

The Venture of Marriage

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IN “THIS NATION OF TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENTS,” as John Updike described our country in one of his short stories, the marriage vow becomes hard to understand. People still regularly make that vow. Often, of course, we may wonder what they think they are doing, and almost as often, I suspect, they may be radically uncertain who or what actually authorizes them to make such a promise. Perhaps they should be uncertain in a society marked, as ours is, by easy divorce, by denial that divorce is destructive in the lives of children, by boys who become fathers without ever having had one as a living presence in their lives, by wedding services so focused on the wedding party that the One whose faithfulness the marriage vow imitates is obscured or forgotten. Nevertheless, however baffling it may seem, people still regularly make that vow, and it is one of the few times in their life when they may seek out the church. What wisdom, if any, can we offer the world about marriage?

There is, I suppose, no single answer to that question, but there is a central answer—one that must be spoken, whatever else is said or done. For the church proclaims the God who in his Son “was not Yes and No,” but in whom “it is always Yes,” in whom “all the promises of God find their Yes.” Because we live by the faithfulness of this Son, we, in turn, must work at learning to be faithful ourselves—learning, as St. Paul says, to “utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:19–20). When we hear from this God a word of command, “You shall not commit adultery,” we must struggle to hear in that command his own commitment and promise to us. It will prove true of us as God has promised: we shall not commit adultery. He will make of us people who can say “Amen” to his command. If the church has anything to say to the world about marriage, it must, therefore, involve at its heart the good of faithfulness. That good I want to explore here. Ultimately I will ask most particularly what wisdom Lutherans may have to offer about marriage, but I do not intend to begin there. We can ask, first, what we know of faithfulness as those who, along with Jews, have inherited as ours the Hebrew Scriptures and the Creator they proclaim. Having done that, I will ask what Lutherans in particular might add to this discussion, and we will ponder the difficulties of upholding the norm of faithfulness within a theology that reckons seriously with sin and deals evangelically with sinners.

The crucified and risen Lord, the one who as faithful and true witness is God’s “Amen” to us, is the uncreated principle of all creation, the one through whom the Father addresses and orders the creation (Rev 3:14). The faithfulness that he so paradigmatically embodies will not, therefore, be entirely alien to those created in his image. It is a faithfulness available to all, at least in some measure. In order to

understand it properly, however, we cannot begin simply with the language of faithfulness, as if we could deduce an ethic of marriage from the gospel narrowly construed. “Faithful to what?” we must ask—faithful to what intent and structure for human life? And so, I begin with what the Augsburg Confession describes simply as “God’s order and command” (AC XXVII, 18). If we do not begin there, we will, I predict, find sooner or later that we have nothing definitive to say about marriage, although we may be eloquent in our condemnation of sexual exploitation and our praise of committed relationships.

Marriage is, Luther says in his Large Catechism, “the first of all institutions.” The Creator has made us as man and woman, as a sexually differentiated species, in order that we may “be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and bring them up to the glory of God” (LC I, 207). In these few words Luther summarizes two of the purposes of marriage, and if we understand these purposes, we understand why faithfulness is the cardinal good of marriage.

God fashions this “first of all institutions” in order that a man and woman may learn to be true to each other. It is “not good” that the man should be alone (Gn 2:18)—not good that he should have no other to serve, no other from whom he can learn who he is, no other who even by resisting his plans and projects can call him out of himself into a bond of love. Through marriage, that is, God brings us into relation with one who is different from us but who also reflects back to us something of the truth of our own nature. Two people—sharing a common nature, yet as different as their genitalia are different—are drawn out of themselves in order that they may learn something of what it means to serve and love the good of another.

A man and woman brought into this institution do not only learn to be true to each other; by the blessing of God they may also beget and rear children. The God who calls them out of their isolation into a union of mutual love ordains that their union should also turn outward in order that human life may be sustained and friendship increased. Embodying the oneness of husband and wife, the child is the sign of God’s continued “Yes” to his creation and of his eagerness to use us as covenant partners in sustaining that creation.

