

In creating the world, God has ordered human society and has established the family as the basic social unit and the building block of the larger human community. It is the means through which children are nurtured and reared, the Christian faith and Christian moral values are passed on to children and young people, elderly parents are cared for in their later years, and the love of family members for one another is channeled into care and nurturing for one another. The family is central not only to Christian life, it is essential to an ordered, just, and moral culture.

Yet, today, there is great confusion as to the meaning of "family." We often hear the familiar refrain that "there are many kinds of families," "it takes a village to raise a child," or "a family is made up of those who love you." While these sentiments enjoy considerable popularity and reflect some aspects of truth, they are nonetheless misleading and, as the popular culture understands them, do not accurately reflect God's creative plan for human families. God has created and established families to consist of a mother and father, who are married to each other, and their children. To be sure, these children may include not only the biological children of the married couple, but also adopted children and stepchildren. As families grow, they come to include grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Yet, at the heart of this extended family, there is always a married couple and their children.

The Bible is replete with examples of families, who live, love, and work together, care for each other, and pass on their faith in God from one generation to the next. Consider, for example, Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 11:27-25:7), their son Isaac and his

wife Rebekah (Gen. 25:19-28:9), and Isaac and Rebekah's son, Jacob and his wife Rachel (Gen. 29:4-35:19), who, despite their own very human foibles and flaws, together remained faithful to God and from whose family descended, many generations later, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Holy Family also provides a model for the God's creative plan. Mary and Joseph raised and cared for Jesus (Luke 2:1-52), remaining faithful to him even as he hung upon the cross (John 19:26). We see in the lives of all of these great biblical figures, including in the life of Jesus Christ himself, the central importance of family.

Parents are the primary educators of their children, entrusted by God with the their loving care and wellbeing. Parents are called to educate and form their children as responsible citizens and moral, faithful Christians. (Eph. 6:4.) Parents must do this through nurturing, as well as discipline, and by providing a strong Christian witness in their own lives to their children. (Sir. 30:1-2.) Children, in turn, are called to honor and obey to their parents. (Ex. 20:12; 20 Prov. 6:20-22; Col. 3:20.) Children are likewise called by God to provide for the care and wellbeing of their elderly parents. (Mk. 7:10-12; Sir. 3:12-13, 16.) God intends parents and children to love, nurture, and care for each other throughout their lives.

Can unmarried couples, who have children together, constitute a "Christian family" in accordance with God's creative plan? Can same-sex couples form a Christian family? The Bible tells us clearly that the answer to both questions is "no." Neither unmarried couples, nor same-sex couples, can form a Christian family according to God's creative

plan. This is because the lifelong marriage of one man to one woman is central to the Christian family. Indeed, it is the foundation upon which all Christian families are built. Jesus himself tells us in sacred scripture:

*"Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:4-6.)*

One man marries one woman and from this lifelong union may come children, entrusted to them by God for their upbringing and care. Indeed, one of the central purposes of marriage is procreation and the rearing of children. (Gen. 1:28.) Consequently, marriage, essential to God's creative plan for the family, provides stability for both the parents and the children, the assurance that the family will live in the context of a committed loving relationship, and the nurturing of both a mother and a father that is distinct by virtue of their complementary genders. In this environment, children have the capacity to grow, learn, and love, such that they can mature into whole and healthy human persons.

That said, a Christian family may not be based upon unmarried people living together in a sexual relationship and raising children as if they were a married couple. The reason for this is because unmarried people living together in a sexual relationship are engaging in a way of life contrary to the will of God and, consequently, find themselves in a state of grave sin. (1 Cor. 6:9-10.) An environment engulfed in, and characterized by, grave sin is not the proper context

for sexual activity, let alone raising children. Persons living openly in a state of grave sin simply lack the capacity to authentically witness the Christian faith to their children and, as a consequence, are unable to form them appropriately in the Christian faith and Christian morals. Indeed, because cohabiting unmarried couples are living in a state of grave sin, the Church will not administer the sacrament of marriage to such couples until, and unless, they cease their sinful activity, repent of it, and receive absolution from the Church.

The same is also true of homosexual persons living in a sexual relationship with one another. Homosexual persons cannot marry, as Christian marriage is reserved, by God's creative plan, to one man and one woman marrying each other. Thus, the foundational requirement for a Christian family--i.e., marriage--is not possible in this context. Moreover, because engaging in homosexual behavior is likewise gravely sinful, such an living arrangement is not an appropriate environment for the nurturing and rearing of children. It is for this reason that many Christian social service agencies and charities will not place adoptions or foster children with homosexual couples.

Does all of this mean that there can be no such thing as a "single parent Christian family"? No, it does not. In our broken and fallen world, the reality is that people die and that divorce has become far too commonplace in our culture. Sometimes, living in a traditional Christian family, having a husband/father and a wife/mother, is simply not possible. While it is clearly best for children, and for husbands and wives as well, to live in a traditional family, the history of the Christian Church is rich and abundant with

instances in which one parent has faithfully raised his or her children in a loving, stable Christian home. It is not an ideal situation, of course, but through faith, love, and perseverance many single Christian parents have created a nurturing family environment for their children.

God has established a wonderful structure for the mutual care and nurturing of his faithful people. There are few blessings greater in this life than the love of family and the care and nurturing of loving parents and children. In our broken, sinful, and troubled world, the concept of the Christian family is under attack. All faithful Christians are called to boldly witness God's creative plan and to advocate for strong, traditional families. Jesus calls each of us, as his disciples, to be the "light of the world" and commands us to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5:14-16.) This includes standing up for traditional Christian marriage, protecting and promoting the rights of traditional families, insisting that troubled and orphaned children be placed in traditional family homes, and standing in solidarity with families caring for elder parents and dependent adult children. In this way, we become Jesus' "light of the world."

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# The Blessings of Family

*A Reflection Upon God's Plan*

*for Healthy, Loving*

*Human Relationships*



*James F. Sweeney*