

Matrimony and Family

– in the Bible

– historically

- *in the Catholic Church*

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Biblical Account

Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife, lived in the Garden of Eden. The Lord set them merely two tasks: to multiply through the sex act and to exert dominion over the rest of His creation. Truly paradisiacal conditions! Had it not been for the free will granted the married couple and the ban to eat from a certain fruit.

After Adam and Eve had been created and had become conscious of their existence, their nakedness did not embarrass them as they had direct contact to the Lord. For some reason, however, they distanced themselves from God's presence. The Lord either wanted to test them, or it was the Sabbath and the Lord rested, or Adam and Eve simply did not try to be close to Him through prayer, thanksgiving or praise.

Satan instantly exploited their separation from God to seduce them into disobedience. Thus the couple lost the Garden of Eden and its paradisiacal conditions. The consequences, and yet also the remedy for Adam and Eve and their descendants, were: a limited lifespan, hard, arduous labour, physical suffering and hardship, lust and competition between the sexes as a result of the proclaimed supremacy of the males which was not accepted by various groups during some eras.

This failed married couple now produced the first family. The first

fruit of their union was the son who later committed fratricide. Thus the failed spouses produced a dysfunctional family. Time passed, mankind multiplied and, once numbers permitted, Lamech was the first to take two wives. Later many men took several wives. The women, on the other hand, lay with God's sons – whoever they had been – and gave birth to their children. A connection to the afterlife, for good or evil, was apparently more real and intensive back then compared to today.

Historical Development

Following further historical adversities (the Great Flood, the building of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent confusion of languages), the families populated the Earth anew. The connection to the Creator, the acknowledgment of His authority and the obeisance of the laws He had issued through Noah dwindled increasingly. After a long time, Abraham was the first man who was meant to bring mankind closer to the Lord again through God's mercy and leadership as well as his own example of faith and obedience.

Abraham had long lived in a marriage which had not produced any issue, but the Lord promised him offspring. Nothing happened for a long time and Sarah, his wife, after she had also failed to get pregnant during their stay at Pharaoh's court, advised him to impregnate the Egyptian Hagar in order to have children through Hagar as surrogate mother. Abraham complied and Ishmael was born. But for the Lord this son was only His second choice or His choice for later times. Thus it ensued that through God's miracle at an advanced age Sarah bore Isaac who was intended to provide the link between Abraham and Israel (Jacob). With several concubines Abraham did, however, sire more children whom he sent away with gifts in order to secure Isaac's inheritance. Abraham – the father of the monotheistic religions – lived in polygamy and consequently males of the following generations also increasingly took several wives. The custom became a matter of course, but there were also

exceptions. It is therefore not surprising that the Lord, through Moses, issued laws regarding matrimony and family which accepted this reality yet also regulated it. Moreover, the recommendation was: He (the king) must not take many wives. (Deuteronomy 17:17)

The husband owed all his wives support and sexual intercourse. The women were to provide the progeny. One could say that the males were the Ministers of Foreign, Economic and Financial Affairs whereas the females were responsible for the Ministries of the Interior, Food, Education and Family. Adultery was prohibited, incest was prohibited, intercourse between men was prohibited, coupling of women with beasts was prohibited as well as many other possible forms of debauchery. Divorce was also regulated and so was the remarriage of divorcees. Thus Israel could lead a secure and regulated existence, could prosper and set an example for other peoples from Moses' desert crossing up to King David. Let us take a closer look at this king.

David led the nation of Israel to its historical zenith with regard to its territory, power and prestige. He was a courageous, even reckless, moody and in every respect passionate man. This passion frequently led to conflicts. He loved God above all, but easily succumbed to his desires, which resulted in several tragedies. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, who subsequently became pregnant, he had her husband assassinated in order to live with his lover. This way he was able to cover up his adultery in the eyes of mankind but not before God. Through the prophet Nathan the Lord showed him his wrongdoing and David, who loved and feared God, immediately admitted and regretted his sins. This saved his life and his position, but the evil consequences of his wrongful act would accompany his House and his descendants from then on while he was powerless to intervene. He tried to live a better life, became calmer, quiet and pious, especially after the tragedy resulting from the arbitrarily ordered census and the death of his son Absalom. He also intended to build a temple in Jerusalem for his Lord in whom he so intrinsically trusted. But after procuring building materials, stone,

timber, gold, silver, bronze and also the necessary drawings, sketches and plans, God did not permit him to go ahead as David had “too much blood on his hands”.

