

WORKS
OF
MARTIN LUTHER

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WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

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A MARRIAGE BOOKLET FOR SIMPLE PASTORS

EIN TRAUBUECHLIN FUER DIE EINFELTIGEN
PFARHERR

1529

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INTRODUCTION

Luther begins the Foreword to his proposed Order for Marriage with an old saying, "Many lands, many customs." It could have been narrowed down to, "Many customs in this land"; for local, provincial, and national practices and uses in connection with marriage rites were many.

Luther's approach to the task before him is characteristic and reveals a careful consideration of the whole question from the Evangelic point of view and his arrival at a fairly certain conclusion. He is proposing this Order of Marriage not as a form in itself or as a binding ordinance but as an example of how to proceed when those who purpose entering the estate of matrimony desire pastoral ministrations. Here is not an ordering by the Church or even for the Church. This is a model, embodying certain traditional customs, tested and accepted, and developing this particular ministry on Evangelic principles.

The rite of marriage is considered and frankly acknowledged to be a civil action and therefore under the control of civil authority. With this Luther does not quarrel nor interfere in the slightest degree. Only when the express desire is present for the pastor to act may the "spiritual" enter; not as of right, but as a free ministrations. It is Evangelical ministrations as over against ecclesiastical functioning.

The situation at Luther's day seemed to emphasize the claim of the Church for complete control in validating marriage and governing its various preliminary steps. Over against this the civil tradition remained,—a growing accumulation through centuries, fostered by government and enactment,—which still made its claim felt. The Church was enforcing two things: A sacramental conception of marriage and her right as superior to civil government. The question of the relation of Church to State and vice versa entered

here. And the Reformation Movement was trying to solve this question along with many others. Luther meets it fairly in this document in so far as it concerns the external marriage rite and its relation to society.

The Church however, in process of time, had accommodated herself to much of the civil tradition in order to gain her end,—authority, and had added functions peculiar to her own purpose. "Many lands, many customs" might be asserted again; for even with the Church emphasizing her power, the situation is not clear. The commixture of the civil and the ecclesiastical (the latter in some parts "spiritual") continued to raise legal questions, did not "standardize" the method, nor did it prevent abuses, such as clandestine marriage, etc., or surround the estate or the rite with sanctity and place upon it a spiritual idealism.

Before examining Luther's work, it is necessary to gain a general view of the situation in so far as fairly normal customs obtain.

The marriage rite in Teutonic lands, in early Middle Ages, was recognized entirely as a family function. This paralleled the early Roman conception. After preliminary matters, such as contract payment, dowry arrangement, etc., had been arranged satisfactorily, the contracting parties plighted their troth in the presence of the father of the bride, or her guardian, or another relative. This consisted first in a statement by the groom, that he took N.— to be his wife. The bride on her part replied with similar words. Then the ring was placed on the fourth finger of the bride's left hand by the groom, and thereupon at the word of the father, or guardian, they joined right hands, testifying thereby to their purpose; and with a statement of the fact of their mutual consent the ceremony was completed. This originally was the extent of the marriage rite, but other,—a great variety of,—customs were connected with it.

In the course of the next few centuries, and under the growing influence of the Church, the rite was developed into a longer function consisting of a number of consecutive parts; but it continued to remain a civil contract and ceremony.

The betrothal, as described above, was the first step. This was still presided over by a layman but in the presence of

the parish priest. This act was regarded as the "Declaration of Intention." The next step was the publication of this intention publicly by the priest in the church that N. and N. purposed to enter into the estate of matrimony. This publication of what later became known as the Banns was intended to bring to light any legal hindrances and prevent the marriage of persons related within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity. The publication took place three times (high days or Sundays) and then the contracting parties made their *Kirchgang*, that is, they went to the church, which was usually the most imposing structure in the town, situated facing an open square. Here in public, before the church, with a layman again as officiant but with the priest present, the contracting parties again exchanged their statement of acceptance, attesting it by joining their right hands (and giving the ring, if this had not been done at the betrothal). The statement legalizing the marriage then followed made by the layman.