To reflect upon these two purposes of marriage is to remind ourselves of the importance of faithfulness. In promising to be true to each other and committing themselves to mutual care, a man and woman have created in each other a set of needs and expectations that cut very deeply into their identity. They have made themselves naked and vulnerable, handed themselves over in trust and confidence. How, then, could faithfulness be anything other than a central good of marriage? To break the vow is not simply to break a promise; it takes on the character of betrayal.

When we reflect upon the procreative purpose of marriage, we reach a similar conclusion. We should not need sociological research to make us fear for children who suffer from divorce, although the research is available.¹ For if a child embodies the union of a man and woman who sever that union, the child’s sense of self must surely

be affected. Parents are needed not simply to beget children, but, as Luther put it, “to support and bring them up to the glory of God.” And even those who have no such theological context within which to set their understanding of parenthood may come to understand how difficult it is for children who themselves have suffered the divorce of their parents to give their love faithfully and receive the love of a spouse with trust.

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If, therefore, the “love of one sex for another is truly a divine ordinance,” as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession says it is (Ap XXIII, 7), this ordinance institutionalizes a call to faithful love between husband and wife. Through the bond of marriage God calls us out of our “aloneness” so that we may love and be loved by one who is not just another self; God sustains human life and blesses self-giving love through the gift of children; and God begins to train us in the meaning of fidelity, which we might even think of as the ultimate *telos* [goal] of marriage. That God uses marriage to make of us the people he wants was an idea not at all alien to Luther, as Paul Althaus notes: “God even uses the problems which he lays upon married people to help them mortify the old man; and through these problems, they learn the difficult art of patiently subjecting themselves to God’s will.”²

Is such faithfulness really good, or even possible, for us? Indeed, we might be tempted to imagine that it is profoundly *unnatural* for creatures who live in time and experience constant change. But that would be to forget our created nature, to overlook what Reinhold Niebuhr rightly termed “the basic paradox of human existence: man’s involvement in finiteness *and* his transcendence over it.”³ We are, that is, not only finite beings, ridden by time, but we also have, to some degree, the capacity to ride time, to give shape and coherence to our lives—all this by the ordinance of God. The institutionalization of faithfulness within marriage should not, therefore, be understood as unnatural. On the contrary, however opposed it may seem to our inclinations at any given moment, marriage offers not the destruction but the perfection of our love. To make temporality and change alone the law of our being negates an essential element of our created nature: the capacity for fidelity within time. To give the last word to temporality and change is to think of the marriage vow only as a way of resisting time.

But the vow is not only that. Rather, it is also and primarily a way “of embracing time (giving love a history by giving it a future).”⁴ Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, reflecting the strong Jewish sense of covenant fidelity *within* history, once suggested that we might help ourselves to understand this by considering a choice between two extreme options:

In one case we will find love, rich and moving, but never great enough to result in marriage. Thus, while such affairs last months or even years, each inevitably ends, and the lovers go their separate ways. The other possibility is of a life spent in a marriage but one not initiated because of love. The couple has very genuine regard for one another, but it cannot be said to rise to that level of empathy and passion we call love. Yet knowing themselves to be unlikely to have a much richer emotional experience or to have a better partner with whom to spend their lives, they marry. Would you prefer a life of love that never comes to marriage over a life of marriage that knows regard but not love? The choice is, of course, odious.... Yet, seen from the perspective of time and of a whole life, if there must be a choice, then being married, even only in deep friendship, seems to me far more personally significant than being in love from time to time.⁵

