

Then Comes Marriage...

by Peter Scaer

Marriage is a blessing, a gift from the God who created us. In holy matrimony, bride and groom vow to remain faithful “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.”

Marriage promises companionship and pleasure, to be sure. But the meaning of marriage goes deeper than that. Our Lord has fearfully and wonderfully made us. Each of us has a cardiovascular system, a digestive system, a circulatory system, all whole and fully integrated. Only one system is not fully complete in each of us — the reproductive system. When it comes to sex, we are complementary creatures. Two

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become one, and together husband and wife can do what they could never accomplish alone.

Natural marriage thus naturally leads to children. Now, we recognize that not every couple is physically able to bear children. Those who marry late in life may be past their childbearing years. For some, infertility can be a pressing and heartbreaking issue. Nevertheless, marriage is essentially oriented toward children, and because it is, we associate with it values of permanence and life-long fidelity. And with marriage and children, God willing, come the blessings of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins — a wonderful web of support and love.



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In marriage, a husband and wife become an image of Christ and the Church. They are also an extension of God’s work of creation. Indeed, there is no such thing as human *reproduction*. We are not factory parts, nor are we made on an assembly line. Each and every one of us comes from the creative hand of a God who loves us and uses *procreation* to continue His good creation. The family that arises from a procreative marriage takes us even further into the very mystery of the Triune God, the God of love.

But a strange thing has happened in our culture today. We have forgotten what marriage is and what it means for us. We see this clearly in the many common distortions of God’s perfect plan — gay marriage, serial marriage, pornography, polyamory, single-parent families and the like. But even more, we see it in the redefinition of marriage as simply our best and most important relationship, an intense and emotional bond that includes and encompasses sexual pleasure. Even Christians have lost sight of marriage’s intrinsic link to children — and as that link fades to nothingness, we can’t help but notice that the less children play a part in it, the less marriage really matters.

Perhaps, in a nation where a million children are aborted each year, this should not be surprising. But the roots of this problem go back further than *Roe v. Wade*. Before abortion became the law of the land, Margaret Sanger and those like her pushed a radical birth control agenda, and they did so under the banner of sexual liberation. In her book *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger promised that “through sex, mankind may attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, which will light up the path to paradise.” For Sanger, large families were the ultimate taboo. She wrote, “The most serious evil of our times is that of encouraging the bringing into the world of large families.”

As we look around, we see that our world has been taken captive by Sanger’s vision. Increasingly, young couples are putting off having children, with some even choosing not to have children at all. Small families are the norm. Birth control and abortion have taken on an almost sacred aura for those who rely on them. We can see



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clearly, too, the effects of these shifts in our churches, in graying populations and smaller Sunday schools.

As a church, we obviously need to do some deep thinking on the issue, but we might start simply by reaffirming simple, self-evident truths: that children are a gift from God, and that marriage was designed so that a child might have a mother and father, bonded together for life. Our failure to remember this may be why so many of us seem to have so little hope, so little thought for the future.

Perhaps we Lutherans would do well to recover the ancient Hebrew wedding toast, “L’Chaim,” “To life!” — that is, “To new life!” Marriage is about so much more than securing either our financial future or our present happiness. Indeed, children are a gift worth more than all the money and experiences that the world claims will give our lives meaning. As Mother Theresa famously quipped, “Too many children? That’s like saying there are too many flowers.” Children remind us of God’s grace, and they call us to look to the future. A small child can light up a room; a group of children can bring joy to a congregation. No wonder our Lord loved to hold them in His arms.

All of this must certainly be said with sensitivity, and with special care for the barren, for the widow and the orphan. Such is life in a fallen world. But we are to be pitied if we do not open ourselves up to the love of marriage as God intended, and if we do not rejoice with all our heart to know that a child is born.

Is there anything sweeter than the Baptism of an infant? For in those waters, we see hope, we embrace the future, and we taste of eternity. We recognize that even as we care for our children, our Heavenly Father cares for us all. We know what makes life worth living, and we celebrate the goodness of the God who created us male and female and gives to us, through the marriage relationship, the good gift of children. In a dark world, this is a message of hope, a life-affirming faith, which stands in awe and wonder at the birth of the Christ child and gives thanks that in Him, through His death and resurrection, our lives — and those of our children — will have no end. **LW**