Despite his bloodshed and adultery, David is the most obvious example of the love for and devotion to God since Abraham and Moses. His wives, his great successes, his power and prestige never once tempted him to behave arrogantly or indifferently towards the Lord. He was always a repentant sinner who readily admitted to his wrongdoings. One could say that he was a wild, untamed individual, simple, hot tempered, vengeful but also caring, choleric but also deeply religious; as such he became the Lord’s favorite, exemplary of the closeness between God and man. It is interesting that despite David’s adultery with Bathsheba the Lord wanted their mutual son Solomon, of all people, as the successor to the throne. This means God accepted David’s penitence and atonement as well as his entire character and continued to believe in him.

His son and heir to the throne was very different to David – obedient, peace loving, straightforward and, most importantly, wise; he was one of the wisest individuals in history. His great popularity and his renown as well as hundreds of wives were his weak points which even all his wisdom and piety could not counteract. For his many foreign wives he built temples and altars to their foreign gods and permitted their worship and sacrificial offerings in their honour in Israel. His open-mindedness, his religious tolerance and his flexibility made him the first “multicultural” ruler of Israel and in the world.

The children of such a famous and respected father could learn a lot from their sires, just like Solomon’s son and successor Rehoboam. Accustomed to have his every wish indulged, he ostentatiously proclaimed at the start of his reign that he intended to raise even higher taxes and even stronger punishment of his opponents than his father. In this way he caused the tragic schism whose consequences affect Israel’s descendants to this day. But let us return to the subject

of matrimony and family.

Over time, polygamy was increasingly less practised, partly due to the influence of neighbouring cultures, but mostly because of the reduced financial circumstances resulting from forced migration and wars. Eventually polygamy only remained to exist on paper and in some Jewish groups in the diaspora. So it was that Christianity also adopted the custom of monogamy from the Jews as a matter of course. Centuries passed until the appearance of Muhammad and the spread of Islam when regulated polygamy was reintroduced in Muslim countries. This was particularly attractive for the powerful or rich who could “afford” several wives as they were strictly obligated to guarantee all their wives support and intercourse and to adequately compensate them in case of divorce. The more Islam spread and took root, the more the Christian rulers attacked the “plague” called polygamy and declared monogamy to be the only permitted form of marriage. Later they also outlawed priests and members of religious orders from marrying. Celibacy was introduced for two reasons: so that the priests would tend more to their flocks instead of their own families and to keep their wealth within the Church instead of bequeathing it to their offspring. The Church ignored that celibacy in the biblical sense was only possible for a limited period.

Matrimony and Family within the Catholic Church

From then on, for two centuries to be exact – here we refer predominantly to the Roman Catholic Church – the Church dignitaries mainly viewed marriage as a necessary evil to further the continued existence of the human race, but also because of the “male sex’s weakness”. In reality, however, theory and practice of celibacy differed widely amongst the priesthood. But this did not deter the Church dignitaries and theologians to saddle marriage partners with even more burdens. Although matrimony and family have assumed a more honourable status within the Church over more recent decades, nothing much has changed in respect of practical solutions regarding

family problems. Spouses whose marriage has failed are strictly forbidden to divorce and remarry. Should they still dare, for whatever reason, they are excluded from the forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion.

As this is the actual reason for this text, we shall explore the situation in more detail. These writings do not concern the 1983 Code of Canon Law or Canon 915 and Canon 916 but the reasons the Catholic Church lists to justify the non-forgiveness of sins and the deprivation of the Holy Communion. Here the Church cites particularly the following passages from the Gospels:

Matthew 19:1-9, Mark 10:3-9 and Luke 16:18.