Borowitz sees clearly the human significance—the importance—of fidelity, and the fulfillment it offers us. When the God who is faithful to his promises came to live among us, he came, St. John says, “to his own” (Jn 1:11). His faithfulness cannot, therefore, be entirely alien to the capacities of our own nature. As the Son of God did, we can embrace time in our promises and learn to be faithful there. We can give our love a history by giving it a future. Of course, St. John also writes that when God’s Son came to his own, his own people did not receive him. Our attention is directed thereby to the fact of sin, the great destroyer of faithfulness within the covenant of marriage. Surely, therefore, we cannot simply say that our created nature is capable of faithfulness over time. Must we not also grant that our *corrupted* nature is often incapable of such faithfulness? I do not want to ignore the destructive effects of sin any more than Moses ignored the hardness of the human heart, and I will eventually make my way toward considering what we should say about divorce. But if we assume immediately that a realistic assessment of the effects of sin encourages us to take more seriously the possibility of divorce, we miss the third purpose served by the institution of marriage—a purpose that loomed very large in the minds of many of the Fathers, and very large indeed in the mind of Luther.

Marriage unites a man and woman in a union of love. That unitive purpose is, by God’s grace, ordered also toward a procreative good—the begetting and rearing of children. But now we must add a third purpose: the institution of marriage exists to restrain sin. Modern Christians are always careful to insist that sexual impulses are not evil or sinful in themselves. True enough. Indeed, even in the sixteenth century the Lutheran Confessions could distinguish between the “natural love” of one sex for the other that “is truly a divine ordinance,” and the corruption of “sinful lust” (Ap XXIII, 7). We should not ignore, however, what is obvious in human history: that the disordered sexual appetites of sinful human beings are often wayward, that they bring fragility, vulnerability, and chaos into the most intimate of human relationships. We should not apologize for suggesting that when the institution of marriage directs and channels those anarchic impulses toward faithful service of one other person in his or her bodily need, when God

restrains sin in that way, human well-being is served. God begins to teach us the meaning of faithful love by offering marriage as a place of healing.

Notice what this suggests. Reckoning soberly with the fact of sinfulness, our first impulse ought not be to contemplate the possibility—or necessity—of divorce. It may come to that, but we should not think first of that. We should think first that the bond of marriage is the healing gift of God, intended to restrain and cure those sinful impulses by commanding faithfulness. Marriage cannot be such a place of healing unless we permit the vow to discipline and control our desires. Lovers, of course, promise that they will be faithful to each other, discerning however dimly what is truly natural and good for human life. Their affections give rise to a promise of fidelity. But in a deeper sense, it must often be the requirement of fidelity that shapes and governs our affections. That institutional requirement is liberating. It sets us free from the wayward desires of the moment to keep the promise we once made from the very heart of our being. It frees us to be what we are truly meant to be—faithful lovers—even if at the moment that is not what we want to be. The institution of marriage serves not only a unitive and a procreative purpose, but also this healing purpose. As such it should be good news for all of us when we are driven by chaotic impulses within, or when we fear to make ourselves vulnerable before the loved one.

II.

I have tried to begin where, it seems to me, the Augsburg Confession begins. It does not, of course, treat marriage directly, taking up the topic only incidentally in order to discuss sacerdotal [priestly] marriage and monastic vows. But when it does touch on the subject of marriage, it begins not with anything that might be regarded as idiosyncratically Lutheran but with an understanding of God's creation, order, and command—which urge, drive, and direct most of us toward the bond of marriage (see AC XXVII, 18–21). We are likely to be misled, I think, if, instead of letting ourselves be drawn back to the biblical witness to marriage as God's ordinance, we try to derive more directly an understanding of marriage from notions of human well-being that float free of that order. A brief illustration of how this can happen may be helpful here.

In his short and often insightful “contemporary commentary” on the Augsburg Confession, George Forell considered what Article XXIII, (“The Marriage of Priests”) might have to teach us more generally about sexual morality.⁶ Opposing the church's rules governing priestly celibacy, Article XXIII, according to Forell's reading, asks: are these rules making people better or worse? And if the answer is that they are making people worse, we should change the rules. Forell then applied this approach to questions that were current when he wrote in 1968. He asked, for example, whether a law making it difficult for married couples to divorce results in better marriages—and concluded that it does not. He asked whether laws against homosexuality make people better or worse—and concluded that they make people worse. Article XXIII, directs us, he suggested, to a very general approach: “We should ask ourselves what kind of laws will help people live more human lives. What kind of laws will build a harmonious and just human society?”

