, and further still to the fall of sin. But such an observation hardly captures the breathtaking rapidity of our fall.

At stake is our very identity. Our identity as a church, our identity as the bride of Christ, and our identity as men and women created in the image of God. How is it possible that we have so soon forgotten? Perhaps we have not so much forgotten our past as we have neglected to pass on the story of our salvation, the drama of our existence in Christ. Maybe after five hundred years, after two thousand years, the past has something to teach us after all. For, when we tell the story of Luther, or of Adam, or the second Adam, we are telling our own story as well.

---

<sup>80</sup> Luther, *Preface to the New Testament* (1522), AE 35:362.