

# The Sanctity of Marriage

## Biblical testimony of the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships<sup>1</sup>

*God created them as man and woman* (Gen. 1:26).

The social and ethical foundations of the Western World have been shaped significantly by the biblical revelation about man being created in the image of God. This pertains also to marital relationship between husband and wife.

Yet these foundations have been shaken more and more in the last two centuries as modern society turned its back on the authority of the triune God and the moral standards laid out in His Word. Sadly the same applies to many Christian families and churches. This tendency of falling away has its peak in well known theologians and church leadership organs denying the commitment of marriage as the only form of sexual union. Instead they plead for recognition and blessing of alternative lifestyles – e.g. homosexual – and declare them as valid alternatives. These churches make themselves solicitors of a fatally flawed social historical development whose catastrophic effect is almost irreversible.

In view of the hesitance of many church leaders to powerfully impress the validity of God's instructions both in Law and Gospel, the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships feels obliged to rise to speak openly with the following testimony.

The Confessing Fellowships have done so before with statements on similar issues, thereby affirming the reliability of the Holy Scripture, especially in regard to the relation of the sexes and their divine purpose. At the same time we reject the statement that these claims are either not authentic or to be seen in a different cultural context or have even been falsely interpreted by the Church, thus calling for an adjustment to modern circumstances and new humanistic knowledge.

Beyond that we see our testimony as *a call to reflection, repentance and renewal in the power of God's grace.*

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<sup>1</sup> This document has been put together in connection with the German and Austrian Convention of Confessing Fellowships, which met in Schladming (Styria, Austria, on October 13 to 15, 1997). A preliminary abridged version was passed there with the title "*Schladming Declaration on the issue of marriage and alternative life styles*". It was published in issue 4/1997 of the magazine DIAKRISIS. This *unabridged version* represents a deeper theological edition of the "Schladming Declaration" and is aimed at a broader audience. It was passed in Kassel, Germany, on February 9, 1998 by the Steering Committee of the Conference of Confessing Fellowships within the Protestant Churches in Germany.

### I. Marriage in the doctrine of creation

1. When creating man in his image (Gen. 1:27) God put man and woman in relation to each other with equal personal worth but different in nature, and by establishing marriage He called them to a lasting union (Gen. 2:18-24; Mal. 2:14).
2. Marriage is the equivalent to the love relationship between God the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. Therefore man and woman realise the true dignity of their marital relationship by looking up to the triune God.
3. Being ordained by God Himself, marriage as "holy matrimony" is under His special blessing and His direction (Gen. 1:28). This implies the commission of the Church to bless the newly wed couple – after their solemn vows – by biblical exhortation, prayer and laying on of hands in the wedding ceremony before God and the congregation.

This is contradictory to the opinion that the Church may bless alternative life styles, too, although they are not in accordance to the special goal of marriage as established by God.

4. Man and woman are equal in respect to their mutual personal worth in the image of God in creation and redemption; however they are different in their specific sexual orientation and in the gifts and tasks connected with it, as well as their position to each other.
5. One of these differences is the appointment of the husband as the head over the wife (1 Cor. 11:3, 7; Eph. 5:21-25) which is deeply rooted in the divine triune relationship (God the Father as the head over God the Son). Consequently the man has the final responsibility in the shaping of life in family and Church, while the woman deliberately submits to him out of respect for his task as provider, which is to be carried out in loving devotion (1 Pet. 3:6a). This primal order is reflected in nearly all human cultures – even if in sinfully distorted form.  
This contradicts both the feminist thesis of the sexes being equal in nature and position, and beyond that, the feminist myth of the matriarch superiority of the woman over the man - a presumption which led to the upsurge of a post-Christian paganism.
6. When establishing marriage, God established it as monogamy (Gen. 2:21, 23). The nature of marriage is rooted in the specific sexual polarity of man and woman, and in the mutual completion of their vocation and gifting. This is incompatible to the concept of "open marriage" (several partners at a time) and the polygamous practice of successive marriages .  
Other forms of "marriage" like homosexual partnerships - be it between men or women - are also fundamentally contradictory to God's purpose of creation. Therefore they are under His most severe condemnation both in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) and New Testament (Rom. 1:26-28, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9f)
7. According to the divine purpose of creation the sexual urge given to man by God serves the multiplication of the human race (Gen. 1:28) and the physical and psychological love unity of the marriage partners (Gen. 2:24).  
It is a crass contradiction to this twofold purpose if the sexual urge is detached from marriage as a merely sensual satisfaction, as it happens in our modern times in the glorification of the pleasure principle as a supposed human right. Furthermore, the merely functional view of marriage in thinking of "roles" is contradictory to the personal love unity. Both faulty developments have dehumanising effects.
8. According to the original purpose of God the marital relationship between the spouses is lifelong (Mt. 19:6, 8). This fact is reflected in the affirmation and blessing of the marriage through the church wedding and its civil recognition by the state.  
Divorce is incompatible to this Christian understanding of marriage (Mt. 19:7-9), the same being true where marriage is replaced or augmented by non-binding relationships. The Bible calls these practices "adultery", "lewdness" or "prostitution" (1 Cor. 6:16-18).

