

The Importance of Preserving Marriage and Family as Essential Foundations of Nations

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the honor of addressing you today. I would like to begin by thanking each one of you for your presence here this afternoon, which indicates that we have a shared concern to protect and defend the original and intended institutions of Marriage and Family. I congratulate you for all efforts to accomplish this noble objective. I especially want to commend those of you who supported the Egypt-Uganda Counter Declaration on Sexual Orientation dated 18 December 2008.

Essential Foundations of Nations.

I was born in Malaysia into a Chinese family. Malaysia has a population of 26 million of which about 62%, or 16 million people, are Malays, who are predominantly Muslim; 28%, or 7.2 million people, are Chinese; and 8%, or 2.1 million people, are Indians. The remaining 2% are people of different races and foreigners.

I have an older sister and an older brother and there are 3 of us children in our family. My father worked in the police force as an administrative personnel officer; and my mother, who has now passed away, was a homemaker. I remember very clearly ~~on~~ how, as children, we would be very disturbed, disoriented and distressed during those times when my father and mother would quarrel and argue with each other. We would remain very quiet, and if there was an opportunity to plea for them to stop we would, but we would rarely have a chance during such circumstances. Such situations would be extremely tense and it would intensify when mum or dad decided to storm out of the house. The fear of them not returning would cause excruciating emotional pain. Dad would usually return at the late hours of the same day, but mum would sometime stay at an aunt's or uncle's place till a day or two later. This would only intensify the strain with dad and stress on the children. I remember clearly how such situations would affect all of us adults and children emotionally as well as socially. Our moods and demeanour would be fragile and disturbed within ourselves and with others. It would also affect us mentally as we would inevitably struggle to concentrate - whether with our school work

or work in the office. It would also challenge us spiritually and we begin to question as to why we have to go through these kinds of challenges.

I suspect that what I experienced as a child due to the marital conflict of my parents (even though my parents have always made up after each quarrel) is typical of a Malaysian family – if not a universal experience of families.

The state of union of a marriage will reflect on the state of union of a family, which will significantly affect the state of union of society and the nation.

In 1948, under Article 16, paragraph 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it affirms that, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.” There was a firm recognition by our leaders at that point of time that we need to support and protect the family institution. This was after World War II and we need to understand the experiences of men and women then. They probably witnessed the brutal killings of millions of men and women, and together with that, millions of providers for children and families disappeared leaving families distressed and disarranged. The state of families was undermined and societies were in chaos. It was under those circumstances that after the war, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was crafted and in Article 16 specifically, there was a call to protect the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Family therefore exists as a fundamental protector of human rights and it is therefore important to preserve marriage and family.

Marriage and Family as the Foundation of Nation and Culture

Marriage and family have always been the foundation of every society and nation throughout human history, and very much so in Malaysia where I come from. The history and central role of marriage and family in Malaysia, as well as many other Asian Nations and cultures, and I suspect in most countries in the world, cannot be ignored. This can be seen:

- i) in the emphasis on a life long union of a man and woman in marriage;
- ii) in weddings, family gatherings, churches, temples, synagogues, mosques; and
- iii) in community activities.

From the beginning, mankind was created male and female, and this design provides clear and unmistakable evidence that men and women were designed for one another. Men and women are created as sexual beings with an inborn attraction towards each other. It is truly a divine idea. The Marriage Institution is also affirmed distinctly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 16, paragraph 1 – as a union between a man and a woman.

The Marriage and Family Institutions were designed for the benefit of men and women, and these were the first institutions which precedes any form of civil government or other

societal institution; they are the core foundational institutions of every society and nation. It is the means by which societies and nations survive and thrive.

Marriage therefore provides a secure, covenant relationship between a man and woman to bond intimately and sexually. It also provides a secure family environment into which children are loved, care for, nurtured and provided for.

Hence, the family by simple definition consists, at its core, of a father, a mother and their children by natural birth, adoption or through a blended family situation. In an Asian culture, it is also comprised of the extended family which may include grandparents, uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces, cousins and in-laws. Some family gatherings can be very large in numbers when everybody turns up.

Malaysia adheres to the definition: A family is formed out of Marriage registered between a man and a woman and comprises of children and extended family members.

