

09.13 Martin Luther. The Estate of Marriage, 1522. (Translated by Walther I. Brandt).

How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! 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. The shameful confusion wrought by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and the 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. But timidity is no help in an emergency; I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly. This sermon is divided into three parts.

Part One

In the first part we shall consider which persons may enter into marriage with one another. In order to proceed aright let us direct our attention to Genesis 1 [:27], "So God created man... male and female he created them." From this passage we may be assured that God divided mankind into two classes, namely, male and female, or a he and a she. This was so pleasing to him that he himself called it a good creation [Gen. 1:81]. Therefore, each one of us must have the kind of body God has created for us. 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 a man and you a woman. Moreover, he wills to have his excellent handiwork honoured as his divine creation, and not despised. The man is not to despise or scoff at the woman or her body, nor the woman the man. But each should honour the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well-pleasing unto God himself.

In the second place, after God had made man and woman he blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply" [Gen. 1:28]. From this passage we may be assured that man and woman should and must come together in order to multiply. Now this [ordinance] is just as inflexible as the first, and no more to be despised and made fun of than the other, since God gives it his blessing and does something over and above the act of creation. Hence, as it is not within my power not to be a man, so it is not my prerogative to be without a woman. Again, as it is not in your power not to be a woman, so it is not your prerogative to be without a man. For it is not a matter of free choice or decision but a natural and necessary thing, that whatever is a man must have a woman and whatever is a woman must have a man.

For this word which God speaks, "Be fruitful and multiply," is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*werck*] which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather, it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or a woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And wherever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice.

In the third place, from this ordinance of creation God has himself exempted three categories of men, saying in Matthew 19 [:12], "There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Apart from these three groups, let no man presume to be without a spouse. And whoever does not fall within one of these three categories should not consider anything except the estate of marriage. Otherwise it is simply impossible for you to remain righteous. For the Word of God which created you and said, "Be fruitful and multiply," abides and rules within you; you can by no means ignore it, or you will be bound to commit heinous sins without end.

Don't let yourself be fooled on this score, even if you should make ten oaths, vows, covenants, and adamantine or ironclad pledges. For as you cannot solemnly promise that you will not be a man or a woman (and if you should make such a promise it would be foolishness and of no avail since you cannot make yourself something other than what you are), so you cannot promise that you will not produce seed or multiply, unless you belong to one of the three categories mentioned above. And should you make such a promise, it too would be foolishness and of no avail, for to produce seed and to multiply is a matter of God's ordinance [*geschöpfe*], not your power.

From this you can now see the extent of the validity of all cloister vows. No vow of any youth or maiden is valid before God, except that of a person in one of the three categories which God alone has himself excepted. Therefore, priests, monks, and nuns are duty-bound to forsake their vows whenever they find that God's ordinance to produce seed and to multiply is powerful and strong within them. They have no power by any authority, law, command, or vow to hinder this which God has created within them. If they do hinder it, however, you may be sure that they will not remain pure but inevitably besmirch themselves with secret sins or fornication. For they are simply incapable of resisting the word and ordinance of God within them. Matters will take their course as God has ordained.

As to the first category, which Christ calls "eunuchs who have been so from birth," these are the ones whom men call impotent, who are by nature not equipped to produce seed and multiply because they are physically frigid or weak or have some other bodily deficiency which makes them unfit for the estate of marriage. Such cases occur among both men and women. These we need not take into account, for God has himself exempted them and so formed them that the blessing of being able to multiply has not come to them. The injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply," does not apply to them; just as when God creates a person crippled or blind, that person is not obligated to walk or see, because he cannot.

I once wrote down some advice concerning such persons for those who hear confession. It related to those cases where a husband or wife comes and wants to learn what he should do: his spouse is unable to fulfil the conjugal duty, yet he cannot get along without it because he finds that God's ordinance to multiply is still in force within him. Here they have accused me of teaching that when a husband is unable to satisfy his wife's sexual desire she should run to somebody else. Let the topsy-turvy liars spread their lies. The words of Christ and his apostles were turned upside down; should they not also turn my words topsy-turvy? To whose detriment it will be they shall surely find out.

What I said was this: if a woman who is fit for marriage has a husband who is not, and she is unable openly to take unto herself another and unwilling, too, to do anything dishonourable since the pope in such a case demands without cause abundant testimony and evidence, she should say to her husband, "Look, my dear husband, you are unable to fulfil your conjugal duty toward me; you have cheated me out of my maidenhood and even imperilled my honour and my soul's salvation; in the sight of God there is no real marriage between us. Grant me the privilege of contracting a secret marriage with your brother or closest relative, and you retain the title of husband so that your property will not fall to strangers. Consent to being betrayed voluntarily by me, as you have betrayed me without my consent".

I stated further that the husband is obligated to consent to such an arrangement and thus to provide for her the conjugal duty and children, and that if he refuses to do so she should secretly flee from him to some other country and there contract a marriage. I gave this advice at a time when I was still timid. However, I should like now to give sounder advice in the matter, and take a firmer grip on the wool of a man who thus makes a fool of his wife. The same principle would apply if the circumstances were reversed, although this happens less frequently in the case of wives than of husbands. It will not do to lead one's fellow-man around by the nose so wantonly in matters of such great import involving his body, goods, honour, and salvation. He has to be told to make it right.

