

This paper was delivered at the Conference on Family Life, hosted by the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. A copy of this paper can be downloaded from www.mcsadewcom.blogspot.com

PERSONAL JOURNEYS – LINKING HISTORICAL OVERVIEWS WITH PERSONAL STORIES OF FAMILY LIFE.

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In response to a call by the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to present a paper on The Changing Patterns of Family Life in Southern Africa my document is therefore presented.

I declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original. Where a citation has been omitted notwithstanding attempts to include it will be corrected when brought to my attention.

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ABSTRACT

The paper of the conference is to examine The Changing Patterns of Family Life in Southern Africa. Marriage as a social institution is not only the concern of the individuals who entered into it but also that the state and the church give it importance as the pillar of society. What was considered the nuclear family 20 or 30 years ago was Christian based with a working father and the mother at home looking after the children having a positive effect on the quality of family life

The government Green Paper on Families states, “Sociologically, the family is defined as a group of interacting persons who recognise a relationship with each other, based on a common parentage, marriage and/or adoption¹.” The character and form of the family has evolved and is continuing to do so, from colonial occupation, through apartheid, to the present, and an increasingly globalised world.

I propose in this paper to examine a family fostering a number of children on a limited/permanent basis and their impact, if any, on the nuclear family. It will also consider how a family adjusts to the husband/father working in a foreign country on a rotational basis. Lastly, we will consider how a single parent with a special needs child copes and defines family.

¹ GREEN PAPER ON FAMILIES. PROMOTING FAMILY LIFE AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.
<http://www.pmg.org.za/node/29227>

INTRODUCTION

In various parts of the world, the structure and content of the family have undergone changes over the centuries. According to a Government Green Paper on Families, the concept of family is continuously changing and adapting to societal and global transformations resulting in changes within the family environment².

Our discussion will begin by examining religions to ascertain whether religion formed society or society formed religion. It seems likely that society could not operate without some form of spiritual connection. Humans looked to some form of deity to try explaining why things happened or how things operate. Therefore, natural persona was used to fill this unknown and began to take on the spiritual form.

This would seem to indicate that, as religion and society are inter-twined so are community and family, that one is a reflection of the other. For the family within certain religious context an acceptable appeasement of the gods may have been required to ensure its sustainability by a form of matrimony.

² GREEN PAPER ON FAMILIES. PROMOTING FAMILY LIFE AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.
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A RELIGIOUS OVERVIEW

Humanisation has two basic requirements other than food and shelter. One is spiritual and the other is community. From the beginning of time, have humans had a need to cover these aspects of life? Did community develop spirit or did spirit develop community? On the other hand, are they actually intertwined that one cannot exist without the other? In this brief overview, we will cover Pagan, Greek, Roman polytheistic religion and Jewish monotheism history to considering if they could have influenced our understanding of family and connections to marriage.

The available evidence regarding Norse pagan³ religion is confusing because the problem inherent in Old Norse texts is that centuries separate events from them being recorded arguing that oral communication kept information about the pagan age alive until it was inscribed beginning in the twelfth century⁴. Religion to the Norse was not a separate institution; it was a part of ordinary life, sanctioning marriage, sustaining family, guarding against intruders, etc. maintained by ordinary people in their homes rather than in special temples led by priests. Unlike Christianity, there was little connection between the Norse pagan religion and morality. A Norseman lost the favour of the gods not by breaking some universal commandment, but by offending the gods themselves in some way. The most desirable thing a person could attain was the esteem of the community during their life, and fame and good reputation after their death⁵.

Religion played an integral part in Greek society, including domestic affairs, civic organization, gender, agriculture and war. Greek religion was ritual based, practicing a flexible set of beliefs and was not simply legendary tales and fictitious myths; it was a complex organization with city-states worshipping their own divinities, who acted to cement the body of citizens into a true community. The Greeks believed that the gods were pre-eminently social beings, upholding an organized universe. The gods assumed a human form as other early forms of paganism did and occasionally assumed animal guise as well. The Greeks used the gods to explain the occurrence of things, which they could not understand through lack of scientific proof for example the rising and setting of the sun and created great myths about such events. It is obvious that the Greeks shared many common aspects with other forms of paganism. One of the similarities between other forms of paganism and Greek religion was their desire to please the gods⁶.

