

The London assembly and mayoral elections will shortly be taking place. What will be news for you is that I am a candidate. However, do not fear. I am merely on a list, way down, for the Christian People's Alliance. There is no prospect of me getting elected. I sincerely hope however that the first one or two people on that list do get elected. The first man on the list, Malcolm Martin, would make an excellent council member. He is a very intelligent man and a deeply committed Christian. We are making a stand on heterosexual marriage. We need 5% of the vote to achieve his election. It would be a major achievement.

Should one issue be so important? Yes it should!

We are in the midst of a root and branch redefinition of the basis of human social life. The gay issue is merely the tip of the iceberg threatening to hit a new Titanic, British and Western society. Below the waterline is much that we do not see. It is this that I wish to address in this letter. This movement - that is the whole iceberg not just the tip - has moved us slowly but inexorably away from a wholesome social model to one that is unwholesome and ultimately dangerous for us all, including gays. It is in all our interests that we see what is happening and ask ourselves what can be done to move us back to wholeness.

First and foremost it must be stressed that this stand for exclusive heterosexual marriage is not against homosexuals. In a modern and decent society we affirm the freedom of people to live in relationships committed to each other as opposed to promiscuous lives which are always if not amended destructive terms of broken lives and fatherless children. The law offers same sex couples legal rights which are comparable to marriage, but without the name. We do not wish to remove this. But neither do we wish to redefine this contract in law as marriage.

The issue of 'redefinition' concerns the whole of society. This cannot be an issue among other issues that each may decide for himself, that one can say yes to and another no without affecting each other. To assume this is to deny society, that is the interrelation of all the parts in the whole. In the present case what we are witnessing is the disintegration of the whole, not the perceived choice of a part. I think this is the crucial point for Christians opposed to the legislation, and which I wish to explain in what follows.

I am at present reading the famous anthropological study, Margaret Mead's 'Growing up in New Guinea' published in 1930. We are shown a very primitive society with a moral code very different from our own. Mead was later shown to have made many errors in her analysis. However what cannot be gainsaid is that in one key respect there is little difference between the Manus and us, and that is in the core structure of the family. This is very important for our purposes, because if this core structure in such a disparate society can be so similar to ours we are legitimated towards making the strong claim of its universal applicability. If in all other societies, no matter when or where, the core structure is the same, we would be further encouraged in our claim.

Margaret Mead describes what we can all recognize, a complicated ritualized and solemnized process of choosing a bride for a man, separating the bride from her family and joining her to the man's family. The wife's family still plays an important role, particularly the wife's brother in relation to her children but the wife after the ceremony is a very different person in relation to them as she was before. That change is key to understanding marriage. The ceremony of marriage marks that transition and is very important for the whole community. The lore associated with it is very

intricate. Among the Manus the bridegroom's father is not allowed even to look upon his daughter-in-law until he is dying. This raises the honour attached to his son's bride and demonstrates the exclusivity of the relationship. The father has also had to work years to pay for a dowry price for his son's wife. At the wedding she is decked out in all the finery the society can muster, not so different from the beauty of the bride in our own society. She is like a goddess, the most valued thing that society has and all celebrate in the occasion with a special feast, as we do. At the approach of a special wedding anniversary the wife is again decked out in the same way with a feast once again for the whole village.

Why? Quite simply because there is nothing more precious than this institution for the society. The wife represents something far more significant than a mere individual. With the Biblical witness behind us I think we can say that she represents humanity approaching her union with God. The wedding occasion belongs to the whole society.

Not long ago I was reading a well researched novel on Bengali society and Calcutta in particular, called 'The City of Joy' by Dominic Lapierre. A poor farmer, now living in the slums of Calcutta and dying of tuberculosis has one final duty encumbered on him, to find the necessary money for the dowry of his daughter. Without it she will not have the chance to marry decently and well. This dowry will give her a start and a value in her married life. He finds that money and dies happy that he has done his best for the daughter he loves.

If you read the book of Ruth in the Bible you will discover a drama that is not dissimilar, a loyal young and good woman in need of a dowry and a husband. That she finds a good and godly man in Boaz and gives birth to a son, the grandfather of David, shows that she has achieved something great and highly honourable.

Our society has fundamentally devalued this institution of marriage. We have not prevented the given freedom to young people to circumvent this institution by living together without marriage and then to easily dissolve the looser union they have made. We have also given freedom to couples to easily dissolve their marriages. We are less judgemental when people break their vows in sexual infidelity. The television or cinema screen portrays this as normal and even advisable 'if things aren't working out'. As a result the direction the West has followed has made a rent in the seamless garment of civilization which in societies we call primitive is still honoured and carefully observed. We even confuse 'civilization' with the West and worse still with the last sixty years in the West. In reality civilization is far richer, deeper and more precious and certainly does not belong exclusively to us. It includes the Manus, Bengali and Hebrew society. I am convinced that much of the reaction of radical Islam against the West is a result of this new movement in our midst. It sees something inherently rotten and seeks to destroy it and not without reason. The reason is that Islam honours what we dishonour. We hide behind a screen of 'women's rights' or when in actual fact we are dishonouring women far more than anything Islam does. Our so called 'women's rights' or in this case 'gay rights' are frequently if not always based on a subversion of what belongs to the genus 'man' and yet in the case of the Manus or other groups we observe them with a sense of patronizing superiority, and not infrequently a post-modern missionary zeal to alter what is holistic, organic and functional for them. I certainly see this missionary zeal in Margaret Mead's book.

