

## Sanctifying Union: The Resacramentalization of Marriage as a Theological Horizon

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### Abstract

*This study undertakes a critical theological exploration of the resacramentalization of Protestant marriage, engaging with Luther's matrimonial theology and its implications for contemporary ecclesial and societal contexts. It posits that the sacramental elevation of marriage within Protestant traditions holds profound significance, mirroring the Trinitarian dynamic and fostering a renewed understanding of conjugal union as a conduit of divine grace. By examining scriptural foundations, historical theological perspectives, and contemporary socio-cultural realities, this research argues for the restoration of marriage's sacred character. The investigation delves into the multifaceted dimensions of sacramental marriage, highlighting its potential to cultivate ethical social conduct, contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, and promote ecumenical dialogue. It emphasizes the intrinsic link between marital sanctity and societal stability, advocating for a theological framework that underscores the indissoluble nature of the marital covenant. Furthermore, the study explores the Trinitarian implications of marriage, positioning it as a manifestation of God the Father, analogous to the Holy Spirit's role in baptism and Christ's in the Lord's Supper. This research posits that the resacralization of marriage offers a transformative vision for Protestant churches, fostering spiritual edification, strengthening communal bonds, and addressing contemporary societal challenges. By re-evaluating the sacramental nature of marriage, this study contributes to a renewed theological discourse, advocating for a unified Protestant perspective that resonates with the enduring values of the Christian faith. It asserts that the restoration of marriage's sacred character is not merely a theological exercise, but a vital contribution to the spiritual and social well-being of both church and society.*

### Keywords

Resacramentalization, marriage, trinity, ecclesial, Protestantism, sacrament, theology



### I. Introduction

A critical analysis of Martin Luther's matrimonial theology is undertaken. This study explores the profound dimensions of this theological construct, critically assesses its inherent challenges, analyzes its potential impact on Protestant marital praxis, and highlights the academic and societal implications stemming from such an in-depth investigation.

A re-examination of these theological precepts aims to cultivate a more profound comprehension of the intricate dialectic between the resacramentalization of Protestant

marriage, the critical engagement with Luther's doctrine, and the diverse theological perspectives that emanate from within the Protestant tradition.

The matter of marital resacramentalization extends beyond denominational boundaries within Protestantism, profoundly impacting its adherents. This concern, primarily, encompasses the entirety of the Protestant tradition, owing to the inherent diversity of theological perspectives therein. The redefinition of marriage within a sacramental framework engenders inquiries and debates that traverse all branches of Protestantism. (Gounelle, 1990)

Moreover, the resacramentalization of marriage holds transversal significance for all Protestants, due to its profound influence on both ecclesial and individual existence. It shapes communal marital attitudes, informs liturgical rites and practices, and reconfigures familial relationships. Consequently, this theological evolution is not confined to specific denominational viewpoints; rather, it constitutes a collective reflection that reverberates throughout the entire Protestant spectrum.

The incidence of divorce and infidelity has demonstrably increased within the past two decades, particularly within the European context. (Kontogiannis, 2024 ; Sobotka & Berghammer, 2021; Bracke et al., 2010). Statistical analyses of marriage and divorce rates substantiate this observed increase.

The core theological inquiry arising from this reflection centers on the appropriate sacramental placement of marriage within the Protestant Reformed tradition. This question necessitates a thorough analysis of the phenomenon termed 'the desacramentalization of Protestant marriage,' a matter that raises fundamental questions concerning the evolving beliefs and practices within Protestantism (Calvin et al., 2009). This inquiry presents a compelling perspective for deciphering the formative dynamics that have shaped the Protestant understanding of marriage."

## **II. Research Methods**

### **2.1 Materials**

The ramifications of this theological inquiry extend beyond doctrinal confines, posing consequential implications, which may be delineated by the following three points.

The inviolability and sacred character of marriage, as established by divine ordinance, must be preserved.

Scriptural testimony, as rendered in the Jerusalem Bible Version, affirms the divine institution of marriage. In the Genesis narrative, it is recorded that God, perceiving the solitary state of man, declared, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I must make him a helper to match.' Subsequently, from the rib extracted from man, Yahweh God fashioned woman and presented her to him (Gen. 2:18, 22). Furthermore, the Genesis account states that 'God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that creeps on the earth' (Gen. 1:27-28).

These scriptural passages articulate marriage as a divinely sanctioned union between man and woman, reflecting the *imago Dei*. This union is bestowed with divine blessing, intended for procreation, dominion over the earth, and the fulfillment of God's creative mandate.