As a young boy, my parents migrated from a smaller town to a bigger city in Kuala Lumpur. Not long after that my mother's siblings also began moving to the urban area in search of employment, and I remember growing up in a house where my uncles and aunties would be around every weekend where we would share meals, and do things and go places together. It would be a time when among family members, there was – and is -- a sense of security and support as well as coaching and counselling – all done in a family spirit of love and concern for each other.

The value and benefits of marriage and family for adults

When a man and woman enter into a marriage, it is meant to be a loving and safe relationship whereby both can bond together emotionally, relationally, spiritually, psychologically, and physically throughout their married life. The marriage relationship is likened to being with your most trusted friend and companion – your confidante whom you can share freely and openly and know that the other person will love and accept you for who you are. Someone with whom you can share your joys, struggles as well as sorrows. This trusting relationship in a marriage should also deepen over the years. It is likened to what an archaeologist always looks forward to - “The older the better”.

There are many benefits and values in marriage and family for adults, and some extensive research has been conducted over the years.

A study in 1998 examined the connection between marital status and personal happiness in 17 industrialized nations with diverse social and institutional frameworks, and found:

Being married was 3.4 times more closely tied to the variance in happiness than was cohabitation, and marriage increases happiness equally for men and women... Further, the strength of association between being married and being happy is remarkably consistent across nations.¹

This report explains that the top three indicators of personal happiness are levels of self-reported health, financial satisfaction and marital status, in that order.

Scholars working jointly at Harvard University and in the United Kingdom observed:

There is remarkable evidence that marriage helps to keep human beings alive. People who are divorced or separated or widowed are at a particularly high risk of dying prematurely. Those never married face somewhat lower risks of death in any given period, but the married have easily the lowest risk of all the groups. Evidence for this is now widespread across the world.²

There is another study on the positive benefits of being married which is based on original research synthesizing hundreds of cross disciplinary scientific studies in the fields of psychology, sociology, law, medicine and economics. The authors investigated the effects of marriage on a broad cross section of married couples and summarized their findings on the positive value of marriage. In general married couples enjoy:³

- ***healthier lifestyle***
People who are married tend to avoid more harmful and risky behaviours than do single, divorced, or widowed persons. For example, married people have much lower levels of problem drinking associated with car accidents, interpersonal conflict, and depression. In general, married people lead a healthier lifestyle in terms of eating, exercising, and avoiding harmful behaviours.
- ***longer lives***
Married people live several years longer than do singles, divorced, or widowed persons. This is often because they have the emotional support of their partner and more access to good health care.
- ***a more satisfying sexual relationship***
Over half (54%) of married males and 43% of married females are very satisfied with their sexual relationship. For cohabiting couples, about 44% of the males and 35% of females are very satisfied. The frequency of sex is also higher in married couples than with cohabiting and dating persons. (Without the risks of STDs and HIV/AIDS for the sexually faithful).
- ***more wealth and economic assets***
Because married couples can pool their economic resources, they tend to be wealthier. In fact, in the United States, the median household net worth for a married couple is \$132,000, as compared to \$35,000 for singles, \$42,275 for widowed individuals, and \$33,670 for divorced individuals.⁴
- ***children do better emotionally and academically***
Children from two-parent homes tend to do better emotionally and academically. As teenagers, they are half as likely to drop out of school, they have higher grades, and

they are less likely to have an unwed pregnancy. Children from two-parent homes also receive more parental attention (such as supervision, help with schoolwork, and quality time together) than do children from single-parent homes. In fact, children from single-parent homes have a much higher probability of growing up in poverty and experiencing a lower quality of life.

Current research and thinking from the worlds of economics and social sciences highlight two major conclusions:

Happily married employees increase profitability
Unhappily married employees decrease profitability

“You can’t expect people to do well in their business if they’ve got problems at home.”
- S. Truett Cathy, CEO of Chick-fil-A, USA Today, June 22, 2006.

The founder of Chick-fil-A, S. Truett Cathy, has implemented marriage-friendly policies and programs for the 600 employees of his company as well as 1200 franchise operators. The company offers lunchtime relationship education sessions, marriage retreats, and all stores are closed on Sunday so that families can have more time together.