An example from the Gospel according to Matthew (19:3-9):

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

As usual, the Pharisees tried to ensnare Jesus in their traps. Because he called the Pharisees hypocrites who tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4), he did not want to conduct an objective discussion with them but to take the wind out of their sails with his reply to their treacherous question and to offend them. He succeeded masterfully in this instance, just as he

did in many other cases, for example regarding imperial taxes and also at numerous other occasions. When it nearly seemed as if the Pharisees had caught him out contradicting Moses, he said: Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. This silenced the Pharisees and when his shocked disciples afterwards questioned what he had meant, he only gave them an evasive, obscure answer.

Regarding the Catholic Church's comprehension of Jesus' answers, it is sadly still comparable to that of the Pharisees back in antiquity. Otherwise, one would observe that Jesus does not explicitly reply to the Pharisees' question but instead describes the condition of marital partnership PRIOR TO the Fall of Man, before the existence of the Torah and marriage laws. And one possible reason to be released from a marriage he lists is adultery. So, Jesus also allows the option of divorce in certain cases.

Neither the Pharisees nor the later Church noticed that Jesus' aim was to confuse the Pharisees with his replies, to defeat them mentally. Otherwise, they would have recognised his subtlety when he said: *Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate* and then: *Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard*. This creates the impression that God said one thing and Moses another. But this is not the case! God said both and Moses merely recorded both in writing. Only that one of the statements concerned the conditions BEFORE the Original Sin and the other the conditions AFTER, i.e. as a future regulation.

It is interesting that the Catholic Church delights in quoting and adhering to those words of Jesus he used in his arguments with the Pharisees, such as those referring to divorce, whereas it does not attach importance to what he said to his apostles and disciples: *But you are not to be called 'Rabbi', for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father', for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.*

(Matthew 23:8-10). So particularly the Catholic Church is teeming

with such titles, starting with **Fathers** of the Church, Doctors (Latin doctor "**teacher**") of the Church and **Padres** right up to "Holy **Father**".

Or: *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. (Luke 12:22) Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Luke 12:33)*

Or: *...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)*

This mandate, too, is only partially implemented: priests unite the marriage partners but never dissolve the union, not even on the grounds of adultery, not to mention violence, alcoholism or irreconcilable differences. Yet those in holy orders are released from their "perpetual" vows and are free to marry after this, which is denied the marriage partners although in both cases the vows were taken before a Church official.

Jesus offers himself to the woman who has had five husbands as the "living water" and does not even tell her to cease sinning; unlike he did in the case of the adulteress caught in the act. More evidence that Jesus did not regard five husbands and five divorces respectively as a problem, but did, however, view the other woman's adultery as such because it is a major sin. But the Church practically drives spouses into committing adultery by not granting them a divorce, even in the worst circumstances, although Moses stipulated it has to. And that Moses represents an irrefutable authority to Jesus he very clearly states in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. *They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.... If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. (Luke 16:29-31)*

For Jesus a lecherous look ultimately constitutes just as much of a case of adultery as does the remarriage to a non-lawfully divorced woman. *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)* Accordingly Jesus views adultery as a once-off sin and not as a permanent one. Therefore the Catholic Church should also regard an

individual who has been divorced according to civil law and remarried as someone who has committed a once-off sin. But if adultery is not a once-off sin, most priests should also not receive absolution until the end of their lives for all their lecherous looks. So why are they forgiven time and again while those who remarry are not?

Access to absolution and Holy Communion, even in public and in front of a large audience, is also granted to all those Catholic politicians who pass divorce legislation, endorse and permit abortion and who support or have waged war with devastating consequences. *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble* (Luke 1:52). These are the words of Mary, Jesus' mother, but the Catholic Church, who claims Mary as its mother, acts otherwise.

On his earthly mission, Jesus repeatedly congregated with "prostitutes and tax collectors" and felt most at ease among them whereas he practically looked for arguments with scholars and Pharisees, whom he defeated every time in discussions and disputes, frequently by using nothing more than subtle rhetoric. Jesus says that the sick and wounded need medical help (to get healed), yet the Church denies, of all people, those failed and wounded who have entered into a second marriage the most important remedy at its disposal: the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Communion.