The rationale for this assertion may be articulated as follows:

Primarily, divine intention posits marriage as a reflection of God's inherent goodness. The attributes of tenderness, love, and mutual joy, manifested within the marital union, serve to illuminate God's benevolent nature. Marriage, as a microcosm of divine society, is ordained to be characterized by reciprocal care, trust, peace, and security.

Secondly, divine purpose envisions marriage as a representation of the *imago Dei*. Within Jewish theological discourse, the 'face of God' signifies threefold aspects: divine presence, merciful salvation towards the beholder, and divine election (Alexander & Rosner, 2006).

While acknowledging the transcendent nature of God, who remains incomparable to any created entity (Ryrie & Doriath, 2005), the marital union is nonetheless imbued with divine significance. Marriage, reflecting the *imago Dei*, serves as a testament to God's presence.

The core values pertinent to marital integrity are herein addressed and rectified, with the objective of restoring the sanctity of marriage as divinely instituted, thereby enabling the marital union to once again reflect the goodness and image of God.

## **2.1 Methods**

### **a. Cultural and religious values:**

When marriage is considered a sacrament within a society, it engenders diverse social implications, contingent upon the prevailing cultural and religious values of that specific context. The following considerations illuminate these ramifications:

Sacramental marriage, often associated with the concept of a sacred and indissoluble covenant, can contribute to societal stability through the fortification of familial structures. (McGrath, 2015 ; Richie, 2017) This stability, in turn, may yield positive consequences for overall social equilibrium. Furthermore, the transmission of religious and moral precepts plays a significant role in shaping the character of succeeding generations.

The sacramental perspective on marriage possesses the potential to cultivate ethical and moral virtues within society. The religious doctrines inherent in sacramental marriage, such as fidelity, responsibility, and mutual respect, can foster a robust framework of social ethics. (O'Donovan, 2024)

The familial stability engendered by sacramental marriage may serve to mitigate social tensions arising from family dissolution (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010 ; Mahoney et al., 2003). Stable familial units are often perceived as a stabilizing influence within the broader social fabric.

Marital relationships founded upon sacred commitment can enhance the emotional well-being of individuals. (Mahoney, 2013 ; Ellison et al., 2011 ; Goldstein, 2007). This, in turn, can positively influence the mental and emotional health of society as a whole.

### **b. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a compendium of global objectives promulgated by the United Nations, seek to address a spectrum of social, economic, and environmental challenges by the year 2030. Marriage, as a foundational social institution, possesses the capacity to influence nine of these seventeen goals through diverse mechanisms.

- a. Regarding SDG 1: No Poverty, marriage may serve as a catalyst for poverty reduction by fostering economic stability and cultivating partnerships that facilitate the efficient stewardship of familial financial resources. (Fernandez-Vallado, 2025)

- b. Concerning SDG 2: Zero Hunger, familial units may contribute to food security through the promotion of collaborative management of food resources and the facilitation of access to sustainable livelihoods, such as the pooling of economic resources and the establishment of family-owned enterprises. (Mollier et al., 2017)
- c. In relation to SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, marriage may influence the health and well-being of individuals by providing emotional support and encouraging salutary lifestyle practices (Bodeker et al., 2020). Stable partnerships may also yield positive outcomes for mental health.
- d. With respect to SDG 4: Quality Education, marital unions may contribute to the quality of children's education by cultivating a stable familial environment that fosters learning and intellectual development. (Ydo, 2022 ; Barakat et al., 2016)
- e. Relative to SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, marital partnerships may influence economic expansion by facilitating the establishment of family-owned enterprises and promoting professional stability through reciprocal support. (Bachkirov et al., 2025 ; Sustainable family business, 2024)
- f. As regards SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, marriages predicated on equity and respect may contribute to the diminution of inequalities by fostering balanced familial relationships and combating discrimination based on gender or other factors. (Pervin et al., 2021)
- g. Bearing on SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Effective Institutions, marriages founded upon mutual respect and justice may contribute to social harmony. Indeed, stable familial units constitute a positive influence within the broader societal framework. (Schliesser, 2023)
- h. Linked to SDG 17: Partnerships for Achieving the Goals, marriage itself represents a form of partnership, thereby possessing the potential to foster cooperation, solidarity, and the attainment of sustainable development objectives. (Abou-Nigm & Albornoz, 2024)

### **III. Result and Discussion**

It is posited that a consensus exists among the majority of Protestants regarding the potential sacramental status of marriage. A theological argument may be advanced for the prohibition of divorce and remarriage, mirroring Catholic doctrine, save for exceptional circumstances, which warrant meticulous examination. However, any such theological evolution should proceed with measured and incremental steps.