The value and benefits to children of a healthy, stable, permanent marriage and family

A leading family scholar from Princeton University recently observed,

If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children’s basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent family ideal. Such a design, in theory, would not only ensure that children had access to the time and money of two adults, it would provide a system of checks and balances that promote quality parenting. The fact that both adults have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.⁵

Growing up in a loving and secure home environment will enable a child to feel safe whereby he or she will be able to feel comfortable to express himself or herself. Such an environment will also provide the security for a child to receive appropriate instruction and correction. In my book *‘Parenting: a Rollercoaster Experience’*, one of the chapters is on Grooming our Children with Loving and Consistent Discipline. The basis for discipline must be love and this is meant to be effectively carried out by two parents, a father and mother, who enjoy and find security and harmony in their marital relationship. This is important because, if parents do not have a secure marriage, the cause of discipline could be a result of their frustration in marriage, frustrating their intention to love and groom their children.

It is said that values are caught rather than taught, and therefore the relationship between both parents is constantly and often unconsciously being observed by our children. Maybe we should worry less about our children not listening to us, and worry more that they are always watching us. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves why our children are behaving in a certain way. Hmm

Children need to observe the complimentary roles as well as benefits of both father's and mother's. Through fulfilling of the roles and responsibilities as husband and wife as well as father and mother, there is also a clear communication and proper affirmation of our gender role and identity to our children. Our children need to understand the role and responsibilities of a husband and father from their father, and the role of a wife and mother from their mother. They need to learn appropriate methods of conflict resolution that help restore and strengthen relationships, including the importance of speaking the truth, apologizing, forgiving and receiving forgiveness. Loving parents would also be able to communicate the benefit and value of time management, setting priorities as well as various life management skills.

Through a stable and healthy marriage and family, children can also learn the importance of respect, proper submission, loving authority as well as respecting the elderly. When a child observes their parents respecting and honouring one another in a loving and harmonious manner, they will in turn recognize the importance of respect. This in turn will enable them to love and respect others as he or she has witnessed love and respect from their parents, and would have also been loved and respected. Respect is one of the key ingredients to a healthy and happy marriage and family, and this is best taught through a stable and harmonious marriage and family. This is because respect is an important element in building a harmonious family and society.

The marriage and family relationships will not always be a bed of roses. Through appropriate means of handling and expressing our anger and frustrations, as well as through the way we tackle challenges and difficulties, we model and communicate personal responsibility and accountability, the need to admit when one is in the wrong, and the importance of apologizing and not blaming others. On the other hand, we also need to learn the spirit of forgiveness and acceptance, and move on together encouraging one another in a family.

Another area of benefit for children growing up in a stable, supportive and strong marriage and family is where they can have the opportunity to develop their unique interests and gifts, rather than to spend their energy and resources surviving on their own in the absence of loving and caring parents, or even being a victim of their parents marital challenges and conflicts.

There are many other areas where children thrive and enjoy their childhood when they are in an environment of a healthy, stable, permanent marriage and family, but the above would suffice to communicate the value and benefit of such an environment.

Conclusion

In view of the above, it is evident that much emphasis must be placed on communicating the importance of preserving the marriage and family institutions, and therefore communities and nations should network and collaborate to strengthen and protect the traditional values of marriage and family.

I would like to end by citing the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the family as an outcome of the Asia Pacific Family Dialogue: Towards the DOHA International Conference for the Family held in Kuala Lumpur from 11-13 October 2004.

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Family is attached but please allow me to cite some important points in closing.

... quoting the Kuala Lumpur Declaration ...

Thank you very much for your kind attention. I would like to end with just one more story of a 16-year old girl who came to us after we conducted a workshop on a character based abstinence program in a school in Malaysia. We just completed the unit on the consequences of premarital sex and she came to me with tears in her eyes saying that if only we had been to the school one week earlier, she would not have engaged in premarital sex with her boyfriend who is also known to have been sleeping with other girls. We tried to calm and counsel her and encouraged her to go for some medical check ups, and connected her with some responsible adults who can provide some form of continuous counselling. During the conversation, and when her family situation was raised, she was saddened that her parents were separated and there were no role models, nor responsible adults, to provide her with the necessary support or guidance. She ended the conversation by saying that, *'I would have thrived and have stronger will power to say no, if my family environment was more healthy and stable.'*

Thank you very much your kind attention.

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¹ Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, "Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60 (1998):527-536.

² Stack and Eshleman, 1998, p. 535.

³ Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, "The Call for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially (2001).

⁴ Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.38.