## II. Marriage in the doctrine of salvation from sin

9. In the fall of man committed by the first human parents, matrimony as established by God suffered deep damage, because the fall itself was connected with disrespect to a commandment given to the spouses (the position of the man as the head; Gen. 3:6b, 17).
10. When man and woman turned away from God and His commandment, they lost the ability to love each other truthfully out of His love in mutual care and devotion (Gen. 3:12). The marital relationship became poisoned by distrust, unfaithfulness and exploiting egoism.
11. Together with the loss of his immediate knowledge of God man also lost the knowledge of his own nature in the image of God, which included the nature of his sexuality (Rom. 1:13-25). As a result of that it became an idol, which led to satisfying the urge in abnormal ways, e.g. homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27) and even more depraved perversions (Lev. 18:23-30). As a result man and woman fell under the foreign rule of Satan.
12. In the sermon on the Mount of Olives Jesus predicted the increase of the rebellion against God's law (*anomia*) during the last days (Mt. 24:12). At His return for judgement He will reveal entirely that, apart from greed and idolatry, it is the adulterous deeds which will exclude the one who committed them from the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Heb. 13:4a; Rev. 21:8).  
Thus the modern sex wave, at times even religiously sanctioned, can be interpreted as the sheer apocalyptic final stage of the outbreak of disobedience with its orientation towards lust, selfishness and excess (2 Tim. 3:1-3).
13. Jesus Christ confirmed the original order of creation for marriage in its unbreakable nature in word (Mt. 19: 6-9) and deed (Jn. 2:1-2, 11), placing it, by His act of salvation, on the basis of the new creation. – The apostolic church order follows the instruction of Christ (Heb. 13:4b; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).  
Therefore modern moral theology is mistaken and deceiving when it, making reference to Jesus' twofold commandment of love – at the same time neglecting others of His commands! – leaves the shaping of sexual relationships solely to the personal responsibility of the individual, making it an arbitrary choice.
14. Through His victory over sin on the cross Jesus Christ broke its enslaving power also in its adulterous effects (Jn. 8:34, 36), empowering His followers to a life of purity and truthful love (Gal. 5:22, 24; 1 Cor. 6:11-13, 19f).
15. Through the redemption from sin Jesus Christ has made it possible that every conscience, burdened by whatever sexual offence, may be relieved and that marriages which have been broken by severe guilt may be healed through mutual forgiveness (Tit. 2:11-14; Heb. 9:14).
16. Jesus Christ has established the unmarried state in relation to the kingdom of God as the only legitimate alternative life style apart from marriage (Mt. 19:12b).  
Thereby, as the apostle Paul goes on to explain, He has made it possible for those

who remain unmarried to serve Him in giving up their lives wholly to Him and by their deliberate abstinence to set a special reference to eternal values (1 Cor 7:32-34).

### III. Marriage in the doctrine of the community of saints

17. Through Christ becoming human, the order of marriage founded in creation has gained a deeper interpretation and has thus become part of the order of salvation. The apostle Paul describes marriage (Eph. 5:32) as a divine mystery which reflects the loving relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church redeemed through His blood (Eph. 5:25-28). Christian marriage and family thus form a foothold for God's plan of salvation.  
Therefore any sociological attempts to classify marriage solely as one form of partnership in human life among others is completely inappropriate as a frame of reference for church and theology.
18. The Church of Christ as "Family of God" offers a special right of belonging to marriage and family, thus promoting its own purpose. The shaping of homely relationships may take its example in the apostolic church order (Eph. 5:23-24), especially in view of the analogous *kephalee* (head) structure. Man and woman should recognise their authority and submission, respectively, as the equivalent to the relationship of Christ to His Church and take it seriously in mutual respect (1 Cor. 11:7-9). Consequently, the husband will accept his sacrificing task to devote himself lovingly to his wife, as the wife will gladly respect her husband's authority and submit to his leading voluntarily and joyfully.  
Therefore we oppose "Christian feminism" which is spreading even in evangelical circles. Under the false interpretation of Gal. 3:28 it claims the exchangeability of the sexes and their roles in family and church.
19. The mutual service of *love* between the spouses has its source in the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church (1 Cor. 6:19). He also represents the inter-Trinitarian bond of love between God the Father and the Son, love being His fruit (Gal. 5:22).  
Hence the answer to the modern marriage crisis lies in the fact that the Church with all its members is being filled with the sanctifying and life bringing power of the Holy Spirit. This will also empower it to be a witness in a more and more perverted environment.
20. Any ministry in the Church (as a bishop, pastor and deacon) not only involves giving professional instructions, but moreover the holders of such offices are called to carry the special responsibility of serving the Church through the sanctification of their lives and the right conduct of their marriages and families as an example in Christ (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:3).  
Only under these circumstances can they credibly fulfill the current, especially urgent task of caring for the institution of marriage and family by pastoral care in conjunction with professional counselling and in educating their congregations in Christian living (1 Tim. 4:16).  
Therefore it is unacceptable to church governments and to congregations if, by a recent trend, even pastors are practicing a life style with changing sexual or with homosexual partnerships, claiming this to be private affairs with no concern to the church as such.