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More than a quarter century later we may be less certain that it is wise or helpful to seek moral wisdom about marriage while being so fearful of God's order and command. Granting, to be sure, that the law cannot always require everything that moral righteousness demands, we may still wonder whether Forell's is the best lesson to learn from Article XXIII. Having observed the effects of an almost complete relaxation of barriers to divorce, we may be far from certain that it has made for better marriages. And we may well be convinced that it has been terribly destructive in the lives of children. Having persuaded ourselves that sexual preference is a private matter, we find that the conversation has surprisingly moved on—to pressure for *public* affirmation and ecclesiastical blessing. What kind of laws help people live more human lives? That question turns out to be less than obvious to human reason. What looked like a reasonable answer to a serious Lutheran thinker over a quarter century ago hardly seems compelling today.

Lutherans need not, however, begin where Forell began. We should start where Christians most often have and where, in fact, the Augsburg Confession begins: with God's creation, order, and command. When we do so, I have suggested, we will see that God uses marriage to accomplish good purposes in our lives—to encourage a man and a woman to serve each other in a union of love, to sustain human life through the gift of children, and to restrain and heal our anarchic sexual impulses. And each of these purposes, in its own way, requires for its realization fidelity to the marriage vow.

There is, however, one truth about marriage to which Lutherans ought to be particularly sensitive, even though it is not a Lutheran insight alone. When the Reformers argued that marriage was (in their terms) a secular rather than ecclesiastical order, they did not, of course, mean that its proper ordering was unrelated to God's creation and command. They meant that marriage was not a sacrament, that it belonged to the order of creation rather than the order of salvation. It was a secular order, but their understanding of it was not secularized, since they "were far removed from the thought of surrendering marriage to the profane, that is, to an order detached from God."⁷

If marriage was not to be freed from the moral guidance provided by Scripture, how was it altered when understood as a secular order? It was no longer subordinated to the monastic life, and it was understood clearly as a religious calling, a place in which one could hear and answer the call of God. In the attack on monastic vows—important at the time, though, I think, no longer a concern in our time and place—marriage was freed to be as heroic a venture as the monastic life had been. Thus Steven Ozment writes

that the first generation of Protestant Reformers “literally transferred the accolades Christian tradition had since antiquity heaped on the religious in monasteries and nunneries to marriage and the home.”⁸

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That this need not be any private insight of Lutherans is clear from the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states:

Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. It is he who gives them meaning and grants them the grace which is indispensable for living them out in conformity with his will. Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other.⁹

Each way of life is a venture made in response to God’s call. But envisioning marriage as such a venture remains a peculiarly Lutheran heritage, a gift to be offered the world. In his Large Catechism Luther writes that when “husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity,” their example “is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable” (LC I, 219). To take up with audacity the venture of marriage, to ask God to make of us exemplars who keep the marriage vow and regard it as attractive and desirable, is a great service we can offer our society. You will find, I think, that many of our contemporaries who contemplate marriage, even when they take it quite seriously, are inclined to regard the vow as a prediction rather than a commitment. And then, surveying the mess so many of their friends have made of marriage, they wonder how they can possibly predict lifelong fidelity for themselves, and they do not know how to take this vow. At best, they think of the vow as committing them to resist time, rather than to embrace it. We should strive to bear witness to a deeper truth: that God has made us people who, by his grace, can be faithful *through* and *within* time, responding to and seeking to imitate the faithfulness he has shown us in his Son.