Jesus addressed his disciples and followers in a different manner than he did when speaking to the Pharisees. Thus he gently reprimanded those who wanted to evoke a fire on an inhospitable Samaritan village or said to his apostles who had been engaged in an argument about who was the greatest: *Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.* (Mark 9:35) Most importantly, however, he cautioned them: *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* (Matthew 7:1,2)

If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. (John 20:23)

Priests and Bishops shoulder an enormous responsibility considering

Jesus' words regarding the right measure and not judging others, but also considering the praise for the unjust servant as well as the widow's prayer. *Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?* (Luke 18:6,7)

Do the Church authorities not fear for themselves when they read the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)?

A child murderess receives absolution after a certain time, a power broker and notorious advocate of abortion, a media journalist who incessantly writes and spreads lies, thereby destroying human livelihoods – all those are able to receive absolution, yet a poor woman, deserted by her husband, who has found support and comfort for herself and her children in a new marriage, is not. Should she, however, leave this second husband to return to her first spouse, she could once more receive absolution and Holy Communion although the Bible, in the Book of Moses, expressly forbids women returning to their first marriage partner. Likewise, those married and divorced according to civil law can easily remarry in a church ceremony after confession. In this way the Church contradicts itself as it claims that the marriage partners offer the sacrament of marriage themselves through the sexual act and that the Church only blesses them and notes down their declaration of intent before or after.

In a way the Church's actions resemble those of the Pharisees who give the Church a tenth of their mint and other garden herbs but neglect justice and the love of God (Luke 11:42). Free from the burden of matrimony and family, from having to earn a living, societal obligations, yes, mostly even from tax collecting (the State does this for them!), the Church dignitaries impose the heaviest burden on those who are God's most sacred concern: troubled marriages and families!

The Catholic Church's idea of marriage and family is certainly a lovely one, an ideal concept, as the family is, after all society's most important unit. But the obstinate clinging to the ideal is far removed

from Jesus' perceptions and the biblical practice. Misled by Paul, the Church compares matrimony to the relationship between the Christ and the Church, which borders on blasphemy because, contrary to Jesus, it denies that mankind is hard-hearted, and refuses divorce even in cases of adultery or matrimonial misconduct. In this way the Church saddles the faithful with terrible burdens, increases their sins and eventually drives them to despair and away from God. Clinging to the ideal is the cause that believers look for false and unhealthy alternatives.

Once the marriage partners have become divorced or legally separated, both of them, or at least the party who instigated the separation, can go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. But should the deserted partner, be it man or woman, who also has to rear and feed the children, meet somebody similarly affected and enter into matrimony or a communal living arrangement with him or her, absolution and Holy Communion is denied them. If, however, they would consort with prostitutes for their sexual gratification or engage in one-night-stands, he or she could go to confession afterwards, express regret and receive Holy Communion. In this way the Church trains its followers in sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy!

The height of hypocrisy is, however, the concession to grant those affected absolution and administer Holy Communion to them after all on their deathbeds as they will no longer have any opportunity to "sin". What kind of a spiritual conflict does this present to the dying person?! Because he then has to regret his marriage and all those happy years spent together as well as the children resulting from the union as sinful. Any rational person has to question how the Lord will judge that person just after death, but, most importantly, how He would judge the Church Elders who compelled that person to behave like that.

It would be proper for the Church to divorce a marriage in certain circumstances instead of annulling it – yet another hypocritical tour de force. All other religions have found better and, most of all, more

realistic solutions: Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Muslims and Jews. The Bible's understanding of matrimony and family differs greatly from that of the Catholic Church. Jesus was, after all, also a descendant of Perez who was sired by Judah with the "whore" Tamar, his daughter-in-law.

And ultimately the words "until death do us part", spoken during the wedding ceremony, are inappropriate as this means that death's authority to divorce is more effective than that which Jesus conferred to the Church. Did Jesus' resurrection not defeat and overcome death? Furthermore, one does not require a divorce permit in Heaven as Jesus said that in Heaven one does not live like spouses but like angels.

Despite Jesus' proclamation: Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36), the Catholic Church fastidiously insists on the literal observance of the ecclesiastical laws instead of applying the Economy of Salvation in the sense of the Gospels, although it should know that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). As such marriage - portrayed in the Bible and the Koran as a first and foremost contractual union based on affection, whose objective is reproduction and the godly upbringing of children - has turned into a forced union in the Catholic Church. Many Catholics no longer even dare to enter into the sacrament of marriage as they fear the consequences in case the union fails. But in the Bible marital problems are solved differently as illustrated by the examples of Leah and Rachel, Abraham and Hagar, Juda and Tamar, David and Bathsheba etc.