The second category, those who Christ says "'I have been made eunuchs by men" [Matt. 19:12], the castrates, are an unhappy lot, for though they are not equipped for marriage, they are nevertheless not free from evil desire'. They seek the company of women more than before and are quite effeminate. It is with them as the proverb says, "He who cannot sing always insists upon singing". Thus, they are plagued with a desire for women, but are unable to consummate their desire. Let us pass them by also; for they too are set apart from the natural ordinance to be fruitful and multiply, though only by an act of violence.

The third category consists of those spiritually rich and exalted persons, bridled by the grace of God, who are equipped for marriage by nature and physical capacity and nevertheless voluntarily remain celibate. These put it this way, "I could marry if I wish, I am capable of it But it does not attract me. I would rather work on the kingdom of heaven, i.e., the gospel, and beget spiritual children." Such persons are rare, not one in a thousand, for they are a special miracle of God. No one should venture on such a life unless he be especially called by God, like Jeremiah [16:2], or unless he finds God's grace to be so powerful within him that the divine injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply," has no place in him.

Beyond these three categories, however, the devil working through men has been smarter than God, and found more people whom he has withdrawn from the divine and natural ordinance, namely, those who are enmeshed in a spiderweb of human commands and vows and are then locked up behind a mass of iron bolts and bars. This is a fourth way of resisting nature so that, contrary to God's implanted ordinance and disposition, it does not produce seed and multiply, as if it were within our power and discretion to possess virginity as we do shoes and clothing! If men are really able to resist God's word and creation with iron bars and bolts, I should hope that we would also set up iron bars so thick and massive that women would turn into men or people into sticks and stones. It is the devil who thus perpetrates his monkey-tricks on the poor creature, and so gives vent to his wrath.

In the fourth place, let us now consider which persons may enter into marriage with one another, so that you may see it is not my pleasure or desire that a marriage be broken and husband and wife separated. The pope in his canon law has thought up eighteen distinct reasons for preventing or dissolving a marriage, nearly all of which I reject and condemn. Indeed, the pope himself does not adhere to them so strictly or firmly but what one can rescind any of them with gold and silver. Actually, they were only invented in order to be a net for gold and a noose for the soul, II Peter 2 [:14]. In order to expose their folly we will take a look at all eighteen of them in turn.

The first impediment is blood relationship. Here they have forbidden marriage up to the third and fourth degrees of consanguinity. If in this situation you have no money, then even though God freely permits it you must nevertheless not take in marriage your female relative within the third and fourth degrees, or you must put her away if you have already married her. But if you have the money, such a marriage is permitted. Those hucksters offer for sale women who never have been their own. So that you can defend yourself against this tyranny, I will now list for you the persons whom God has forbidden, Leviticus 18 [:6-13], namely, my mother, my stepmother; my sister, my stepsister; my child's daughter or stepdaughter; my father's sister; my mother's sister. I am forbidden to marry any of these persons.

From this it follows that first cousins may contract a godly and Christian marriage, and that I may marry my stepmother's sister, my father's stepsister, or my mother's stepsister. Further, I may marry the daughter of my brother or sister, just as Abraham married Sarah. None of these persons is forbidden by God, for God does not calculate according to degrees, as the jurists do, but enumerates directly specific persons. Otherwise, since my father's sister and my brother's daughter are related to me in the same degree, I would have to say either that I cannot marry my brother's daughter or that I may also marry my father's sister. Now God has forbidden my father's sister, but he has not forbidden my brother's daughter,

although both are related to me in the same degree. We also find in Scripture that with respect to various stepsisters there were not such strict prohibitions. For Tamar, Absalom's sister, thought she could have married her step-brother Amnon, II Samuel 13 [:13].

The second impediment is affinity or relationship through marriage. Here too they have set up four degrees, so that after my wife's death I may not marry into her blood relationship, where my marriage extends up to the third and fourth degrees, unless money comes to my rescue! But God has forbidden only these persons, namely, my father's brother's wife; my son's wife; my brother's wife; my stepdaughter; the child of my stepson or stepdaughter; my wife's sister while my wife is yet alive [Lev. 18:14-18]. I may not marry any of these persons; but I may marry any others, and without putting up any money for the privilege. For example, may marry the sister of my deceased wife or fiancée; the daughter of my wife's brother; the daughter of my wife's cousin; and any of my wife's nieces, aunts, or cousins. In the Old Testament, if a brother died without leaving an heir, his widow was required to marry his closest relative in order to provide her deceased husband with an heir [Deut 25:5-9]. This is no longer commanded, but neither is it forbidden.

The third impediment is spiritual relationship. If I sponsor a girl at baptism or confirmation, then neither I nor my son may marry her, or her mother, or her sister, unless an appropriate and substantial sum of money is forthcoming! This is nothing but pure farce and foolishness, concocted for the sake of money and to befuddle consciences. Just tell me this: isn't it a greater thing for me to be baptised myself than merely to act as sponsor to another? Then I must be forbidden to marry any Christian woman, since all baptised women are the spiritual sisters of all baptised men by virtue of their common baptism, sacrament, faith, Spirit, Lord, God, and eternal heritage [Eph. 4:4-6].

Why does not the pope also forbid a man to retain his wife if he teaches her the gospel? For whoever teaches another becomes that person's spiritual father. St. Paul boasts in I Corinthians 4 [:15] that he is the father of all of them, saying, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." According to this he could not have taken a wife in Corinth; neither could any apostle in the whole world have taken a wife from among those whom he taught and baptised.