The promotion of global peace is intrinsically linked to the regulation of marital and sexual conduct. Scriptural texts, such as Exodus 20:14, 17 and Deuteronomy 5:17-18, identify lust, rape, polygamy, and adultery as transgressions. These transgressions often engender delusion, cognitive impairment, and moral disorientation, as described in Deuteronomy 28. Such emotional and psychological stressors contribute to societal instability, a phenomenon observable across diverse global contexts. (Andriamanantsalama & Robijaona Rahelivololoniaina, 2024)

Demographic projections indicate that the global Christian population will surpass three billion by the year 2050. Scholarly studies, notably those conducted by the Pew Research Center, anticipate a significant augmentation of Christian adherents in the coming decades. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, is projected to witness a doubling of its Christian population, from 517 million to 1.1 billion. More moderate growth is anticipated in Latin America and the Caribbean (from 531 million to 665 million), Asia (from 287 million to 381 million), and North America (from 266 million to 287 million). By mid-

century, Christianity is expected to maintain its majority status in these regions, with projected adherence rates of 89% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 66% in North America, 65.2% in Europe, and 59% in sub-Saharan Africa, testifying to the enduring global presence and continued demographic significance of the Christian faith. (Johnson, 2016 ; Pew Research Center, 2013)

The implications of this study extend to the church's concern for the edification of its faithful, society's interest in promoting the well-being of its members, and the advancement of theological scholarship.

### **3.1 Divine Covenant: The Impact of Sacramental Marriage on Church and Society**

When Protestant ecclesiastical bodies recognize marriage as a sacrament, they ascribe a sacred and spiritual nature to this union. The interests of these bodies, within this perspective, center upon the faithful, encompassing the sacralization of the marital union, participation in divine life, the perpetuation of faith, stability and commitment, the edification of the ecclesial community, and the fostering of ecumenical dialogue.

#### **a. The sacralization of the marital union**

The sacralization of the marital union is achieved through the Church's recognition of marriage as a sacrament, thereby rendering the union between man and woman sacred. This perspective perceives marriage as a divine institution, established and blessed by God, transforming it into a visible sign of divine grace (Deheuvels & Paya, 2016). Marriage becomes a visible sign of divine grace.

#### **b. Participation in divine life**

Catholic theological doctrine posits that the sacrament of marriage facilitates spousal participation in divine life. Scriptural affirmation, as found in 1 Corinthians 7:14 (LSG), 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the brother,' supports the notion that marriage serves as a conduit for couples' spiritual growth and progression towards salvation and holiness. The narratives of Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3), Noah (Gen. 7), and Lot (Gen. 18) illustrate this concept.

#### **c. Perpetuating the faith**

Ecclesiastical institutions frequently regard marriage as a crucial element in the perpetuation of the faith. Christian families are considered foundational units of the Christian community, with marriage expected to play a pivotal role in the religious education of children. (Ratsimandisa et al., 2024)

#### **d. Stability and commitment**

By advocating for marriage as a sacrament, the Church seeks to cultivate stability and commitment within conjugal relationships. This stance reinforces the belief that marriage is a sacred and indissoluble covenant, consistent with its interpretation of biblical teachings. (Raharinosy & Robijaona Rahelivololoniaina, 2024)

#### **e. Building the church community**

Families established upon sacramental marriage are deemed essential components of the ecclesial community. The Church endeavors to foster robust and harmonious familial relationships, thereby contributing to the construction of a resilient Christian community. (Andriantsilaniarivo & Robijaona Rahelivololoniaina, 2025)

#### **f. Promoting ecumenism**

The sacramental recognition of marriage by Protestant churches fosters the potential for global ecumenical unity. The common ground shared with Catholic and certain Protestant denominations, such as Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists,

who already acknowledge marriage as a sacrament, provides a basis for the hope that all Protestant traditions may achieve a unified perspective on marriage.

The genesis of a novel doctrinal formulation constitutes a matter of profound interest within theological scholarship. Such an emergence presents a compelling occasion for the comprehensive exploration and elucidation of its consequential doctrinal implications.

### **3.2 Three sacraments illustrating the Trinity**

Within the Protestant tradition, the acknowledgment of baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments is established. However, the potential for a third sacrament, reflective of the Trinitarian structure, warrants theological consideration. This reflection explores the proposition that baptism manifests the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Supper reveals the work of the Son of God, and marriage illuminates the work of the Father, the source of love and all life.