About the thirteenth century the Church began to gain full control of the ceremony. The parish priest is now normally the functionary at the betrothal, which is conducted much in the same manner as before, but prayer and a short benediction follow the Declaration of Intention. Publication of the Banns is an ecclesiastically ordered procedure, with canonically promulgated restrictions governing the relation of the contracting parties. The banns must be published from the pulpit (choir) three consecutive Sundays. During certain seasons weddings are not to be consummated. The priest acts at the function before the church, where after a fourth announcement (publication) the interchange of consent is followed by personally spoken vow, attested by joining right hands, the blessing and giving of the ring (rings), and the declaration on the part of the priest of the union consummated in the sight of God and "solemnized" by himself.

Immediately the priest leads the wedding party into the church for the celebration of the Nuptial Mass (*Missa pro sponso et sponsa*) with which is connected the Benediction of the Marriage (*Benedictio nuptiarum*¹). The sacramental character of marriage and necessity for ecclesiastical approval and consummation were the ultimate outcomes of the Church's objective here.

Luther refused to accept this conception of marriage. Ultimately marriage, to him, is not a sacrament, nor an ecclesiastical action *per se*. It is a civil act, perpetuating a Divine institution, true; but one dealing distinctly with "worldly" ends, even though the priest be the officiant. The "spiritual," not as opposed to the worldly but as necessary companion, functions thus far,—in blessing in the Name of God and praying for the Divine favor to rest upon those entering this *holy* estate.

Luther does not cast aside tradition, either civil or ecclesiastical, as he works toward his purpose. He accepts important elements of both, but he places an element of freedom on the use which is distinctly new. Again this is an emphasis of the Evangelic principle.

With the "civil" he is not concerned, either to order or govern custom or method; authority must regulate this. But there is no choice left except to respond when "anyone desires us to bless them . . . pray over them . . . marry them . . ." "We are in duty bound to do this." If so much honor and ceremonial display has been connected with the consecration of monks and nuns in the past, an estate purely human in invention, "how much more should we honor this Divine estate and in a much more magnificent way bless, pray, and adorn it?" Then, too, this (our) ministry should be active to the end that the holiness and seriousness of this estate should be emphasized over against the frivolity and burlesquing of the world, so that by common prayer and blessing persons may enter it in the fear of the Divine Creator and Ordainer.

Luther follows the traditional in dividing the rite into three distinct but related actions.

First,—the *Publication of the Banns*. This is not to discover illegal impediments primarily, but to ask for the prayer of the congregation in behalf of the contracting persons, that they may initiate their purpose in God's Name and under His blessing. The exhortation to present information regarding impediments is secondary. The tone of this act has been changed completely. It is now a spiritual action.

Second,—the *Marriage* proper. This as formerly takes place *before* the church. Much of the traditional form is retained, but simplified. Each of the parties is questioned

in turn as to consent. Then the ring (rings) is given. Whereupon in testimony they join right hands, and the officiant pronounces, "What God has joined together . . ." This is a new element . . . scriptural. Then the officiant pronounces the marriage consummated,—since they have acknowledged their purpose publicly "before God and the world,"—"In the Name of the Father, etc."

Third,—The *Benediction before the Altar*. The Nuptial Mass is ignored entirely, the Nuptial Benediction likewise. Slight reminiscences of phrases from collects are found in the closing prayer which Luther provided. This Office is wholly evangelical; it is built of Scriptures and prayer . . . the Benediction of the Word and Prayer which Luther in another writing says is the only right benediction. The Scriptures record the Divine institution and matters related to the estate. The order is: Divine institution, Genesis 2: 18, 21-24; Holiness, spiritual earnestness of the estate, Ephesians 5: 25-29; Subjection, mutual relations, Ephesians 5: 22-24; Burden, cross, Genesis 3: 16-19; Comfort, blessing, Genesis 1: 27, 28, 31; Proverbs 18: 22.

The benediction is in the form of prayer, prayed with hands outstretched over the groom and bride.

Luther accomplished a number of things with this Order. He admitted the place of the civil right in marriage and continued it; this is the "worldly" side. He denied the sacramental character fabricated by the Church, but on the other hand declared its Divine institution and purpose and its spiritual values; this was the "religious" sphere. He qualified the action of the Church through her ministry by making it dependent upon desire (invitation), not right, restricting the action to "solemnization," i.e., pronouncement, intercession and benediction.