So away with this foolishness; take as your spouse whomsoever you please, whether it be godparent, godchild, or the daughter or sister of a sponsor, or whoever it may be, and disregard these artificial, money-seeking impediments. If you are not prevented from marrying a girl by the fact that she is a Christian, then do not let yourself be prevented by the fact that you baptised her, taught her, or acted as her sponsor. In particular, avoid that monkey business, confirmation, which is really a fanciful deception. I would permit confirmation as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue. They mock our God when they say that it is one of God's sacraments, for it is a purely human contrivance.

The fourth impediment is legal kinship; that is, when an unrelated child is adopted as son or daughter it may not later marry a child born of its adoptive parents, that is, one who is by law its own brother or sister. This is another worthless human invention. Therefore, if you so desire, go ahead and marry anyway. In the sight of God this adopted person is neither your mother nor your sister, since there is no blood relationship. She does work in the kitchen, however, and supplements the income; this is why she has been placed on the forbidden list!

The fifth impediment is unbelief; that is, I may not marry a Turk, a Jew, or a heretic. I marvel that the blasphemous tyrants are not in their hearts ashamed to place themselves in such direct contradiction to the clear text of Paul in I Corinthians 7 [:12-13], where he says, "If a heathen wife or husband consents to live with a Christian spouse, the Christian should not get a divorce." And St. Peter, in I Peter 3 [:1], says that Christian wives should behave so well that they thereby convert their non-Christian husbands;

as did Monica, the mother of St. Augustine.

Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, speak to, and deal with a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the precepts of those fools who forbid it. You will find plenty of Christians, and indeed the greater part of them, who are worse in their secret unbelief than any Jew, heathen, Turk, or heretic. A heathen is just as much a man or a woman-God's good creation-as St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Lucy, not to speak of a slack and spurious Christian.

The sixth impediment is crime. They are not in agreement as to how many instances of this impediment they should devise. However, there are actually these three: if someone lies with a girl, he may not thereafter marry her sister or her aunt, niece, or cousin; again, whoever commits adultery with a woman may not marry her after her husband's death; again, if a wife (or husband) should murder her spouse for love of another, she may not subsequently marry the loved one. Here it rains fools upon fools. Don't you believe them, and don't be taken in by them; they are under the devil's whip. Sins and crimes should be punished, but with other penalties, not by forbidding marriage. Therefore, no sin or crime is an impediment to marriage. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and had her husband killed besides. He was guilty of both crimes; still he took her to wife and begot King Solomon by her [II Samuel 11], and without giving any money to the pope!

I must pursue this subject a bit further. These wise guys posit the hypothetical case of a man who sins with his wife's mother or sister. Had this happened before the marriage it would have been a crime which would prevent and break up the proposed marriage. Since it happened subsequent to the marriage, however, for the sake of the wife, who is innocent in the matter, the marriage may not be dissolved. Nevertheless, the husband's punishment is to be that he shall lie with his wife but have no power to demand of her the conjugal duty. See what the devil through his fools does with the estate of marriage! He puts husband and wife together, and then says, "Be neither man nor woman." As well put fire and straw together and bid them not to burn. If one were to impose upon the pope a command one-tenth as hard as this, how he would rage and storm, and howl about unlawful authority! Away with the big fools. You just let marriage remain free, as God instituted it. Punish sins and crimes with other penalties, not through marriage and fresh sins.

The seventh impediment they call public decorum, respectability. For example, if my fiancée should die before we consummate the marriage, I may not marry any relative of hers up to the fourth degree, since the pope thinks and obviously dreams that it is decent and respectable for me to refrain from so doing, unless I put up the money, in which case the impediment of public decorum vanishes. Now you have heard a moment ago that after my wife's death I may marry her sister or any of her relatives except for her mother and her daughter. You stick to this, and let the fools go their way.

The eighth impediment is a solemn vow, for example where someone has taken the vow of chastity, either in or out of the cloister. Here I offer this advice: if you would like to take a wise vow, then vow not to bite off your own nose; you can keep that vow. If you have already taken the monastic vow, however, then, as you have just heard, you should yourself consider whether you belong in those three categories which God has singled out. If you do not feel that you belong there, then let the vows and the cloister go. Renew your natural companionships without delay and get married, for your vow is contrary to God and has no validity, and say, "I have promised that which I do not have and which is not mine."

The ninth impediment is error, as if I had been wed to Catherine but Barbara lay down with me, as happened to Jacob with Leah and Rachel [Gen. 29:23-25]. One may have such a marriage dissolved and take the other to wife.

The tenth impediment is condition of servitude. When I marry one who is supposed to be free and it turns out later that she is a serf, this marriage too is null and void. However, I hold that if there were Christian love the husband could easily adjust both of these impediments so that no great distress would be occasioned. Furthermore, such cases never occur today, or only rarely, and both might well be combined in one category: error.

The eleventh impediment is holy orders, namely, that the tonsure and sacred oil are so potent that they devour marriage and unsex a man. For this reason a subdeacon, a deacon, and a priest have to forego marriage, although St. Paul commanded that they may and should be married, II Timothy 3 [I Tim. 3:2, 12], Titus 1 [:6]. But I have elsewhere written so much about this, that there is no need to repeat it here. Their folly has been sufficiently exposed; how much help this impediment has been to those in holy orders is obvious to all.