The use of the term 'appears' acknowledges the simultaneous and unified action of the Trinitarian Persons. This relationship, while exceeding human comprehension, is approached within theological discourse through the concepts of the 'Tri-Unity of God' (Ryrie & Doriath, 2005) and the doctrine of Perichoresis. Perichoresis, a theological term derived from the Greek 'perichōrēsis' (περιχώρησις), signifying 'mutual circulation' or 'reciprocal indwelling,' articulates the intra-Trinitarian relationship, describing a perfect communion and interdependence wherein the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit 'indwell' one another, reflecting a co-eternal, co-equal, and consubstantial, yet distinct, existence (Ryrie & Doriath, 2005).

Primarily, baptism appears to manifest the operative presence of God the Holy Spirit. Scriptural discourse on baptism frequently emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role. The baptism of Jesus provides a paradigmatic example of this association. While John administered water baptism, the Holy Spirit's manifestation as a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) occurred during that event. Subsequently, at Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus experienced baptism by the Holy Spirit, evidenced by the appearance of tongues of fire (Acts 2:3 LSG). Furthermore, apostolic inquiries into the reception of the Holy Spirit at baptism, and the subsequent administration of rebaptism for the impartation of the Spirit's seal (Acts 8:17), underscore this point.

It must be affirmed that the other Trinitarian Persons are not excluded from participation in baptism. The Trinity, characterized by interdependence, co-eternity, and co-equality (Ryrie & Doriath, 2005), operates in unified action. Nevertheless, baptism, as a foundational sacrament within Christian tradition, is presented as a distinct manifestation of divine agency, particularly through the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the Lord's Supper appears to manifest the operative presence of God the Son. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is grounded in the remembrance of Jesus, the Son of God, as articulated in scriptural accounts: '... do this in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:24-25 LSG, Matthew 26:17-29). Jesus' salvific mission, symbolized by his sacrificial offering on the cross, serves as atonement for the sins of the world (John 3:16). This sacrificial offering assumes profound significance within each celebration of the Lord's Supper, rendering communion a living commemoration of Jesus and his redemptive work.

The theological discourse surrounding the Lord's Supper focuses upon the Blood and Body of Jesus, distinguishing it from the Father or the Holy Spirit. This sacramental act represents the new covenant established by God through the Blood and Body of His only Son: a vicarious atonement or expiation by substitution (Luther, 1520).

Thirdly, marriage appears to manifest the operative presence of God the Father. Within the marital union, God is perceived as the paternal source of life and the origin of all creation. Divine agency is discerned in the institution of marriage, established at the genesis of the world. God bestowed blessings upon the first couple, Adam and his wife, for the propagation of progeny and dominion over the earth (Genesis 2). Thus, God the Father is understood as the initiator of marriage, extending a paternal blessing upon the union.

#### IV. Conclusion

This study, having revisited the compelling theme of the 'Resacramentalization of Protestant Marriage' through the lens of Luther's theology, has undertaken a comprehensive analytical exploration. The research sought to delineate the grandeur of the marital concept, elucidate its inherent complexities, examine its potential ramifications, and underscore the academic and societal implications arising from this inquiry.

The study's significance lies in its capacity to transcend denominational boundaries within the Protestant tradition. The consideration of marital 'resacramentalization' reveals its profound influence across all Protestant branches, shaping marital attitudes, liturgical practices, and familial dynamics.

The central problematic addressed by this reflection centers on the theological orientation for the sacramental placement of marriage within the Protestant Reformed Church. Through an examination of the historical, theological, and cultural underpinnings of this perspective, fundamental questions regarding Protestant doctrines and practices were raised. The outcome yields a compelling insight into the formative dynamics of Protestant marital understanding.

Regarding the potential impact of this research, three primary points emerge. Firstly, the preservation of marital sanctity in accordance with scriptural precepts, aimed at restoring the foundational values of the matrimonial institution. Secondly, the anticipated reduction in infidelity and divorce rates through the adoption of a unified sacramental vision within Protestant communities. Finally, the promotion of global peace by mitigating social tensions associated with marital discord, thereby contributing to a more harmonious and secure society.

This study yields substantial benefits for ecclesiastical institutions, society, and theological scholarship. Ecclesiastically, it proposes a renewed sacramental vision of marriage, fostering spiritual edification, stability, and ecumenical dialogue. Societally, it promotes stability, ethical social conduct, reduced tensions, emotional well-being, and a contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. Theologically, the emergence of a novel doctrine surrounding marriage presents a compelling opportunity to explore doctrinal implications and re-evaluate the sacramental concept within a Trinitarian framework.

Therefore, this study aims to deepen the comprehension of the complex interplay between the 'resacramentalization' of Protestant marriage, the critique of Luther's doctrine, and the diverse theological perspectives within the Protestant tradition. By contributing to the intellectual discourse in this field, it stands as a significant contribution to contemporary theological research and a source of continued reflection on marriage within the Protestant community.

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