The Reformation Movement had already produced a number of Marriage Orders prior to Luther's. One issued at Wittenberg in 1524 was ascribed to Bugenhagen, but this he refused to admit. It was Evangelical and broke away from Roman practice and was used widely. This Wittenberg order served somewhat in the nature of a model to Luther in his own work. There are points of agreement but Luther goes quite a bit farther. His Order is much closer to the traditional and is much more full liturgically. While this historic element is evident in Luther's Order it is not as dis-

tinctively a liturgical accomplishment as his Order for Baptism. However his purpose was single and simple: to provide an Evangelical model for the procedure at a marriage.

Literature: The *Traubüchlin* will be found in
Walch 10: 854
Erlangen 23: 207
Weimar 303: 74
Clemen 4: 100
Daniel, *Codex*, 2: 315ff.
Hering, *Hilfsbuch*, 151ff

See also Höfling, *Urkundenbuch*, 173ff
Kliefoth, *Lit. Abhandlungen*, I, 1, 147ff

Cf. Legg, *Sarum Missal*, 143ff: *Ordo ad facienda sponsalia* (Benediction and Missa)

Missale Romanum, [91] *Missa pro sponso et sponsa*
Rituale Romanum, 221, *De sacramento matrimonium*;
224, *Ritus celebrandi matrimonii sacramentum*

And the very fine Introduction to the Luther Order in Weimar as above, page 43ff.

PAUL ZELLER STRODACH

NOTE ON INTRODUCTION TO A MARRIAGE BOOKLET

¹ Some old Missals reverse this order.

EIN TRAUBUECHLIN FUER DIE EINFELTIGEN*
PFARHERR

Mart. Luther

Wittenberg

(At the end of book:)

Gedruckt zu Wittenberg durch Nickel Schirlentz

M. D. XXIX

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Martinus Luther

“Many lands, many customs” is a common saying. Since marriage and the marriage state is a worldly business, it behooves us pastors or ministers of the Church not to attempt to order or govern anything connected with it, but to permit every city and land to continue its own use and custom in this connection. Some lead the bride to the church twice, both evening and morning. Some only once. Some announce it formally and publish the banns from the pulpit two or three weeks in advance. All such things and the like

* It is well-nigh impossible to render *einfeltigen* satisfactorily in English by using one word. Luther has the *average* pastor in mind, who did not have any great amount of education.

I leave to the lords and the council to order and arrange as they see fit: it does not concern me.

But should any one desire us to bless them before the church or in the church, to pray over them, or also to marry them, we are in duty bound to do this. For this reason I have desired to offer this advice and form to those who do not know anything better, in case some should desire to follow our custom in this matter. The others who know all about it, that is, who do not know anything about it but permit themselves to think that they do know all about it,—well, they do not need this service of mine,—except that they may be overwise and conceited about it and should guard themselves very zealously lest perchance they do something that somebody else does! Otherwise one might think that they might learn something from somebody else, and that certainly would be a great pity.

Since it has been customary up to the present to surround the consecration of monks and nuns with such great ceremonial display, (even though their estate and organization are an ungodly and purely human invention which does not have any foundation in the Scriptures,) how much the more should we honor this Divine estate and in a much more magnificent way bless, pray, and adorn it? For even if it is a worldly estate it does have God's Word in its favor and was not invented or instituted by men, as was the estate of the monks and nuns. Therefore, too, it should be accounted more spiritual than the estate of the cloisterettes,—yea, a hundred times more so,—which in truth should be considered the most worldly and fleshly of all, because it was fabricated and instituted out of flesh and blood and is above all the invention of worldly cleverness and wisdom.

And for this reason, too, in order that the young people may learn to regard this estate seriously and honor it as a Divine creation and command, and not act so disgracefully in connection with it and make fools out of themselves with their laughing and mockery and the like frivolity, as has been customary heretofore, just as if it was a joke or child's play to enter into the marriage state or to have a wedding.

Those who at the first instituted the practice that one should lead the bride and bridegroom to church, truly did not regard it as a joke but as a very earnest matter; for there is no doubt but that they were seeking the blessing of God thereby and the common prayers, and were not making a ridiculous burlesque out of it or a bit of heathenish monkey business.