Will the Church's misconduct be avenged some day? It happened before. When the world endorsed anti-authoritarian upbringing, declared any order and discipline to be an offence against children and called for tolerance towards undisciplined and aggressive children and adolescents, the Church did not stand up and protest. The bishops did not go on the warpath, nobody demanded the right to

raise their offspring in the biblical sense. The consequences followed in 1968 with drugs, communes and the youths' degeneration. And still the Church remained silent. Today, those who did not speak out at the time are being accused of having abused thousands upon thousands of young boys and adolescents. It is obvious that these accusations are wildly exaggerated and invented by either the media or greedy individuals aiming for compensation, but even the small remainder of monstrous priests and/or bishops is sadly enough to silence the Church. Now disgrace is the price for its silence, for not speaking out. But the Church also did not stand up when religious education was removed from the school curriculum. With their silence the Church betrayed the children; now the world accuses it in an entirely different and completely unexpected way of child abuse. God's ways are truly unfathomable. Back in the past, the Church hierarchy did nothing to prevent the abolition of authority; now they have lost their own authority.

Today's bishops and cardinals also fail to raise their voices and, for whatever reason, are still not up in arms to fight against abortion, surrogate marriages and surrogate families. Their punishment is the lack of novices entering the priesthood and religious institutions.

The failure to properly and forcefully speak up for the family has manoeuvred the Church into an awkward situation. It is therefore trying to please everyone with its mission to fight for social justice, the preservation of natural resources and to counteract climate change – all areas that cost nothing and where cheap advice makes a favourable impression. But this is not the issue! It is not the objective of the Church of Christ! Jesus distinctly and clearly told his disciples and their descendants: *Heal the sick, raise the dead* (Matthew 10:8), *proclaim the good news* (Luke 4:43), *bind and loose* (Matthew 18:18), *testify, be merciful just as your father is merciful* (Luke 6:36), *do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... store up for yourselves treasures in heaven* (Matthew 6:19,20). Clear debts like the penitent servant in the parable. Be vigilant!

It only takes a small step to rectify the current situation, but it requires great courage. Because there will be an outcry, an attack and ugly insults from the media and the ruling circles. But their days are numbered anyway.

The institution of the family, in the biblical sense, is neither a romantic love relationship, nor is it an entertaining journey, but a partnership of convenience based on love capable of suffering. It necessitates a sense of reality and tolerance between husband and wife on behalf of God to produce children, raise them according to God's commandments and thus create the foundation for a just society. Wherever this is being prevented it is first and foremost the Catholic Church's duty to protest against it through its cardinals, bishops and priests. As shepherds they have to lead their laypeople instead of sending them ahead and then, when the situation turns precarious, distance themselves from them, as has frequently happened. This would be the only true and correct process to campaign for matrimony and family instead of moralising about failed relationships. While the Lord is the shepherd who tracks his lost or wounded sheep, brings them back into the flock, heals and feeds them, the Church punishes them by banishing them from its society and depriving them of healing.

It is nothing new that people sin, everybody does, but it is not right to excessively punish the laypeople for their transgressions seeing that the Church so generously deals with its own sinners and feels so sure of forgiveness. The Catholic hierarchy should bear this in mind and act appropriately. As priests and confessors, the clergy has ample opportunity to discover if a failed marriage is truly broken or if it has been abandoned through recklessness, carnal desire or a thirst for adventure and should act justly with regard to remarriage and the forgiveness of sins. Only then will Jesus surely find the faith when he returns to earth. Let us wish that the Church authorities and the laypeople will find their way back to it through prayer and fasting.

One last remark: This text is not intended as a condemnation of the Church but to serve as a push towards the right direction, so that all

believers can partake in all the means of salvation entrusted to the Church. With this in mind, let God's mercy and blessings be bestowed upon the Catholic Church as well as upon all Christians, Muslims and Jews.

D.S.