³ Collins Concise Dictionary 21st Century Edition. HarperCollins Glasgow (2001). 1 a member of a group professing any religion other Christianity, Judaism or Islam. 2 a person without any religion; heathen. adj 3 of or relating to pagans. 4 heathen; irreligious. ORIG C14: from Church L *pāgānus* civilian (hence, not a soldier of Christ), from L: *villager*, from *pāgus* village

⁴ Jochens, Jenny. Old Norse images of women. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

⁵ Short, William R: <http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/mythology/religion/text/practices.htm>. Last update: 16-September-2012, ©2003-2012.

⁶ Flacelière, Robert. Daily Life In Greece At The Time Of Pericles. New York: Harper and Row, 1970

One of the better-known pagan religions and was not only practiced by the Romans but also by the various communities that were absorbed into the Roman Empire. Religious tolerance was a strategy among the emperors designed to encourage the merging of the different religions to unite people and effect greater political stability. This cemented and united the empire. Therefore within the Roman Empire people could worship whomever one liked as long as it did not interfere with others or cause disruption within the Empire. The Roman religion was in a way much the same in essence as that of the individual home, only on a much larger and more magnificent scale. Just as the wife was supposed to guard the hearth at home, then Rome had the vestal virgins guard the holy flame of Rome. In addition, if the worship of a private household took place under guidance of the father, then the religion of state was in control of the pontifex maximus^{7, 8}.

Judaism was the first religion based on monotheism, the belief in one God. The Jews have a 5,750-year history, tracing their origins from Old Testament times beginning with the patriarch Abraham. Evolving out of a common religion, the Jewish people developed customs, culture, and an ethical system that identified them as Jews regardless of their individual religious attitudes.⁹ The Jewish system of law, also referred to as Halacha (also Halakah Hebrew: הלכה), includes a civil and criminal justice system followed by observant Jews. Halacha regulates Jewish life, such as marriage and divorce, burial, relationships with non-Jews and education¹⁰. As individuals and as a people, Jews have had a great impact on civilization, contributing to ideas and culture in every field of human endeavour.

From the brief discussion, it is difficult to ascertain whether religion formed society or society formed religion. It seems likely that society could not operate without some form of spiritual connection. The conjunction of this is the connection of the community to family or is it families to community? This would seem to indicate that, as religion and society are inter-twined so are community and family, that one is a reflection of the other. Religion therefore seems to have the element which binds people and society namely marriage which we now discuss.

MARRIAGE OVERVIEW

The word *mātrimōnium*¹¹, the root for the English word "matrimony," defines the institution's main

⁷ Pontifex Maximus Livius.org article by Jona Lendering retrieved September 10 2012. <http://www.livius.org/pn-po/pontifex/maximus.html>

⁸ Oracle Education Foundation. Last Updated: June, 2010 <http://library.thinkquest.org/28111/newpage2.htm>

⁹ Grobman, Gary M. Who Are The Jews? Copyright 1990 <http://remember.org/guide/Facts.root.whoare.html>,

¹⁰ Judaism, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism>, last modified on 14 September 2012

¹¹ Collins Concise Dictionary 21st Century Edition. HarperCollins Glasgow (2001).

function. Involving the *mater* (mother), it carries with it the implication of a man taking a woman in marriage in order to have children legally recognised by society. When studying the history of human civilization, the tradition of marriage stands independent of time, race, geography and culture. It means it is a characteristic of civilization, humanity and human culture. Marriage historically, was to create political unions between nations, between different ethnic groups, to secure peace, trade and development.