While it would be facile to undermine the great advances made in Western society particularly in relation to women - I am very happy with my female doctor - it needs nevertheless to be

acknowledged that there are costs as well as benefits. The chief error we have fallen is a facile assumption of equality, namely that men and women, gay and straight, should be in all respects equal. What we need is a right definition to know when equality ought to apply and when not. In some respects equality is much to be desired. We ought to be equal before the law. All ought to have an equal measure of respect. In our society we are so preoccupied with money-wealth that we frequently respect the rich far more than the poor contrary to the law of the Gospel of Christ. Here is another area where Islam is right to criticize the West for where profit comes in equality is not on the agenda.

However in some respects there is and cannot be equality. What there is not is equality of function. A woman and a man, a boy or a girl, do not have the same function. Rather, pre-eminently in a marriage, they have different functions. In all societies except for some in the West man is head, meaning he is law giver, upholder of the tradition, bread winner. In Manus society the man dies considerably earlier than the woman because of the hard work he does to provide for his family. He needs to be prepared for this heavy duty and respected for it. He needs to be toughened for it. The woman in all wholesome societies is the carer, nourisher, teacher of love. For this on the contrary she is not toughened, rather protected, allowed to be soft for the sake of her children. The greater honour her body is given, her modesty, contributes to this and marks her special place of honour. In our society a man once stood up to offer his seat to a woman, any woman, a child always to an adult. That we no longer do so shows how much we have altered the basic course civilization has always hitherto followed.

Traditionally there is a complicated lore that the children enter into to prepare them for their future roles, including the way they dress, play, eat. Games are different, expectations, freedoms, checks and restraints. Effeminacy among boys is avoided at all costs so that they grow up to be manly and fit for the future role that they have to fill. The girl is prevented from becoming boyish so that she likewise can fulfil her function. This is not a curtailing of freedom, rather the structure in which freedom is played out. Because we in the West despise this holy structure we end up by destroying our freedom which can only be enjoyed in the structure given, which has been given to us and held in trust through the providence of God. It is the limitation of our humanity, the holy limitation which we must either submit to or threaten our very civilization by turning from it.

If we were wise we would seek to rediscover our natural limitations. This is why I am strongly opposed to the elevation of women to the episcopacy. It is also why I oppose gay marriage without being opposed to gays themselves. Within the parameters of civilization as we have examined it, a man needs to be a man and a woman a woman, at least publicly. That many can and do live otherwise does not alter this categorical imperative. The highest authority spiritually must be reserved for the man, not the woman. As Paul says in his first letter to Timothy, he must be an upright man, with one wife, with his children in order. To elevate a woman to this high priestly position upsets the right order despite the respect we hold for individuals and their many gifts. Scripture will not tolerate it either. Many texts must be subverted if this is followed.

The whole gay issue is secondary to this issue of place for man and woman in society. Although not all can or will enter into this structure as described it has always been an aspect and dynamic of society. Homosexual men have frequently been more gifted than the average person, and to some degree driven by circumstances to areas like the arts becoming great painters, composers, designers.

It must be recognised that their unhappy state has frequently advanced the general happiness of all. We cannot alter this. But we can appreciate it and see God's hand in it. That there is dissonance does not mean harmony is broken, rather ultimately enriched. If there is a theodicy it must be found here.

Lastly it needs to be pointed out that sexuality is not normally cut and dried into 100% straight, 100% gay. The reality is much less certain. Frequently people have a choice that an important person or a particular experience can influence. This is another reason why particular care needs to be taken with children. At the heart of my argument is the hidden structure of human social interaction. Society must and cannot but advance either openly in terms of propaganda or covertly through unseen drives what is its nature to do. To deny this on the societal level is to create what is not natural with dangerous consequences in terms of social upheaval.

In conclusion two points need to be emphasized. First the children must not be confused. There needs to be a clear road for them to follow, that is taught to them by their society. Fundamentally therefore the guardian of the society, whether government or religion, must unambiguously protect this course leading to marriage and the role played within it. Everything ought to point the way to the wholesome institution where the future generation, yet unborn, will be nurtured.

Secondly the man must work. Unemployment destroys the family more than any other element. Government must provide the conditions of work and the necessary incentives for it. A man who does not provide belies the fundamental basis of society. He becomes a headless man in his homestead. Many studies have shown this. Our society seeking to support the less fortunate has removed the incentive and even the honour of work. When a woman can bear a child out of wedlock and have automatic support and a father can lay about with an income for which he does nothing, society is destroyed. Most of all respect goes, both self-respect and the respect of others, things which in Manus society in their greater integrity would not have been permitted. The governmental and societal preoccupation with profit for shareholders, the polarization of industry in multinational companies, and not the necessity of work for a man with a family, is the sad cul de sac where we find ourselves. Society needs men who work as a primary precondition of its stability. They also need to be manly including the deference and respect they give to their women and the wives of other men.

These fundamental principles are too precious to let go. In the arrogant assumption that we can take leave of the structure of our humanity we become like the constructors of a new Tower of Babel. We cannot do it. It will destroy us if we try. That these principles are no longer followed is the iceberg that our society faces in 2012, 100 years after another Titanic hit another iceberg.

Father Robert  
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