

FOREWORD

As this brief work on marriage goes to press, the general acceptance of the uniqueness and desirability of a state-established and protected life-long union between a man and a woman seems to be in significant decline. Cohabitation apparently has become the norm as reportedly almost 75 percent of women under the age of thirty in the United States have lived with a partner outside of marriage. The average age of men and women who do get married continues to climb, in 2013 the numbers being 26.5 years for women and 28.5 for men—an all time high. The divorce rate, on the other hand, is down from an all time high of 50% in the 1980's but is still over 40%. Additionally, homosexual marriage continues to gain greater acceptance both socially and legally. The state of Minnesota, for example, recently joined 13 other states in opening marriage to homosexuals while the Supreme Court of the United States has struck down a California law prohibiting same-sex marriages. In Europe, 22 of 51 countries currently recognize some sort of same-sex partnership.

What has happened to marriage? Perhaps the simplest answer is that people have forgotten, or have never learned, what marriage truly is. Growing up in an age of cohabitation, divorce and homosexuality, how could they be expected to know? Somewhat surprisingly, in Martin

Luther's day—the 16th century—the people of Europe found themselves struggling with the concept of marriage as well. At that time, the ideal life was seen to be a life without any type of sexual relations at all. The celibate life of the monk and the nun was lauded, while marriage was viewed as a life of sinful desire and lust. And back then, as now, children were an issue, with their birth not being heralded as good news, but simply as an outcome, a necessity of the marital life, and presenting another mouth to feed. Surprisingly, laws of inheritance and other social pressures presented cohabitation as a viable and desirable option then as now.

So the text of this work. It is a compilation of two sermons which Luther preached on marriage, one on Hebrews 13:4 and the other on Ephesians 5:22-33. That first appeared together as a single publication in 1536. Here Luther lays down three basic principles for a good and happy marriage. The first is to recognize that marriage is not created by man, but by God. A second is that marriage is meant for man's benefit, for his comfort and well-being. The third: Marriage takes place within the greater context of another marriage, that is, the marriage of Christ and his Church. The Afterword contains a detailed account of the publication history of this work, along with the social and theological context in which it should be understood.

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support toward its printing. Roxanne Johnson (formerly Nelson) once again did a wonderful job on the cover, and here special mention must also be given to Scott Krieger. He has worked tirelessly on all of the books of this series, selflessly embracing the tedium of obscurities such as call-out box placement and header and footer format. Without his efforts, these works would have never made it to press, nor would the soon-to-be released electronic editions ever have been made available! For his continuing labors I am nothing but grateful and express my most humble and heartfelt thanks!

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