Thus, too, the act in itself reveals its earnestness. For whoever desires prayer and blessing from the pastor or bishop shows thereby indeed,—even if he does not express it in so many words,—into what peril and need he is entering and how greatly he stands in need of the Divine blessing and common prayer for the estate which he is undertaking. And this serious situation can be seen daily in the misfortunes caused by the devil in the marriage estate with adultery, unfaithfulness, discord, and all manner of ill.

Therefore, we will deal in the following way with the bridegroom and bride,—if they desire and ask it.

(I)

First, publish the banns from the pulpit with such words as these:

Hans N. and Greta N. desire, according to the Divine institution, to enter the holy estate of marriage; they desire that common, Christian prayer be made on their behalf so that they may begin it in God's Name and prosper therein.

And should any one have anything to say against it, let him speak in time or hereafter keep silence. God grant them His blessing. Amen.

(II)

Before the church marry them with words such as these:

Hans, dost thou desire Greta to thy wedded wife?

¶ *He says:* Yes.

Greta, dost thou desire Hans to thy wedded husband?

¶ *She answers:* Yes.

¶ *Then the pastor lets them give each other the wedding ring and joins their right hands together, and says:*

Matt.
19: 6

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

¶ *Thereupon he speaks in the presence of all:*

Since Hans N. and Greta N. desire each other in marriage and acknowledge the same here publicly before God and the world, in testimony of which they have given each other the hand and the wedding ring, I pronounce them joined in marriage, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

(III)

Before the altar he reads God's Word over the bridegroom and bride. Genesis, the second chapter.

Gen. 2:
18, 21-24

And God the Lord said: It is not good that man should be alone: I will make a helpmeet for him who can be with him. Then the Lord God let a deep sleep fall on the man, and he went to sleep; and he took one of his ribs and closed the place with flesh. And God the Lord fashioned a wife out of the rib, which he took from the man, and brought her to him. Then the man said: This was at one time bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken from man. Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and the two will be one flesh.

¶ *Thereupon he turns to both of them and speaks to them thus:*

Eph. 5:
25-29

Since both of you have given yourselves to the marriage estate in God's Name, hear first of all God's commandment concerning this estate. Thus speaketh St. Paul: Ye men love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her so that he might sanctify her and purify her through water in the word and present her to himself a glorious congregation without spot or blemish or any such thing, but that she might be holy and blameless. Thus also should men love their wives as their own body. He who loveth his wife loveth himself. For no one has ever yet

hated his own flesh but has nourished it and cared for it as also the Lord for the congregation.

The wives are to be subject to their husbands as unto the Lord, for man is the head of the woman just as Christ is the head of the congregation and he is the Saviour of the body. But as now the congregation is subject to Christ, so shall the wives be subject to their husbands in all things. Eph. 5: 22-24

Second hear also the curse which God has placed upon this estate. God spake thus to the woman: I will cause thee much sorrow when thou dost conceive. Thou shalt give birth to thy children with much sorrow, and thou shalt yield thee to thy husband, and he shall be thy lord. Gen. 3: 16-19

And God spake to the man: Since thou hast listened to the voice of thy wife and eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee and said, Thou shalt not eat thereof, Cursed be thy field for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou nourish thyself therefrom all thy life long; thorns and thistles shall it bear thee, and thou shalt eat the grass of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread until thou returnest again to earth from which thou wast taken. For thou art earth and shalt become earth.

Third; and this is your comfort that ye may know and believe that this estate is pleasing to God and is blessed by Him. For thus it is written: God created man in his own image; yea, in the image of God created he him. He created them, a man and woman. And God blessed them and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply yourselves and fill the earth, and make it subject unto you, and reign over the fish in the sea and the birds in the heaven and over all animals that crawl on the earth. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, all was very good. Therefore Solomon also says: He who obtains a wife, obtains a good thing and will receive favor from the Lord. Gen. 1:27, 28, 31
Prov. 18: 22

Here he spreads forth his hands over them and prays thus:

O Lord God Who hast created man and woman and hast ordained them for the marriage bond and hast typified therein the sacramental union of Thy dear Son, the Lord Eph. 5: 25-32

Jesus Christ, and the Church, His Bride: We beseech Thy groundless goodness and mercy that Thou wouldest not permit this Thy creation, ordinance and blessing to be disturbed or destroyed, but graciously preserve the same through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.