

Jamaica Coalition for a Healthy Society & the Lawyers Christian Fellowship, Jamaica
International Conference on Human Rights:
International Law and the Welfare of the Family
December 2013. Kingston, Jamaica

Rev Earl Thames:

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS – Past, present and future

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Very early in my Christian career, before I even thought of becoming a Minister, a critic of the Christian religion asked me the trick question – “Who married Adam and Eve, since there was no other human being around? I can remember that although I was only a teenager, my answer was immediate - “God.” That question mirrors the mistaken concept that most people have concerning Marriage, that is, that it is a human institution.

It is not. Marriage is a Divine institution. Not only Adam and Eve, but every person who enters into an authentic marriage has been married by God. The words of the Christian Marriage Ceremony are deeply true –“Whom God has joined together, let not man put apart.” Most persons forget that these words are not human words. They were said by the Person who claimed to be the Son of God, or rather, God the Son, the one who created Marriage (see Matt.19:4-6).

This institution which was coterminous with the creation of woman, is an integral part of the created order (Gen.2:21-24). Through this institution, God ensured the continuation of human life in the world. There is no doubt that the first and foremost purpose of Marriage is for the procreation of the human species. Other created things such as plants and even animals such as the amoeba, can reproduce without a union of male and female. But not so human beings. Although there now exists the method of procreation by artificial insemination, even that process necessitates material from male and female human beings.

In other words, the very existence of the human race is based on the fact of male and female persons. It is however significant that originally, when the two genders were created, there was no specific definition as to how many of each gender should be involved in the union called marriage. As a demonstration of the way that the male sought to ensure the gratification of his sexual desires as against those of the female, he immediately interpreted the intention of God to mean that he could unite with as many of the female species as possible under what he called

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“Marriage!” From the earliest times, polygamous Marriage has distinguished every religion, including that of “God’s people” the Jews. In fact, they went further and legitimized unions involving sexual activity outside of marriage, by approving of “concubines.” This was done despite the commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” And so the adulterer was usually the woman, not the man! This continued into so-called civilized society, as it was expected that every young man would “sow his wild oats” that is, have sexual relationships with many women, before settling down to marry a woman. Not so however, the young woman. Her whole reputation was at stake, and since an indiscretion often resulted in a visible effect – pregnancy, many lives of the female gender were ruined.

It was Jesus who put an end to this injustice by giving a new interpretation to the words concerning Marriage contained in Genesis 2:24 “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” Jesus transformed human society and especially Marriage by simply adding one word to that sentence – the word “two.” Jesus said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” (Matt.19:5). Thus was monogamous Marriage instituted. The male was not free to unite with as many females as he desired. The new commandment of Jesus was – one man, one woman.

It should be mentioned that the only other person to even suggest such a form of Marriage was the Roman philosopher, Marcus Aurelius. For him it was a mere possibility. For Jesus, this was God’s original design. Not many ladies realize that this is what has transformed the status of women in the world. It was Jesus who did it. By restricting the number of women whom a man could call a wife, He gave women a new status in society. Women began to be regarded as more than “playthings” or child-producers. Their value and status have increased progressively with the years.

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In many Western societies, today, women are regarded as at least equal to men. Not so in societies which are non-Christian, such as Islamic societies. The Moslem religion allows a man to have four wives and so women are still striving for recognition in these societies. In these societies, a woman can still be stoned to death for adultery. Not so the man. Monogamous or polygamous Marriage therefore determines to a great extent, the status of women in a society.

But this restriction by Jesus, has had more far-reaching consequences. The Book of Leviticus in Chapter 18 had set out the relationships between men women and animals which were prohibited. These extended from incest within the family, to relationships between persons of the same sex and animals. A close examination of these prohibitions reveals that the aim was to preserve and “put a fence” around Marriage. Any sexual act outside of that in the Marriage relationship, was sinful. When the word “Marriage” had a wide interpretation, many activities and relationships could be entered upon without their being regarded as “sins.” So Solomon could have 700 wives and 300 concubines, and not be considered an immoral man. Since the commandment of Christ, however, the situation has changed dramatically.