This understanding of marriage as an heroic venture is, it seems to me, something that the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation might well take as their special calling in our society. We can repeat what Denis de Rougemont once wrote: “When a young engaged couple are encouraged to calculate the probabilities in favour of their happiness, they are being distracted from the truly moral problem.”¹⁰ Which problem is that they are being offered in marriage the opportunity to ride time, to give their love a

future. If they suppose that they are being asked only to predict the likelihood that their marriage will endure, they miss the call to covenant fidelity, the honor God does them in permitting them to covenant together and thus shape their future.

That truly is an heroic venture, for the covenant is made not only in the face of a constantly changing world, where arrangements always seem temporary, but also in the face of death, which flaunts the pretensions of our commitment. If, nonetheless, we are so bold as to undertake this venture—serving our spouse in a bond of faithful love and thereby making chastity more attractive and desirable—we may need more reassurance even than the knowledge that God has created us as persons who are made for and capable of covenant fidelity. We may need also to know that our promise of marital faithfulness is taken up into Christ's promise to his church. Thus Althaus writes that, although for Luther marriage was not a sacrament, it gives “a picture of the intimate love of Christ for the church, and we can fully live in it as it was intended to be lived only through the power of the love of Christ.”¹¹

III.

“Love is not love,” Shakespeare writes, “Which alters when it alteration finds.”¹² We know, of course, that this is not obviously true of erotic love, which, for all its power and passion, is notoriously fickle and unstable. The institution of marriage is ordained by God to enable our love to rise to the level of Shakespeare's insight—to enable us to be faithful. And yet, in our weakness we are sometimes truant from this school of virtue, and sometimes we drop out altogether, only perhaps to want to enroll again at a later date. What should we say about divorce?

Without ever treating the subject in detail, the Lutheran Confessions seem both to assume that divorce is wrong (LC I, 67) and to assume that the innocent party to a divorce may remarry (Tr, 78). In fact, Steven Ozment has written that the Reformers “endorsed for the first time in Western Christendom genuine divorce and remarriage.”¹³ We should, I think, be careful about how we use one of the reasons that weighed heavily in their endorsement. In their attack on the prohibition of sacerdotal marriage, the early Lutherans were struck, rightly enough, by the power of sexual appetite in human life. In emphasizing the permissibility and, even, necessity of marriage they express doubt whether “perpetual chastity lies within human power and ability” (AC XXVII, 28)—except, of course, for those to whom God has given a special gift of continence (Ap XXVII, 51). Insofar as this is simply a reaffirmation of the teaching that marriage serves God's purpose in restraining sin, it is true and useful. But offered apart from the Reformers' own firm commitment to the continued force of God's command, it invites abuse. It invites me to wonder why I should be chaste if I am not married but do not know myself to have any special divine gift of continence. And I can resist that invitation only if I know—in addition to the anarchic power of sexual appetite—that “it is not marriage that the law forbids, but lust, adultery, and promiscuity” (Ap XXIII, 35). No matter how drawn I may be to these sins on occasion, they are contrary to the command of God and, therefore, not truly in accord with my nature.

This same sense of the power of appetite and “necessity” of marriage played a role in the assumption that the innocent party could remarry. In part, of course, such a judgment was based upon the exception Jesus himself makes in his teaching on divorce as Matthew 19:9 records it. Yet no such exception is stated in Mark 10:11–12 or Luke 16:18. St. Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7, in particular, makes clear that within the canonical writings themselves there is already a casuistry at work, attempting to take seriously (as Jesus had) God’s ordinance in creation while also reckoning (as Moses had) with the brokenness of sinful human life. Likewise, the Lutheran Reformers’ willingness to permit an innocent party to remarry was based not only on Jesus’ saying in Matthew but also on more general theological and ethical reflection. The Reformers took seriously the powerful human impulse toward marriage even among those previously married and now divorced—and so they set marriage as a remedy for sin against a blanket prohibition of remarriage.