The twelfth impediment is coercion, that is, when I have to take Grete to be my wife and am coerced into it either by parents or by governmental authority. That is to be sure no marriage in the sight of God. However, such a person should not admit the coercion and leave the country on account of it, thus betraying the girl or making a fool of her, for you are not excused by the fact that you were coerced into it. You should not allow yourself to be coerced into injuring your neighbour but should yield your life rather than act contrary to love. You would not want anybody to injure you, whether he was acting under coercion or not. For this reason I could not declare safe in the sight of God a man who leaves his wife for such a cause. My dear fellow, if someone should compel you to rob me or kill me, would it therefore be right? Why do you yield to a coercion which compels you to violate God's commandment and harm your neighbour? I would freely absolve the girl however, for, as we will hear later, you would be leaving her through no fault of her own.

The thirteenth impediment is betrothal, that is, if I am engaged to one girl but then take another to wife. This is a widespread and common practice in which many different solutions have also been attempted. In the first place, if such an engagement occurs without the knowledge and consent of the father and mother, or of the guardians, then let the (fiancée's) father decide which girl is to remain as the wife. If she is betrayed it is her own fault, for she should know that a child is supposed to be subordinate and obedient to its father, and not become engaged without his knowledge. In this way, obedience to parental authority will put a stop to all these secret engagements which occasion such great unhappiness. where this course is not followed, however, I am of the opinion that the man should stick to the first girl. For having given himself to her he no longer belongs to himself. He was therefore incapable of promising to the second girl something that already belonged to the first and was not his own.

If he does so nonetheless and carries on to the point where he begets children by her, then he should stick with her. For she too has been betrayed, and would suffer even greater injury than the first girl were he to leave her. He has therefore sinned against them both. The first girl; however, is able to recover from the injury done her because she is yet without children. She should therefore out of love yield to the second girl and marry someone else; she is free from the man because he jilted her and gave himself to another. The man himself though should be made to suffer punishment and make amends to the first girl, for what he gave away really belonged to her.

The fourteenth impediment is the one touched on already, when a husband or wife is unfit for marriage. Among these eighteen impediments this one is the only sound reason for dissolving a marriage. Yet it is hedged about by so many laws that it is difficult to accomplish with the ecclesiastical tyrants.

There are still four more impediments, such as Episcopal prohibition, restricted times, custom, and defective eyesight and hearing. It is needless to discuss them here. It is a dirty rotten business that a bishop should forbid me a wife or specify the times when I may marry, or that a blind and dumb person

should not be allowed to enter into wedlock. So much then for this foolishness at present in the first part.

Part Two

In the second part, we shall consider which persons may be divorced. I know of three grounds for divorce. The first, which has just been mentioned and was discussed above, is the situation in which the husband or wife is not equipped for marriage because of bodily or natural deficiencies of any sort. Of this enough has already been said.

The second ground is adultery. The popes have kept silent about this; therefore we must hear Christ, Matthew 19 [:3-9]. when the Jews asked him whether a husband might divorce his wife for any reason, he answered, "'Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.' They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'"

Here you see that in the case of adultery Christ permits the divorce of husband and wife, so that the innocent person may remarry. For in saying that he commits adultery who marries another after divorcing his wife, "except for unchastity," Christ is making it quite clear that he who divorces his wife on account of unchastity and then marries another does not commit adultery.

The Jews, however, were divorcing their wives for all kinds of reasons whenever they saw fit, even though no unchastity was involved. That covers so much ground that they themselves thought it was going too far. They therefore inquired of Christ whether it was right; they were tempting him to see what he would say concerning the law of Moses.

Now in the law of Moses God established two types of governments; he gave two types of commandments. Some are spiritual, teaching righteousness in the sight of God, such as love and obedience; people who obeyed these commandments did not thrust away their wives and never made use of certificates of divorce, but tolerated and endured their wives' conduct. Others are worldly, however, drawn up for the sake of those who do not live up to the spiritual commandments, in order to place a limit upon their misbehaviour and prevent them from doing worse and acting wholly on the basis of their own maliciousness. Accordingly, he commanded them, if they could not endure their wives, that they should not put them to death or harm them too severely, but rather dismiss them with a certificate of divorce. This law, therefore, does not apply to Christians, who are supposed to live in the spiritual government. In the case of some who live with their wives in an un-Christian fashion, however, it would still be a good thing to permit them to use this law, just so they are no longer regarded as Christians, which after all they really are not.

Thus it is that on the grounds of adultery one person may leave the other, as Solomon also says in Proverbs 18, "He that keepeth an adulteress is a fool". We have an example of this in Joseph too. In Matthew 1 [:19] the gospel writer praises him as just because he did not put his wife to shame when he found that she was with child, but was minded to divorce her quietly. By this we are told plainly enough that it is praiseworthy to divorce an adulterous wife. If the adultery is clandestine, of course, the husband has the right to follow either of two courses. First, he may rebuke his wife privately and in a brotherly fashion, and keep her if she will mend her ways. Second, he may divorce her, as Joseph wished to do. The same principle applies in the case of a wife with an adulterous husband. These two types of discipline are both Christian and laudable.

But a public divorce, whereby one [the innocent party] is enabled to remarry, must take place through the investigation and decision of the civil authority so that the adultery may be manifest to all - or, if the civil authority refuses to act, with the knowledge of the congregation, again in order that it may not be left to each one to allege anything he pleases as a ground for divorce.