In Christian societies, anyone who enters upon a Marriage ceremony with more than one person is guilty of a crime – bigamy! This has also meant that all sexual unions except those with a married partner, are sinful. Christ has therefore narrowed the concept of Marriage to a union between two persons of the opposite sex, who ought to complement each other and so be in fact, “one flesh,” That this was the original intention of God at Creation has been made clear by the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 5:28-31 where he declares that the husband ought to love his wife “as his own body.” This is not metaphorically speaking. He is making reference to the seemingly humorous story in Genesis 2:21-23 where it is said that God created woman by taking a rib out of man and clothing that rib with flesh.

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The story is not humorous. Like other records in Genesis, it is declaring a truth in “picture” language, that is, that in Marriage, the two persons are in fact, parts of the same body – one flesh. The oneness of the Marriage union is meant to be real, not metaphorical. This oneness is realized or consummated in the sexual act which symbolically joins two people together physically. In 1 Corinthians 6:16 Paul shows that this is true even if one person is a prostitute! “What, know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? for two, saith he, is one flesh.” Marriage and the sex act, have therefore been linked by God. As such they are sacred and should never be treated lightly, much less abused.

This does not exhaust the significance of the Marriage union, because the two opposite genders, unite to create children. It is significant that in Ephesians, Paul goes directly from statements concerning husbands and wives, to statements concerning parents and children. Chapter divisions in the Bible are purely artificial and were not in the original documents. So Chapter 6 in respect of parents and children is a continuation of Chapter 5 in respect of husbands and wives.

The crucial truth therefore is that it was God who created the family - husband, wife and child. This is the basic unit of human society. Because the family is the place in which relationships between human beings are most intimate, it provides the model for relationships between human beings in the wider society. The state of society depends greatly on the state of the family. The love, consideration and care for others, has to be experienced in the home before it can be experienced in the society. Even in those situations where there is an “extended family,” relationships have to be first established within that extended family before they will be reflected in the wider society, which is, in a certain sense, an extended family. It is therefore true that human society is largely conditioned and determined by what takes place in the family. In other words, the family is the basic unit and model of society.

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It is against this background that we can now examine what is taking place in the world in our day, that is, the present situation. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are witnessing an all-out attack on every aspect of the relationships between the sexes, especially as these relationships were originally ordained by God in Marriage and the family. There is a retreat from, almost a rebellion against, God's design for Marriage, the family and human society.

First, The Abuse of the Sex Act

It has been said that the Christian Faith fails to recognize the sexuality of human beings. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Judaeo-Christian religion accords a very high place to children, to love between the sexes and to the sex act. A Child is regarded as a gift from God and the sex act through which a child is produced, is so exalted that a whole book of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, is devoted to describing its beauty. It should be mentioned that the Christian religion recognizes this act as more than a means of procreation. It is also a source of pleasure and comfort to male and female and a demonstration of love in Marriage, as the Song of Solomon and 1 Corinthians 7: 4-5 unashamedly declare. But more, the love between a husband and his wife though not regarded as equal to the love of God in Christ, is used as the model for the relationship between Christ and His Church, in both Ephesians and the Book of the Revelation. In Ephesians 5:25 it is stated, "Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it." In Revelation 21:2, it is stated, "I, John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

What riles the human critic is the fact that this wonderful act is explicitly reserved for and restricted to, Marriage. Persons have always attacked this restriction. But the modern attack begins by rejecting the first "fence" protecting this act, that is, clothing. Because God knew the

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power of lust, and that sin would lead not only to the decline of the spiritual aspect of man, but to the intensification of the animal aspect of man, He deliberately changed the clothing of the first human beings. Genesis 3:21 states that God replaced fig leaves, which revealed the human body, with coats of skins, which concealed the human body. This was to reduce lust, the precursor and motivator of the sex act.

Modern fashions have reversed the process. Clothing, especially for women, now reveals the human body in ever increasing degrees. Lust is thus encouraged and facilitated. Hence the rapid increase in teenage pregnancies and rape. As the female body is more and more exposed there is no restriction of the sex act among young and old. Women as well as men can now “sow their wild oats” freely. Marriage is not necessary.

This removal of the sex act from Marriage has therefore devalued the act. It need not be motivated by love but merely by self gratification - lust. Naturally, this removal of the sex act from Marriage has also resulted in the devaluation of Marriage itself. One can “have it all and not get hitched,” to quote from the play, My Fair Lady. The abuse of the sex act has therefore meant the abuse of Marriage, as almost every television soap opera shows. Adultery as well as fornication is now committed ad lib! That this has had serious repercussions on society is obvious. As more and more teenagers become mothers, the discipline of children has decreased, purity is now mocked, and moral standards are now discarded. As adultery is no longer frowned on, Marriage vows are no longer sacred. Modern society is now said to be “permissive,” a euphemistical way of saying, immoral.