As far as can be ascertained pagan wedding ceremonies were called hand-fasting. The term is originally from Old Norse¹² *hand-fest*, which means, “to strike a bargain by joining hands”.¹³ The couples' right hands will be bound together (hence 'hand-fasting'), they will swear the oaths that will henceforth define their relationship, and their hands will then be unbound in token that they remain together of their own free will. Customs vary widely between various non-Christian native Europeans but many hand-fasting's were traditionally for a period of up to seven years. At the end of the designated period, the participants would choose to recommit to the relationship if they so wished. There is no shame implied or applied should a hand fasting not be renewed.¹⁴ The hand-fasting tradition does not recognise ownership or property, men and women both have the right to own property.

The Greeks in turn believed that Cecrops¹⁵ - one of the early kings of Athens – was responsible for civilizing humanity and establishing monogamous marriage. The Greeks considered Pandora as the first bride as well as the first woman. Pandora's name, derived from the word *Didomi*¹⁶, meaning to give, reflects that the bride was originally a gift. The gift was the organizing principle of the Hellenic system of legitimate reproduction. Weddings in ancient Greece were a major part of a person's life, especially for the bride-to-be. The bride's parents usually arranged the weddings¹⁷. With the institution of matrimony, this marriage was to transfer the woman on to a different 'owner', with lines of heredity established and boundaries of who was in charge of the woman. In fact, Bonnard, (1962), states that; "A minor from the day of her birth to the day of her death, a woman only changed from one guardian to another when she married"¹⁸.

¹² Torp, Arne, Lars S. Vikør (1993) Hovuddrag i norsk språkhistorie (3.utgåve), Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS 2003

¹³ The Wiccan Minister's Manual, A Guide for Priests and Priestesses - Page 307, Kevin M. Gardner - 2008

¹⁴ Britain's spiritual history. Last updated 2008-04-11 BBC © 2012 http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml

¹⁵ Cecrops. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/heroes/g/Cecrops.htm>

¹⁶ Didomi. <http://www.studylight.org/lex/grk/view.cgi?number=1325>

¹⁷ Kitto, H.D.F. Greeks Paperback ISBN: 9780140135213, 28 Feb 1991, Penguin.

¹⁸ Bonnard, André. Greek Civilization From The Iliad To The Parthenon Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan, 1962

Marriage in ancient Rome had mythical precedents, starting with the abduction of the Sabine Women¹⁹. According to Livy²⁰, Romulus and his men abducted the Sabine maidens, promised them an honourable marriage within which they would enjoy the benefits of property, citizenship, and children. These three benefits seem to define the purpose of marriage in ancient Rome.²¹ The purpose of marriage for Romans was to produce legitimate children; citizens producing new citizens.²² The head of the family was the oldest male who had the power to decide what those rules were. However, towards the end of the 1st century CE women could own land, run businesses, free slaves, make wills, be heirs themselves, and work in some professions.²³ The lives of elite Roman women were determined by their marriages which brought with it both wealth and political standing.

At a Jewish marriage ceremony, practicing Jews sign a marriage contract called a Ketuba²⁴ (Hebrew: כְּתוּבָה), describing the conditions of marriage. The ketubah became a mechanism whereby the amount due to the wife (the bride price) was to be paid in the event of the cessation of marriage, either by the death of the husband or divorce. In a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, the ketubah is signed by two witnesses and read out aloud under the chuppah. The ketubah is then given to the bride for safekeeping. Close family, friends and distant relatives are invited to witness the ketubah, which is considered an honour. A competent witnesses cannot be a blood relative of the couple. In Orthodox Judaism, women are also not considered valid witnesses. The marriage ceremony, as in many other religions, has been ritualized and often includes the breaking of a glass by the groom symbolizing the destruction of the Temple²⁵.

Most Christian denominations view marriage as a permanent and lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. If we look at what the New Testament says about marriage, we find that the New Testament describes marriage as between man and woman. The Bible states in Ephesians 5: 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh"²⁶. When we turn to Paul's letters, we find in 1Corinthians chapter 7 verse 2 the following "But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to

¹⁹ The Rape of the Sabine Women. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rape_of_the_Sabine_Women

²⁰ Livy, "The Rape of the Sabine Women," in Mary R. Lefkowitz & Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, Published by JHU Press, 2005, pp. 176-178.