You may ask: What is to become of the other [the guilty party] if he too is perhaps unable to lead a chaste life? Answer: It was for this reason that God commanded in the law [Deut. 22: 22-24] that adulterers be stoned, that they might not have to face this question. The temporal sword and government should therefore still put adulterers to death, for whoever commits adultery has in fact himself already departed and is considered as one dead. Therefore, the other [the innocent party] may remarry just as though his spouse had died, if it is his intention to insist on his rights and not show mercy to the guilty party. Where the government is negligent and lax, however, and fails to inflict the death penalty, the adulterer may betake himself to a far country and there remarry if he is unable to remain continent. But it would be better to put him to death, lest a bad example be set.

Some may find fault with this solution and contend that thereby license and opportunity is afforded all wicked husbands and wives to desert their spouses and remarry in a foreign country. Answer: Can I help it? The blame rests with the government. Why do they not put adulterers to death? Then I would not need to give such advice. Between two evils one is always the lesser, in this case allowing the adulterer to remarry in a distant land in order to avoid fornication. And I think he would be safer also in the sight of God, because he has been allowed to live and yet is unable to remain continent. If others also, however, following this example desert their spouses, let them go. They have no excuse such as the adulterer has, for they are neither driven nor compelled. God and their own conscience will catch up to them in due time. Who can prevent all wickedness?

Where the government fails to inflict the death penalty and the one spouse wishes to retain the other, the guilty one should still in Christian fashion be publicly rebuked and caused to make amends according to the gospel, after the manner provided for the rebuking of all other manifest sins, Matthew 18 [:15-17]. For there are no more than these three forms of discipline on earth among men: private and brotherly, in public before the congregation according to the gospel, and that inflicted by the civil government.

The third case for divorce is that in which one of the parties deprives and avoids the other, refusing to fulfil the conjugal duty or to live with the other person. For example, one finds many a stubborn wife like that who will not give in, and who cares not a whit whether her husband falls into the sin of unchastity ten times over. Here it is time for the husband to say, "If you will not, another will; the maid will come if the wife will not." Only first the husband should admonish and warn his wife two or three times, and let the situation be known to others so that her stubbornness becomes a matter of common knowledge and is rebuked before the congregation. If she still refuses, get rid of her; take an Esther and let Vashti go, as King Ahasuerus did [Esther 1:1 :17].

Here you should be guided by the words of St. Paul, I Corinthians 7 [:4-5], "The husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does; likewise the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does. Do not deprive each other, except by agreement," etc. Notice that St. Paul forbids either party to deprive the other, for by the marriage vow each submits his body to the other in conjugal duty. When one resists the other and refuses the conjugal duty she is robbing the other of the body she had bestowed upon him. This is really contrary to marriage, and dissolves the marriage. For this reason the civil government must compel the wife, or put her to death. If the government fails to act, the husband must reason that his wife has been stolen away and slain by robbers; he must seek another. We would certainly have to accept it if someone's life were taken from him. Why then should we not also accept it if a wife steals herself away from her husband, or is stolen away by others?

In addition to these three grounds for divorce there is one more which would justify the sundering of husband and wife, but only in such a way that they must both refrain from remarrying or else become reconciled. This is the case where husband and wife cannot get along together for some reason other than the matter of the conjugal duty. St. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 7 [:10-11], "Not I but the Lord gives charge to the married that the wife should not separate from her husband. But if she does, let her remain single, or else be reconciled to her husband. Likewise, the husband should not divorce his wife." Solomon complains much in the Proverbs about such wives, and says he has found a woman more bitter than death [Eccles. 7:26]. One may also find a rude, brutal, and unbearable husband.

Now if one of the parties were endowed with Christian fortitude and could endure the other's ill behaviour, that would doubtless be a wonderfully blessed cross and a right way to heaven. For an evil spouse, in a manner of speaking, fulfils the devil's function and sweeps clean him who is able to recognise and bear it. If he cannot, however, let him divorce her before he does anything worse, and remain unmarried for the rest of his days. Should he try to say that the blame rests not upon him but upon his spouse, and therefore try to marry another, this will not do, for he is under obligation to endure evil, or to be released from his cross only by God, since the conjugal duty has not been denied him. Here the proverb applies, "He who wants a fire must endure the smoke."

What about a situation where one's wife is an invalid and has therefore become incapable of fulfilling the conjugal duty? May he not take another to wife? By no means. Let him serve the Lord in the person of the invalid and await His good pleasure. Consider that in this invalid God has provided your household with a healing balm by which you are to gain heaven. Blessed and twice blessed are you when you recognise such a gift of grace and therefore serve your invalid wife for God's sake.

But you may say: I am unable to remain continent. That is a lie. If you will earnestly serve your invalid wife, recognise that God has placed this burden upon you, and give thanks to him, then you may leave matters in his care. He will surely grant you grace, that you will not have to bear more than you are able. He is far too faithful to deprive you of your wife through illness without at the same time subduing your carnal desire, if you will but faithfully serve your invalid wife.

Part Three.