If the church is to bear witness to the world about the meaning of marriage, it must continue to struggle with this tension today. In our eagerness to be compassionate and evangelical, we cannot abdicate the prophetic task of witnessing to God’s creation and ordinance. There will be no point in articulating an ideal or norm for marriage if in our practice we constantly disavow that norm. But at the same time, the rigorism of the prophet should not entirely overpower pastoral responsibility to hold out marriage—even for the divorced—as a place of healing and service.

In our attempt to live out this tension faithfully, we will not, I think, be able to argue convincingly that the adultery of one’s spouse constitutes the only permissible ground for divorce and remarriage.¹⁴ Even apart from such betrayal of the covenant, a marriage can die for reasons that are hard to delineate and that result from no one’s unilateral decision. If we should not hastily assume that this has happened in any given marriage, we should also not deny that it does sometimes occur. Or again, a divorced person who *was* in fact responsible for his or her divorce may no longer be able to amend or revive that broken marriage years later. Shall we say that the venture of marriage in which God schools us in the meaning of love is forbidden such a person? I don’t think so. As Oliver O’Donovan has written:

The church has to preach the good news that God provided a fish to swallow the rebellious Jonah, and that the fish spewed him out on dry land, at the right end of the Mediterranean, we may suppose, for a man who was headed for Nineveh. The very task that we have fled can be set before us again.¹⁵

There was also, however, a certain wisdom—the wisdom of seriousness—in the view that only innocent parties could remarry. Such a view took seriously guilt, the need for repentance and forgiveness, and the church’s prophetic responsibility to witness to God’s will for husbands and wives. In the time and place we inhabit, we owe the world—which includes, of course, the world within our congregations—such seriousness. If we are genuinely evangelical, we ought not give ecclesiastical blessing to the remarriage of divorced persons unless there has been repentance and acceptance of

responsibility for the breakdown of the earlier marriage, an earnest attempt to restore that marriage where it may be possible, and amends where they are possible. Moreover, unless the marriage service of previously divorced persons contains some form of confession and forgiveness, we have lost one half of the tension with which the Reformers struggled—and we have abdicated our responsibility to the world.

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There was a time when the tribunal appointed in the Roman Catholic Church to consider a request for annulment included both a lawyer representing the petitioner *and* a lawyer who was designated as “defender of the bond of marriage.”¹⁶ There is something profound in that recognition of the church’s dual responsibility—to make available marriage as a place of healing and service for the petitioner, and to bear witness to the creation and command of God. Exactly what structural forms this twofold responsibility ought to take among us it is not my task to say, but until we begin to talk about that question we have not taken seriously the witness and wisdom we have to offer the world about what we used to call the holy estate of matrimony.

IV.

Perhaps this has seemed too somber. We are, after all, talking about one of the great delights of human life. That does not make it any less serious, of course. Our culture has largely forgotten that when we give ourselves in the body, we give *ourselves*—our very person. And a culture that regards with casualness such giving of the body demonstrates thereby a certain dehumanization. No apology is needed, therefore, if we are serious. I have tried to underscore the vision of marriage we owe our world: it is a place of service—in which we minister to the needs of our spouse. It is a place of fulfillment and satisfaction—in which the spouse ministers to our need. It is a place of service—in which, by God’s blessing, we take up the task of sustaining human life and rearing the generation that will succeed us. It is a place of healing—in which our wayward appetites are disciplined, and we are taught what it means to devote ourselves in love to that one neighbor who is husband or wife. And in, with, and under all of these it is a bold and daring venture—to embrace time and, with God’s help, shape our future, to be as faithful to husband or wife as the Lord has been to his people Israel and as Christ has been to his bride, the church.

