



Commentary on the Common Confession

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CC6) Marriage and Family

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

The Common Confession speaks of marriage as an institution. In so doing, it echoes the Lutheran understanding of marriage as a vocation. In marriage a man and a woman are joined, so that each may support the other in love, and in that same love, give birth to children and nurture them toward adulthood.

It says in the order for marriage, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, that "God in his goodness created us male and female" and he "established marriage." Marriage is an order of creation, an integral part of God's creative will for his creatures.

A critically important biblical text for marriage comes from the creation account in Genesis. "Male and female he created them" (1:27). The creation account is equally clear as to the purpose of marriage from God's perspective. These are companionship (2:18) and procreation (1:28). In marriage a man and woman leave their own parents, cling to each other, and become one flesh (2:24).

In the Gospels Jesus quotes approvingly and virtually verbatim the words of Genesis (Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-8). In this way Jesus reinforces the divine origin of marriage and enjoins it on those who follow him. The Common Confession says it very succinctly, "From marriage God forms families."

This understanding of marriage has been the standard within the Christian community throughout the ages.

To be sure, Christians have not always practiced the teaching about marriage as a union of man and woman. The Scriptures themselves record occasions when God's people failed to live within the boundaries God had set. Nevertheless, the standard has remained: marriage is a union of one man and one woman. Other patterns of sexual behavior between men and women have been understood as contrary to the will of God.

Today this teaching and behavior regarding marriage and sexuality have been seriously challenged. The sharpest challenge has come from those who advocate a gay and lesbian life style. The ongoing debate within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America indicates how divisive this issue has become within the Christian community.

Through it all, however, the Word of God continues to speak with power and grace. The Word directs us to a behavior that God the Creator intends for his people. That Word calls for fidelity in marriage and loyalty to his command. It is a Word that graciously forgives and leads to a new obedience for his children. As the order for marriage indicates, God "continues still to bless it [marriage] with his abundant and ever-present support." These words assure us that "we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored."

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