In the third part, in order that we may say something about the estate of marriage which will be conducive toward the soul's salvation, we shall now consider how to live a Christian and godly life in that estate. I will pass over in silence the matter of the conjugal duty, the granting and the withholding of it, since some filth-preachers have been shameless enough in this matter to rouse our disgust. Some of them designate special times for this, and exclude holy nights and women who are pregnant. I will leave this as St. Paul left it when he said in I Corinthians 7 [:9], "It is better to marry than to burn"; and again [in v.2], "To avoid immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband." Although Christian married folk should not permit themselves to be governed by their bodies in the passion of lust, as Paul writes to the Thessalonians [I Thess. 4:5], nevertheless each one must examine himself so that by his abstention he does not expose himself to the danger of fornication and other sins. Neither should he pay any attention to holy days or work days, or other physical considerations.

What we would speak most of is the fact that the estate of marriage has universally fallen into such awful disrepute. There are many pagan books which treat of nothing but the depravity of womankind and the unhappiness of the estate of marriage, such that some have thought that even if Wisdom itself were a woman one should not marry. A Roman official was once supposed to encourage young men to take wives (because the country was in need of a large population on account of its incessant wars). Among other things he said to them, "My dear young men, if we could only live without women we would be spared a great deal of annoyance; but since we cannot do without them, take to yourselves

wives," etc. He was criticised by some on the ground that his words were ill-considered and would only serve to discourage the young men. Others, on the contrary, said that because Metellus was a brave man he had spoken rightly, for an honourable man should speak the truth without fear or hypocrisy.

So they concluded that woman is a necessary evil, and that no household can be without such an evil. These are the words of blind heathen, who are ignorant of the fact that man and woman are God's creation. They blaspheme his work, as if man and woman just came into being spontaneously! I imagine that if women were to write books they would say exactly the same thing about men. What they have failed to set down in writing, however, they express with their grumbling and complaining whenever they get together.

Every day one encounters parents who forget their former misery because, like the mouse, they have now had their fill. They deter their children from marriage but entice them into priesthood and nunnery, citing the trials and troubles of married life. Thus do they bring their own children home to the devil, as we daily observe; they provide them with ease for the body and hell for the soul.

Since God had to suffer such disdain of his work from the pagans, he therefore also gave them their reward, of which Paul writes in Romans 1 [24-28], and allowed them to fall into immorality and a stream of uncleanness until they henceforth carnally abused not women but boys and dumb beasts. Even their women carnally abused themselves and each other. Because they blasphemed the work of God, he gave them up to a base mind, of which the books of the pagans are full, most shamelessly crammed full.

In order that we may not proceed as blindly, but rather conduct ourselves in a Christian manner, hold fast first of all to this, that man and woman are the work of God. Keep a tight rein on your heart and your lips; do not criticise his work, or call that evil which he himself has called good. He knows better than you yourself what is good and to your benefit, as he says in Genesis 1 [2:18], "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." There you see that he calls the woman good, a helper. If you deem it otherwise, it is certainly your own fault, you neither understand nor believe God's word and work. See, with this statement of God one stops the mouths of all those who criticise and censure marriage.

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, 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 favour from the Lord." What is this good thing and this favour? 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 recognise the estate of marriage is something quite different from merely being married. He who is married but does not recognise 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 recognises 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 recognise 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?

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason (which the pagans followed in trying to be most clever), takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labour at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labour, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight."

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works. This is also how to comfort and encourage a woman in the pangs of childbirth, not by repeating St Margaret legends and other silly old wives' tales but by speaking thus, "Dear Grete, remember that you are a woman, and that this work of God in you is pleasing to him. Trust joyfully in his will, and let him have his way with you. Work with all your might to bring forth the child. Should it mean your death, then depart happily, for you will die in a noble deed and in subservience to God. If you were not a woman you should now wish to be one for the sake of this very work alone, that you might thus gloriously suffer and even die in the performance of God's work and will. For here you have the word of God, who so created you and implanted within you this extremity." Tell me, is not this indeed (as Solomon says [Prov. 18:22]) "to obtain favour from the Lord," even in the midst of such extremity?

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.

St. Cyprian, that great and admirable man and holy martyr, wrote that one should kiss the new-born infant, even before it is baptised, in honour of the hands of God here engaged in a brand new deed. What do you suppose he would have said about a baptised infant? There was a true Christian, who correctly recognised and regarded God's work and creature. Therefore, I say that all nuns and monks who lack faith, and who trust in their own chastity and in their order, are not worthy of rocking a baptised child or

preparing its pap, even if it were the child of a harlot. This is because their order and manner of life has no word of God as its warrant. They cannot boast that what they do is pleasing in God's sight, as can the woman in childbirth, even if her child is born out of wedlock.

I say these things in order that we may learn how honourable a thing it is to live in that estate which God has ordained. In it we find God's word and good pleasure, by which all the works, conduct, and sufferings of that estate become holy, godly, and precious so that Solomon even congratulates such a man and says in Proverbs 5 [:18], "Rejoice in the wife of your youth," and again in Ecclesiastes 11 [9:9], "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life." Doubtless, Solomon is not speaking here of carnal pleasure, since it is the Holy Spirit who speaks through him. He is rather offering godly comfort to those who find much drudgery in married life. This he does by way of defence against those who scoff at the divine ordinance and, like the pagans, seek but fail to find in marriage anything beyond a carnal and fleeting sensual pleasure.