Not just to articulate this vision but to seek to live it within and for the world is both our duty and our delight. The delight is found precisely within the duty, as Chad Walsh so nicely expresses in one of his sonnets on eros and agape:

Hitchhikers are justified by faith through grace.
They do not work their way but wait their way
To the heavenly city. And the race
Is not always to the thumbs at dawn of day.
Many a thumb, at eventide extended,
Outdistances the prudent morning thumb.
This, in strict justice, cannot be defended,
But drivers deal the law of Kingdom Come.
The camera, my bank account, *Who's Who*
List no merits to claim you for my bed.
Faith rendezvoused with grace and I with you,
And good works followed, just as Luther said.
Here at the table, count them one by one:
Damaris, Madeline, Sarah, Alison.¹⁷

Not all of us are called by God to this venture, but many are. Here we serve the neighbor given us, the world is served, and God schools us for eternity. These goods—and these delights—cannot be ours or anyone else's unless our marriages are marked by fidelity. When they are, we can give ourselves gladly and confidently in our bodies, we can give and receive pleasure as God intends, we can marvel as the mystery of a child's person unfolds before us over time—and, together, we can embrace time, finding in our lives a coherence that is divinely fashioned and capable, therefore, of being offered back to God as our own sacrifice of praise. That is as joyous as life gets—and as serious as can be. Chad Walsh, once again, captured the joyful solemnity of human love touched by the fidelity of God in a poem to his wife:

Look at this moment hard so you will know it
When you meet it again. It has no clear
Artistic corners to mark it off and name it;
Yet it is yours; you must be set to claim it
How many thousand thousand years from here
When God at last will lastingly bestow it.

There is the broken fence I helped you over;
This locust tree—notice the blackened crown,
And the long rift that lightning left—this field
With limestone bones half dressed, revealed
Where little gullies eat the flesh; and down
The hill the milky way of faint white clover.

Look farther down, the chestnut lot is there.
Change is permitted there. The bones of blight
Shall be delivered from the foreign death.
The spirit is another name for breath,
And it shall breathe rough leaves and waves of white

Blossoms to break in spray on the blue air.

Between us and the trees of transient black
Mark well the little farmhouse and the smoke
That rises in a slowly widening wreath;
We shall not go to see who lives beneath;
Nor shall the ropeswing from the hovering oak
Take you from me and bring you laughing back.

All these can wait, but now look well and see
Not what I am in dreams or memories,
But as I am, remember me and keep
The memory through any age of sleep
So when you waken with the chestnut trees
You will not stand, a stranger, here with me.¹⁸

That image—of husband and wife embracing time in order to give their covenant a truly lasting future—is the bold and daring vision we have to offer the world.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the following: Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990); Barbara Defoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 271 (April 1993); and Daniel Goleman, “75 Years Later, Study Is Still Tracking Geniuses,” *The New York Times* (March 7, 1995): B5.
2. Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 88. In *Here I Stand* Roland Bainton entitled the chapter discussing Luther’s marriage “The School for Character.”
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 1: 175. Emphasis added.
4. Margaret Farley, *Personal Commitments* (NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 40.
5. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choosing a Sex Ethic: A Jewish Inquiry* (Schocken Books, 1969), 113.
6. George W. Forell, *The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 92–95.
7. Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Gene L. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.

8. Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Image Books, 1991), 153. See also Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 218: "The repudiation of monasticism was a reaffirmation of lay life as a central focus for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Luther marks their break in his own life by ceasing to be such a monk and by marrying a former nun."
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Publications, 1994), par. 1620.
10. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974), 304.
11. Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 89.
12. William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116."
13. Ozment, *Protestants*, 162.
14. Nor, in fact, did the Reformers. Ozment (*Protestants*, 163) notes that they generally permitted divorce and remarriage on five grounds: (1) adultery, (2) willful abandonment, (3) chronic impotence, (4) life-threatening hostility, and (5) willful deceit (e.g., about one's state prior to marriage).
15. Oliver O'Donovan, *Marriage and Permanence* (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1978), 20.
16. O'Donovan, 19.
17. Chad Walsh, "Twenty-Three Sonnets: Eros and Agape," *Eden Two-Way* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 48–49.
18. Chad Walsh, "For Eva My Wife," *The Unknowing Dance* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), 1.