21. The life of the local church is being stimulated and unfolded through the special gifts of grace with which the Holy Spirit equips the members for various ministries. In this way those talents of men and women which are specific to their sex can be rediscovered and made fruitful (Mt. 28:1-10; 1 Tim. 2:10, 15; 5:3-16). According to Paul the state of deliberate bachelorhood or virginity is also a divine gift (1 Cor. 7:7). This is being overlooked where women claim their supposed rights in the Church in an equalising manner and take over offices which are distributed to men according to the apostolic order (1 Cor. 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:12). Here the special blessing is not being acknowledged which the Holy Spirit has given to the Church, and hence to the world – and which He wants to give continuously – by using in His service especially the female and motherly gifts of the woman (Lk. 1:48; Mt. 26:13; Acts 18:26; 1 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:5).
22. In the Church of Jesus Christ we are given *means of grace* through the Word and the sacraments in order to bring our sinfully distorted lives, our disordered thoughts and emotions, and especially our damaged marriages under the healing power of the Holy Spirit.
23. In the sacrament of baptism, the "washing of regeneration" (Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5), our old sinful man died with the crucified Christ, and we shall be raised with Him to live a new life (Rom. 6:1-11). Accepting this renewing process in faith and with the help of counselling and therapy, even people with a homosexual tendency can experience a transformation of their existence and find a new life style in accordance with the order of God (1 Cor. 6: 9, 11). Regular *confession* will continuously assure them of the forgiveness of their sins – including those in thoughts and fantasies! The *Lord's supper*, too, will assure them of their lasting partaking in Christ. This promise has been confirmed by many of today's experiences, and thus defeats the "*dogma*" of the irreversibility of homosexual tendency which has often been accepted even by the Church.
24. In a society depraved by the demonic *zeitgeist*, the vocation of the Church is to be the model of ethical orientation and the source of healing influences by its testimony through the word and its entire Christ-like conduct of life (Mt. 5:13-16). Therefore the Church must not adapt to the world and its permanently changing values (Rom. 12:2). Rather she must remain with the eternally lasting "*Word of Life*" (Phil. 2:15-16), out of which she has been created herself.

### *Appeal*

We have presented both the dimension of the perilous decay of the traditional order of marriage and family, and also the lasting validity of the biblical witness about the God initiated relationship between man and woman. Therefore we address the clerical and worldly public with a call of admonishment:

- We address the *church governments*: Exercise your pastoring and teaching ministry, especially in regard to marriage and family, on the basis of the Scripture and the creeds! Resist with authority every attempt (even in synods) to devaluate these Biblical commandments by recognising and blessing "*alternative life styles*" - such as homosexual and free partnerships.

For a church which gives up the Biblical order at this crucial point, also gives up its apostolic basis and thus excludes itself from the fellowship of the *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia*, the Church of the Nicene Creed.

- We address the *state governments and legislative organs*: Don't let the institution of marriage and family which have been so far protected by the Basic Constitutional Law, get undermined any further! Rather strengthen them through suitable social programs which secure the protection of marriage and family, e.g. by a substantial re-distribution of burdens for the benefit of families.
- We address *artists* and those responsible for the *media*: Don't give yourself away as instruments of a sexual and moral disintegration leading up to the dissemination of pornography! We encourage you to perform a determined about-face, considering the fatal consequences of the already unleashed "superpower sexuality" (Christa Meves) - leading up to murderous child abuse!
- We address *schools* and *teachers*: When teaching the subject of sex education, respect the standards of Christian ethics as much as the sense of shame of the pupils! Respect the predominant responsibility of the parents by sharing this task with them wisely.
- We address the Christian *parents* themselves: In educating your children, accompany their awakening sexual consciousness sensitively! Most of all, prepare them by your own example for their future task as married men and women.
- We address the *office holders and workers*: In sermons, counselling, teaching and service to the needy, encourage the care of marriage and family according to Biblical commandments!
- Finally we address those immediately concerned, the *married couples and those preparing to get married*: Don't let your sexual relationships be determined by the distorted spirit of this time. Take your orientation solely from the unchangeable order of God. Confidently claim healing in the grace given by Jesus Christ where faulty behavior has damaged your life! Let yourself be touched by His love again; for it *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...* (1 Cor. 13:7-8)

**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes. 5:23)**

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