Conversely, we learn how wretched is the spiritual estate of monks and nuns by its very nature, for it lacks the word and pleasure of God. All its works, conduct, and sufferings are un-Christian, vain, and pernicious, so that Christ even says to their warning in Matthew 15 [:9], "In vain do they worship me according to the commandments of men." There is therefore no comparison between a married woman who lives in faith and in the recognition of her estate, and a cloistered nun who lives in unbelief and in the presumptuousness of her ecclesiastical estate, just as God's ways and man's ways are beyond compare, as He says in Isaiah 55 [:9], "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." It is a great blessing for one to have God's word as his warrant, so that he can speak right up and say to God, "See, this thou hast spoken, it is thy good pleasure." what does such a man care if it seems to be displeasing and ridiculous to the whole world?

Small wonder that married folk for the most part experience little but bitterness and anguish. They have no knowledge of God's word and will concerning their estate, and are therefore just as wretched as monks and nuns since both lack the comfort and assurance of God's good pleasure; This is why it is impossible for them to endure outward bitterness and drudgery, for it is too much for a man to have to suffer both inward and outward bitterness. If they inwardly fail to realise that their estate is pleasing in the sight of God, bitterness is already there; if they then seek an outward pleasure therein, they fail to find it. Bitterness is joined with bitterness, and thence arises of necessity the loud outcry and the writings against women and the estate of marriage.

God's work and ordinance must and will be accepted and borne on the strength of God's word and assurance; otherwise they do damage and become unbearable. Therefore, St. Paul tempers his words nicely when he says, I Corinthians '7 [:28], "Those who marry will have worldly troubles," that is, outward bitterness. He is silent on the inner, spiritual delight, however, because outward bitterness is common to both believers and unbelievers; indeed, it is characteristic of the estate of marriage. No one can have real happiness in marriage who does not recognise in firm faith that this estate together with all its works, however insignificant, is pleasing to God and precious in his sight. These works are indeed insignificant and mean; yet it is from them that we all trace our origin, we have all had need of them. Without them no man would exist. For this reason they are pleasing to God who has so ordained them, and thereby graciously cares for us like a kind and loving mother.

Observe that thus far I have told you nothing of the estate of marriage except that which the world and reason in their blindness shrink from and sneer at as a mean, unhappy, troublesome mode of life. We have seen how all these shortcomings in fact comprise noble virtues and true delight if one but looks at God's word and will, and thereby recognises its true nature. I will not mention the other advantages and delights implicit in a marriage that goes well that husband and wife cherish one another, become one, serve one another, and other attendant blessings lest somebody shut me up by saying that I am speaking

about something I have not experienced and that there is more gall than honey in marriage. I base my remarks on Scripture, which to me is surer than all experience and cannot lie to me. He who finds still other good things in marriage profits all the more, and should give thanks to God. Whatever God calls good must of necessity always be good, unless men do not recognise it or perversely misuse it.

I therefore pass over the good or evil which experience offers, and confine myself to such good as Scripture and truth ascribe to marriage. It is no slight boon that in wedlock fornication and unchastity are checked and eliminated. This in itself is so great a good that it alone should be enough to induce men to marry forthwith, and for many reasons.

The first reason is that fornication destroys not only the soul but also body, property, honour, and family as well. For we see how a licentious and wicked life not only brings great disgrace but is also a spendthrift life, more costly than wedlock, and that illicit partners necessarily occasion greater suffering for one another than do married folk. Beyond that it consumes the body, corrupts flesh and blood, nature, and physical constitution. Through such a variety of evil consequences God takes a rigid position, as though he would actually drive people away from fornication and into marriage. However, few are thereby convinced or converted.

Some, however, have given the matter thought and so learned from their own experience that they have coined an excellent proverb, "Early to rise and early to wed; that should no one ever regret." Why? Well because from that there come people who retain a sound body, a good conscience, property, and honour and family, all of which are so ruined and dissipated by fornication, that, once lost, it is well-nigh impossible to regain them scarcely one in a hundred succeeds. This was the benefit cited by Paul in I Corinthians 7 [:2], "To avoid immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

The estate of marriage, however, redounds to the benefit not alone of the body, property, honour, 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. We know only too well that the most terrible plagues have befallen lands and people because of fornication. This was the sin cited as the reason why the world was drowned in the Deluge, Genesis 6 [:1-13], and Sodom and Gomorrah were buried in flames, Genesis 19 [:1-24]. We see before our very eyes that God even now sends more new plagues.

Many think they can evade marriage by having their fling [*auss bubenn*] for a time, and then becoming righteous. My dear fellow, if one in a thousand succeeds in this, that would be doing very well. He who intends to lead a chaste life had better begin early, and attain it not with but without fornication, either by the grace of God or through marriage. We see only too well how they make out every day. It might well be called plunging into immorality rather than growing to maturity. It is the devil who has brought this about, and coined such damnable sayings as, "One has to play the fool at least once"; or, "He who does it not in his youth does it in his old age"; or, "A young saint, an old devil." Such are the sentiments of the poet Terence and other pagans. This is heathenish; they speak like heathens, yea, like devils.

It is certainly a fact that he who refuses to marry must fall into immorality. How could it be otherwise, since God has created man and woman to produce seed and to multiply? Why should one not forestall immorality by means of marriage? For if special grace does not exempt a person, his nature must and will compel him to produce seed and to multiply. If this does not occur within marriage, how else can it occur except in fornication or secret sins? But, they say, suppose I am neither married nor immoral, and force myself to remain continent? Do you not hear that restraint is impossible without the special grace? For God's word does not admit of restraint; neither does it lie when it says, "Be fruitful and multiply" [Gen. 1:28]. You can neither escape nor restrain yourself from being fruitful and multiplying; it is God's ordinance and takes its course.

