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“International Law, Development and the Family: The Family as a strategy for Development

THE THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE FAMILY – Rev. Earl Thames

It is remarkable what some philosophers have said about the family. Socrates, according to Plato in the Republic, declared that a just city is one in which citizens have no family ties. The Russian American rationalist and individualist philosopher Ayn Rand, states that views which favour consanguinity, that is, blood relationship, are a small scale manifestation of racism. She therefore favours a child-free life-style. Both of these philosophers fail to understand the importance of the family in God’s design for humanity. They have no firm conviction about God. It is with this conviction about God and about His design for humanity that we must begin as we examine the importance of the family.

God, say the Scriptures, is love. When He decided to create man, the Scriptures declare that He made man “in His own image.” This was not His physical image because God is Spirit. Man was created therefore in the spiritual image of God. This means that man was created to reflect the image of God. Man was therefore created a loving, caring being. But the main characteristic of love is that it is “other-regarding.” For love to operate, it must have an object to love. So we find these significant words coming from God – “ It is not good for the man to be alone. “ This is a truth which has been recognized by poets and psychologists alike –

No man is an island,
No man stands alone.

Psychology has long ago recognized that the human being is in danger of serious mental disorders if left alone for any extended period of time. A theologian puts it this way – We are saved singly, but we cannot exist solitarily! As a species of life, it is not good for a man to be alone. Man is a corporate being. So God gave him a companion, an object of love. “I will make a helpmeet for him.” It is a record of history that this helpmeet was not another man. No.

Although taken out of the body of a man, this helpmeet was called woman. This new person was not to duplicate the man but to complement the man. Doctors confirm that physically, the sex organs of man and woman exactly fit or complement each other. This regrettably is not true of homosexual unions because, as doctors confirm, the anus is an outlet not an inlet. Hence, the susceptibility of homosexuals to AIDS. But the complementarity between the man and the woman is not only physical. It has been confirmed that this is also psychological and emotional.

While the man is strong and often harsh, the woman is the gentler person. It is this complementarity which gives balance to many a home and family. Emotionally too, men and women react differently to most situations. The man and the woman were made to fit each other.

The creation of the woman from the rib of the man is not without significance. In Ephesians 5:28-29 we read, So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself, for no man ever yet hated his own flesh but nourisheth and cherisheth it. The woman was part of the man's own body. This is exactly what Adam said on the creation of woman in Genesis 2:20 -This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. The husband is therefore to love his wife as he loves his own body, for she is a part of his own body! Why am I emphasizing this? Because this love of the man for the woman was the first manifestation of the image of God in human beings. The love of husband and wife is a manifestation of the love of God, the Nature of God, for God is love.

But the relationship between husband and wife went deeper than this, because, says Jesus, in Matt. 19: 6, "They are no longer two but one flesh." This unique unity is made real and visible by the sex act. It is Paul who makes this abundantly clear in 1Corinthians 6:16 by stating the consequences of a man having sexual relationships with a prostitute - Know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? For two, he says, that is Jesus, shall be one flesh. This is why the only ground of divorce for Jesus is sexual immorality outside of the Marriage. The sex act therefore makes the union and breaks the union. The love between the two, as a reflection of the love of God, must be faithful. But the sex act is not only for the uniting of a man and a woman.

Its purpose is even greater than that. By this act, human beings cooperate with God in Creation itself. From that union, comes another life, another human being, a child. This is the origin of the family. It is not a merely human institution. It is the manifestation of the love of God carried to its deeper purpose. Beginning with the love of husband for the wife, it reaches its further fulfilment in the procreation of children. It was God who said to the first human beings, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. This gives the lie to those who believe that the first sin was the sex act. Sex and the family were ordained by God.

There is no doubt that there are many varieties of family structures. There are families with one parent, extended families inclusive of relatives, families without any children. But there is no doubt that the main design of God was for a family consisting of a husband, a wife and children, the so-called “nuclear family.” May I add, that originally it was not a husband and a wife but a husband and many wives. Who changed the picture? It was Jesus – by adding one word to the words in Genesis. The word in Genesis says, Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh. Jesus added one word - the word “two.” Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they two shall be one flesh. Thus was monogamous Marriage introduced into the world. Despite polygamous practices in every country including Israel, it is clear that monogamy was God’s original design – one man, one woman and a child or children. The manifestation of the love of God was now not only between husband and wife, but also between parents and children. What then is the family? It is the unit of love and care in human society.

But we must add another dimension. Children do not enter the world as mature adults. No, children are born as weak, helpless beings dependent on others for their very existence. Just as birds, and other animals, a child needs a nest, a safe place in which to be nurtured. The family is not only the unit of care. It is the nest, the place of nurture, in which the child is developed into a mature human being. This has become more important as psychologists now declare that the most formative period in a human being’s life is between the ages of 1-6 years. Most of the traits which will influence the adult life of the child are formed during these years. The home and family are therefore the first training ground, the first school for the young life. But it is not only the physical, mental and psychological life of the child which is developed in

the family. The spiritual and moral life of the child are also nurtured in the family. So in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 when God gave his commandments He said, These words which I command you this day shall be in your hearts and you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thy house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up. The home and family is the first Church for the young life.

If I may digress for a moment, it is because most of the families in Jamaica have ceased to be the first school and the first Church to young lives, that such a large percentage of the criminals in our prisons are below the age of 30 years. If Jamaica is to progress, the family needs to recover its role as being the first school and first Church in the society.

To appreciate the vital importance of the family, can you imagine what human life would be like if there were no family? Human beings could exist on the face of the earth as a gathering of millions of superior animals. But they would be no different from other animals as they competed for space in which to live. It would be a case of survival of the fittest, unless the mass of human beings was divided into smaller entities. Hence the emergence of countries - peoples separated by natural boundaries such as rivers, mountains etc. But there would still be competition and conflict among the people within the same country. There would be the necessity of still smaller units, hence the emergence of tribes, people whose affinity is based on physical features or language. But even within the tribes there would be competition and conflict.

Hence the necessity for still smaller units. Within the tribe there could emerge associations of people based on common interests, skills etc. – farmers, masons, musicians, merchants. But despite these associations of people there would still be the demand for a smaller unit. What would be missing? A unit of protective, personal care - the family. Humanity demands the family to exist. If there were no family, it would be necessary to invent it. God, the Creator of humanity knew this. That is why He, not us, designed the family. It is with deep concern and regret that we are witnessing in our time, a rejection of, a turning away from, and revised versions of, the family.

We are also witnessing the gradual disintegration of Marriage; the gradual disintegration of social relationships, as murders are now being committed even in schools; the gradual disintegration of international relationships, as a Third World War utilizing nuclear weapons seems to be on the horizon. This could mean the wide scale destruction of human life – the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Book of Revelation that a third of the world will eventually be destroyed. Could it be that these are the consequences of the rejection of God’s design of the central unit of human caring and human relationships – the family? Whenever God’s design is rejected there are consequences. Could it be that we are now living in the time of consequences?