„Europe for Christ!"

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Dear Friends!

The „Europe for Christ!" Team wishes you a blessed New Year! Let us pray that we and all of Europe will get a little closer to God in this year coming.

As Christians we are "God's ambassadors". And as such, we have to live an authentic life and – where possible – stand up for God.

Today we are confronted with the fact that many people, even our relatives and friends, live together with their partners – often with children – without having made a commitment to each other in front of God. This wrong development has consequences for society as well.

Here we are called to be God's ambassadors with love and compassion: *to consciously say 'Yes' to each other is the basis of a stable family!*

In the following text family researcher Philippa Taylor (England) describes the difference between simply "living together" and a marriage joined by God.

For a new Europe!

Your "Europe 4 Christ!" Team

PS: don't forget the daily Our Father for a Christian Europe!

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For Better or For Worse:
Judeo-Christian Perspectives on Marriage
by Philippa Taylor

'*A new branch of research is finding that marriage has powerful and beneficial effects on human beings … its findings deserve to be read by everyone in Western society.*[1]

Although the concept of marriage, and its associated ceremony, varies in different cultures and in different legal systems, some form or concept of it has been found to exist in all human societies, past and present[2]. For example, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, as well as Christians, have all recognised lifelong, committed unions that are legalised or formalised within their individual cultures.

Western practices have been particularly shaped by the Judeo-Christian understanding of marriage, based on the account of creation in the Bible.[3] These few words in Genesis establish the essential ingredients of marriage: a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman that is publicly made. The Genesis text illustrates three of the 'legs' that marriage stands on: **leaving, cleaving** and **'one flesh'**. **Leaving** points to the establishment of a new family and social unit, **cleaving** points to the committed faithfulness that one promises to the other and **'one flesh'** points to the personal union, the oneness of man and woman. The primary purpose of human sexual relationship is this *unitive relationship* between the partners, but a further purpose is the *procreative one* of building a family. The two belong together in the biblical understanding of marriage.[4] Marriage is also described in the Bible as a *covenant relationship*, *witnessed* by God.[5] Because the marriage covenant, established by binding vows, is also witnessed by others, the public dimension is at the heart of marriage.

In contrast to the public commitment of marriage, cohabitation is essentially a private agreement between two individuals. A haze of ambiguity surrounds most cohabiting relationships. They often begin in a private and casual way and although there is not usually any secret that a couple is living together, to those around, the exact meaning and status of the relationship is unclear. Furthermore, there is usually no commitment to permanence in a cohabiting relationship, so it again can fall short of biblical norms: *'what God has joined together, let man not separate.'*

The Judeo-Christian belief is that God has created us and our capacity and purpose for relationship, therefore marriage is an innate part of our human nature. The universality of marriage within different cultures and societies indicates that marriage is not just an invention or a particular phase in social evolution. Marriage will be with us, in one form or another, as a 'natural good' until the kingdom of God appears.[6] Part of the importance of understanding Judeo-Christian perspectives of marriage and its grounding in human nature, is to reveal the many similar elements with secular natural assumptions on marriage. Therefore Browning can say: "*The theory of marriage in the West has had a religious dimension, but beneath and within the symbolism of religion can be found a variety of additional features. Greek, Roman and German legal theories about marriage and philosophical perspectives from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Locke and Rousseau underline this.*"[7]

We cannot assume people get married because it is the 'right thing to do'; we have to appeal to natural law, principles which hold true because of our human condition and not because of any moral imperative. Indeed, the close identification of marriage with organized religion can be disadvantageous - people resent the church having any control over their lives when they do not adhere to any of its defining principles.

Society today puts many threats on marriage. The problem at stake however is not that the idea of marriage as such could be lost, rather it is the personal damage done to individuals by the permissive understanding of the relationship between men and women: "*So when as Christians we seek to persuade society about this moral order we are not acting as though the God given institution of marriage were under ontological threat…it is not within the power of humankind to finally destroy created order. No Christian movement needs to defend marriage: rather we seek to protect humans against the damage done to them by cutting across the grain of the order of marriage.*"[8]

The 'natural good' of marriage can be clearly seen in the many wider benefits that it brings to society, to adults and to children, which have been well documented elsewhere. I began this article with a quote about the benefits of marriage for us, and I conclude with another: '*The emotional support and monitoring of a spouse encourages healthy behaviour that in turn affects emotional as well as physical well-being: regular sleep, a healthy diet, moderate drinking. But the key seems to be the marriage bond itself: Having a partner who is committed for better for worse, in sickness and in health, makes people happier and healthier.'[9]*

Philippa Taylor is the Senior Researcher for CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) and a Consultant on marriage, family and bioethics. She has written a number of papers and booklets, including 'For Better or for Worse' and 'Counting the Cost: the Effects of Family Breakdown.'

Further Reading:

- *For Better or For Worse: Marriage and Cohabitation Compared*, Taylor, P., CARE, 2005. http://www.care.org.uk/Publisher/Article.aspx?id=42654
- *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*, Ash, C., IVP, 2003.

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[1] Oswald, A, *The Extraordinary Effects of Marriage*, Warwick University, January 2002.

[2] Not necessarily monogamous marriage.

[3] "*…At the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female … for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.*Matthew 19:4-6 quoting from Genesis 1:27, 2:24.

[4] *Genesis 1-11,* Atkinson D, *Bible Speaks Today* series, IVP, 1990.

[5] E.g. Malachi 2:14 '*...The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth ... she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant*.'

[6] O'Donovan, 1994, quoted in Ash, C., *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*, IVP, 2003.

[7] Browning, D. & Marquardt, E., *Liberal Cautions on Same-Sex Marriage*, 2004, paper presented to Witherspoon Institute.

[8] Ash, C., *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*, IVP, 2003.

[9] Waite, L, & Gallagher, M, *The Case For Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, Doubleday, 2000.