The next step followed as night follows day – it does not matter with which gender one has the act – a male or a female. Since God and His commandments are now disregarded, the

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prohibitions of Scripture do not matter, despite the visible punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah by God! See the records of Gen 19, Jude 7, and Rev. 11:8.

Secondly, the Reconstituting of Marriage

Since God has been left out of the reckoning, and nature abhors a vacuum, it was only natural for human beings to create their own concept of Marriage - one based not on love but on self gratification. The “alternative life-style “ allows a person to marry another person of the same gender – male with male and female with female. Homosexuality is not new. But what is new is that such unions are now institutionalized and formally recognized as valid “Marriages.”

This recognition is not only by the state but also by some Churches! There are now practicing homosexual Bishops and Moderators. The God-ordained link between the sex act and monogamous Marriage between persons of the opposite sex has therefore been broken, rather annulled. God’s plan and design has been replaced by a human institution and design.

Not many advocates of this “alternative life style” have realized the serious and eventually disastrous implications of this new design.

First, **its implications in respect of the procreation of children.** This new design cannot produce children. For purely physical reasons, neither the union of two males, nor that of two females can produce children. Should this design become the norm therefore, it will mean the ultimate end of the human race. But someone will object and say, “Children can be produced by test-tubes, or there can be artificial insemination.” Those who suggest this as the solution forget that both test tube babies and those produced by artificial insemination require a donor other than the homosexual couple. Either the sperm or the egg, or both, have to be obtained from outside the union. In fact, a homosexual couple can only adopt a child. They cannot produce a child. The continued existence of the human race is therefore in jeopardy.

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If the homosexual couple adopts a child, the life in society of such adopted children is fraught with problems. Such children would have either two fathers, or two mothers. Except by some contrivance, such children could not have both a father and a mother. One can imagine the problems to be faced by such children at school, in civic registrations, in employment procedures, and in marriage. In fact, an initial question would be – from which partner will the child obtain his or her “Surname?” Which partner will be regarded as the father of the child? Society will have to undergo mammoth changes to accommodate such children.

Secondly, **the legal implications of such unions.** It has been suggested that as regards property rights, the same rules would apply to homosexual marriages as those pertaining to heterosexual marriages. At first this sounds plausible, but on deeper examination, there are serious problems. For instance, in a case of divorce, the wife has special property rights. However, in a homosexual Marriage, which partner is the “wife?” Will this be determined by the couple at the commencement of the Marriage? If so, will it be illegal to change one’s mind during the Marriage? What seemed simple at first has already begun to assume complex proportions in actual cases of divorce. In the USA a divorce of same sex couples can only be granted by a state which accepts same sex marriages. Many same sex couples are now in a legal quandary because one has to be resident in the particular state for one year before such divorce proceedings can be brought. Again, if a person marries again without such a divorce will the person be guilty of polygamy or worse, bigamy? If such unions multiply, society would seem to be heading towards nothing short of chaos.

Thirdly, **the implications for the family.** In Jamaica there is already an increasing social problem because in most homes there is no “father.” Research has shown that this is one of the main causes of the spiraling crime rate in the island. The disciplining of older teenage boys tends to demand a father, rather than a mother or grandmother. “My mother who fathered me,” though

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highly commendable, is leading to increased crime and the destruction of the Jamaican society. The tragedy is that there are also serious social effects when there is no “mother” in the home. The psychological development of children, especially girls, demands a mother. The irremediable weakness of same sex unions is that of necessity, they are either motherless or fatherless. There is no real family.

Whether this is admitted or not, the new human design does not promote the family. Even if one includes adopted children, the family is incomplete – at least one important member is missing. As such it is an inadequate unit on which to base society. Should same sex marriages multiply, they could lead to the destruction of what we now know as civilized society. Could this be why Sodom and Gomorrah suffered divine destruction? It may have been a Divine attempt to nip this destructive force in the bud! In God’s view, same sex unions are destructive of Marriage, the family and human society. Should we therefore, attempt to join together those whom God has put asunder?

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