²¹ Treggiari, Susan. *Roman Marriage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991

²² Treggiari, Susan. *Roman Marriage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991

²³ Treggiari, Susan. *Roman Marriage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991

²⁴ "The Value and Significance of the Ketubah," Broyde, Michael and Jonathan Reiss. *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, XLVII, 2004

²⁵ Grobman, Gary M. Copyright 1990. *Who Are The Jews?* <http://remember.org/guide/Facts.root.whoare.html>

²⁶ Ephesians: Chapter 5: 31 New American Standard Bible (NASB) The Lockman Foundation 1995. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&version=NASB#fen-NASB-28491a>

her husband²⁷". Therefore, we can see that when Paul speaks to individuals, it is husband and wife, man and woman and this is what marriage is in Christianity.

Marriage is the one thing that unites all cultures in the sense that it is a communal relationship, a rite of passage bonding two people and reserves obligations and values. Marriage is dignity and a true sign of commitment. It is understood to be solely between a natural man and a natural woman. Furthermore, the family continues to be a cornerstone of human civilisation because of its ability to transmit society's values, norms, morals and ethics.²⁸ Failure of the home speaks to the health of the broader societies. It is clear that marriage is the most central and common tradition in all cultures. It is sacred to all people. It is the building block of nationhood and should be our first form of unity²⁹. If this is so, how has marriage and family changed in the African perspective?

AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The vast majority of the population is comprised of the indigenous African population with its various ethnic groups. When we examine the Zulu nation for example, we see that the Zulu king Shaka created a well-organized centralized Zulu state. An important reform was to integrate defeated clans into the Zulu nation, on a basis of full equality. As a result, settlements grew larger with increasing numbers of homesteads clustered together. The largest hut is that of the chief's mother, the chief's hut is to the right, with the wives huts to the right of the first wife. The unmarried girls live on the left of the entrance, the unmarried boys, to the right. This ensured the growth of the Zulu community making the family the nucleus of the tribe³⁰.

During the *Maafa*,³¹ which is derived from a Swahili term for "disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy" [in preference to using *African Holocaust*, because the indigenous African terminology more truly confers the events], the first African institution destroyed was marriage. As Hare states "The Black family has crumbled more in the last 30 years than it did in the entire 14 decades since slavery³²." This statement can be attributed to all families in the current social malaise.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians: Chapter 7:2-3 New American Standard Bible (NASB) The Lockman Foundation 1995.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&version=NASB#fen-NASB-28491a>

²⁸ GREEN PAPER ON FAMILIES. PROMOTING FAMILY LIFE AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

<http://www.pmg.org.za/node/29227>

²⁹ AFRICAN MARRIAGE. http://www.africanholocaust.net/news_ah/africanmarriageritual.html

³⁰ Zulu Kraals. http://zulu-culture.co.za/zulu_kraal_layout.php

³¹ Barndt, Joseph. *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century*. 2007, page 269. Usage of the Swahili term *maafa* ("misfortune") in English was introduced by Marimba Ani's 1994 book "Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora". It is derived from a Swahili term for "disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy". Harp, O.J. "Across Time: Mystery of the Great Sphinx." 2007, page 247.

³² Hare, Dr Julia ,Psychologist. info@thelackthinktank.com.

South African families have had to adapt to colonialism, urbanisation and globalisation. The foreign occupations and apartheid system, particularly the migrant labour system, also played a comprehensive role in shaping the family in the country. There are also a substantial number of families of European descent including those from Eastern Europe, India, Malaysia and China. South African families exist in this racial and ethnic cauldron³³.