Physicians are not amiss when they say: If this natural function is forcibly restrained it necessarily strikes into the flesh and blood and becomes a poison, whence the body becomes unhealthy, enervated, sweaty, and foul-smelling. That which should have issued in fruitfulness and propagation has to be absorbed within the body itself. Unless there is terrific hunger or immense labour or the supreme grace, the body cannot take it; it necessarily becomes unhealthy and sickly. Hence, we see how weak and sickly barren women are. Those who are fruitful, however, are healthier, cleaner, and happier. And even if they bear themselves weary, or ultimately bear themselves out that does not hurt. Let them bear themselves out. This is the purpose for which they exist. It is better to have a brief life with good health than a long life in ill health.

But the greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labour worth while, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls. Now since we are all duty bound to suffer death, if need be, that we might bring a single soul to God, you can see how rich the estate of marriage is in good works. God has entrusted to its bosom souls begotten of its own body, on whom it can lavish all manner of Christian works. Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal. whoever teaches the gospel to another is truly his apostle and bishop. Mitre and staff and great estates indeed produce idols, but teaching the gospel produces apostles and bishops. See therefore how good and great is God's work and ordinance!

Here I will let the matter rest and leave to others the task of searching out further benefits and advantages of the estate of marriage. My purpose was only to enumerate those which a Christian can have for conducting his married life in a Christian way, so that, as Solomon says, he may find his wife in the sight of God and obtain favour from the Lord [Prov. 18:22]. In saying this I do not wish to disparage virginity, or entice anyone away from virginity into marriage. Let each one act as he is able, and as he feels it has been given to him by God. I simply wanted to check those scandalmongers who place marriage so far beneath virginity that they dare to say: Even if the children should become holy (I Cor. 7:14), celibacy would still be better. One should not regard any estate as better in the sight of God than the estate of marriage. In a worldly sense celibacy is probably better, since it has fewer cares and anxieties. This is true, however, not for its own sake but in order that the celibate may better be able to preach and care for God's word, as St Paul says in I Corinthians 7 [:32-34]. It is God's word and the preaching which make celibacy, such as that of Christ and of Paul, better than the estate of marriage. In itself, however, the celibate life is far inferior.

Finally, we have before us one big, strong objection to answer. Yes, they say, it would be a fine thing to be married, but how will I support myself? I have nothing; take a wife and live on that, etc. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest obstacle to marriage; it is this above all which prevents and breaks up marriage and is the chief excuse for fornication. What shall I say to this objection? It shows lack of faith and doubt of God's goodness and truth. It is therefore no wonder that where faith is lacking, nothing but fornication and all manner of misfortune follow. They are lacking in this, that they want to be sure first of their material resources, where they are to get their food, drink, and clothing [Matt. 6:31]. Yes, they want to pull their head out of the noose of Genesis 3 [:19], "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." They want to be lazy, greedy rascals who do not need to work. Therefore, they will get married only if they can get wives who are rich, beautiful, pious, kind, indeed, wait, we'll have a picture of them drawn for you.

Let such heathen go their way; we will not argue with them. If they should be lucky enough to obtain such wives the marriages would still be un-Christian and without faith. They trust in God as long as they know that they do not need him, and that they are well supplied. He who would enter into wedlock as a

Christian must not be ashamed of being poor and despised, and doing insignificant work. He should take satisfaction in this: first, that his status and occupation are pleasing to God; second, that God will most certainly provide for him if only he does his job to the best of his ability, and that, if he cannot be a squire or a prince, he is a manservant or a maidservant.

Indeed, God has shown sufficiently in the first chapter of Genesis how he provides for us. He first created and prepared all things in heaven and on earth, together with the beasts and all growing things, before he created man. Thereby he demonstrated how he has laid up for us at all times a sufficient store of food and clothing, even before we ask him for it. All we need to do is to work and avoid idleness; then we shall certainly be fed and clothed. But a pitiful unbelief refuses to admit this. The unbeliever sees, comprehends, and feels all the same that even if he worries himself to death over it, he can neither produce nor maintain a single grain of wheat in the field. He knows too that even though all his storehouses were full to overflowing, he could not make use of a single morsel or thread unless God sustains him in life and health and preserves to him his possessions. Yet this has no effect upon him.

To sum the matter up: whoever finds himself unsuited to the celibate life should see to it right away that he has something to do and to work at; then let him strike out in God's name and get married. A young man should marry at the age of twenty at the latest, a young woman at fifteen to eighteen; that's when they are still in good health and best suited for marriage. Let God worry about how they and their children are to be fed. God makes children; he will surely also feed them. Should he fail to exalt you and them here on earth, then take satisfaction in the fact that he has granted you a Christian marriage, and know that he will exalt you there; and be thankful to him for his gifts and favours.

With all this extolling of married life, however, I have not meant to ascribe to nature a condition of sinlessness. On the contrary, I say that flesh and blood, corrupted through Adam, is conceived and born in sin, as Psalm 51 [:5] says. Intercourse is never without Sin; but God excuses it by his grace because the estate of marriage is his work, and he preserves in and through the sin all that good which he has implanted and blessed in marriage.