Family life refers to the activities that enable a family to play its roles in society, nurturing, socialising, and parenting. At present in South Africa only a third of children are living with both of their biological parents, according to a South African Institute of Race Relations report. This report shows that 40% of children live only with their mothers, 3% live only with their fathers and 23% live with neither of their biological parents. Some 8% of children live in 'skip generation households' with their grandparents or great aunts and uncles.³⁴ Family life also covers the quality of relationships between the various members, between parents and children, or between spouses and siblings. In this context, we will look at the challenges of a nuclear South African family.

Our family was not without its trials and tribulations. From my first marriage, I had two daughters who were 13 and 11 years of age when their mother passed away, from whom I had divorced a number of years earlier. In my second marriage, we have two sons and a daughter. Our youngest son being diagnosed with cerebral palsy two years after his birth placed a lot of pressure on the family.

After the death of my first wife, we decided to bring the two eldest children into our home as they had been living with an aunt in the interim. During a December holiday, we moved the family together. As in any family dynamics play an important role. Previously my son was the oldest sibling with a younger sister and a younger brother. With the family now enlarged with two stepsisters, both being older than him, tensions started to manifest. During an altercation one-school holiday my eldest son broke the front teeth of my eldest daughter. Not that I was happy with the fight that had happened it did sort out the pecking order among the siblings.

My first sibling to leave home was Liz* who moved into her own flat as she felt a need to be independent. My second daughter Thea* unfortunately fell pregnant during her matric year and had to leave school before the year-end exams. After the baby was born, she moved it with her boyfriend and his parents. After a heart sore discussion, we accepted their decision and

³³ GREEN PAPER ON FAMILIES. PROMOTING FAMILY LIFE AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.
<http://www.pmg.org.za/node/29227>

³⁴ Holborn, Lucy; Eddy, Gail. The First Steps to Healing the South African Family.
www.sairr.org.za/services/publications/occasional-reports/files/first-steps-to-healing-the-south-african-family-final-report-mar-2011.pdf

*Not their real names.

subsequently they married three years later. My third daughter Milly* was requested by my wife's friend to look after their house while they were working in Australia. During this time, she had a relationship and fell pregnant unfortunately with an abusive boyfriend. Soon after she found out she was pregnant she broke off the relationship. Subsequently my siblings have had different strains on their marriages and lives as told in their stories.

THE EFFECTS OF A FOSTER CHILD IN THE FAMILY

My name is Liz*, I am the eldest child of the family of five siblings and my daughter is aged 14.

My husband and I have been married for 17 years in 2012. I previously worked in the administrative field until I stopped working in February 2011. My husband worked in the airline industry as a loadmaster, but is now in the water heating industry. While employed in the airline industry my husband drank almost every day when he was home and on his scheduled breaks. I was not comfortable with this and it caused many an arguments in our home, often in front of our daughter. I grew up in a home where alcohol was very, very seldom used and only on special occasions. My husband on the other hand grew up in a home where his father drank openly.

The cycle of us arguing over his drinking and frequenting bars, sometimes taking our daughter with him, aggravated the situation. During this time, it came to my attention, 5 years after we were married, that my husband had been having affairs since before we were married. The affairs and the constant denial of them carried on for 13 years. During this time, I filed for divorce once and threatened to leave him on three occasions, but could not get to the point of terminating the relationship. My daughter has a close relationship with her father and when we did separate, she started to go into depression.

On one auspicious day my husband lost his job with the airlines as the company had been declared insolvent. This was the turning point in our lives. My husband struggled with his loss for a while until he surrendered his life and accepted Christ into his life. This was an answer to many, many of my prayers. We then started looking for a church where we could strengthen our faith, and after a few weeks, we found our spiritual home. We have been members of the church for on 5 years now and our lives have changed dramatically.

A new journey for us began in early 2010 when a couple at the church introduced us to the world of children in distress. She was a social worker at Child Welfare and encouraged us to apply to be a

place of safety and foster care for these children. In November 2010, we had our first placement that was only for a month. This particular child was a 9-year-old female and had lived most of her life without a mother and so she was thrilled to have a 'mother' to look after her. This caused problems with our biological daughter as she became jealous of the new addition to our family. She would not offer help to this young child and would often be dismissive, as she believed that she could lose her parents.

Soon after the first foster child left, our second foster child arrived and was a baby of 13 months. He was found dumped in a rubbish bin in an alley behind a pizzeria. His biological mother was found to be living on the street and was unable to support him. The impact this has had on our family is twofold. Firstly, it has allowed us to see that we were able to open our hearts to a child that is not biologically ours. Secondly, it has given us empathy for those around us who are in challenging circumstances. This has influenced our daughter's life very differently. She has become jealous of him due to his attachment to my husband. She has been teasing him unduly and has sometimes become nasty in her play. Nevertheless, I believe she loves him very much and that she has mixed feelings as to the new family dynamics.

I was recently in hospital and was unable to care for him for a month and this had a huge impact on our family. While in hospital, they did not allow our foster child to visit me and as he already had abandonment issues, he felt that I had also rejected him. His reaction to this perceived rejection was by having violent tantrums and refusing to let my daughter or me to do anything for him. The responsibility of bathing, dressing etc. all fell on my husband. This took up more of my husband's time and energy thus leaving less for our daughter.

I felt it necessary to get professional help for the family. Since starting the therapy, I have found our little man to be more accepting of me doing things for him and my relationship with him has grown stronger. The biggest change came when we spent two weeks away on holiday at the coast. The first week was not much different to our normal routine. During the second week though, our "baby" started to want to spend more time with me. This was a real joy after I felt he was rejecting me due to my hospitalisation. Since getting home from the holiday his anxiety has continued to get less and less and he now allows me to do things for him.

The impact of our previous life, as mentioned above, is now starting to show in the relationship between father and daughter. The psychologist advised that it would benefit the family if each of us spent one on one time with each child. This strategy has worked very well as the relationship

between my children have grown in leaps and bounds and the relationship between father and daughter is on the mend. My relationship with our daughter is very strong and we are extremely close.

Throughout the almost two years we have been assisting the Child Welfare we have had a variety of children pass through our home, each with their own individual ups and downs for our family. Nevertheless, the one constant in this is that each child has left an impression on our lives and we pray that in the short time they were with us we planted a seed for our Lord within them that will grow over their lives.

Here we find a family although members of a church who still needed to find “external” professional help with their foster child and the traumatic dynamics within their relationships. What “systems” could the church have in place to be able to become aware of this type of conflict?

A MARRIAGE WITH A TRANSMIGRATION HUSBAND

Transmigration is a non-permanent move from one place to another includes moving to a different country.

My name is Thea* I am the second child of the family of five siblings. I have been married for 16 years and have a daughter aged 19 and a son aged 15.

It was a big decision to having a transmigration marriage. We were unsure how this was going to affect our relationship our relationship with the children as well as and the relationship between themselves. My husband’s company had decided to transfer him to West Africa on a three-year contract. This meant that he would only be home every twenty-eight days. The money was good and we needed that desperately, although it meant that we were going to be living as a split family!

At first, it was hard to be by myself and juggle the mother and father duties. My son being so young battled the most without his dad. I took him to a psychologist where he was diagnosed with depression. This was tough for both my husband and me. We had to deal with it as this was now the way things had to be.

I found myself being mom, dad, nurse, mentor, teacher and I am battling considering my son’s depression. For a while I played it safe with him in order not to push him too much. Trying to keep things on track and happy at home is difficult with two teenagers who need their parents. I then go

to work where I am expected to be everyone's friend and not have a personal or private life. As for my daughter, she adapted extremely well, probably due to the difference in age. Still I had to learn to depend on myself more than I used to, as my husband was not always here to do things. This also made me become more independent.

In situations like this, it is so important to have a good support system. Not everyone lets you down, but it is a hard life. People that you think are there for you may disappoint you. This has been my experience and it has taught me that the only person I can rely on is myself.

For a while I was not sure if we are going to be able to continue like this. For a close family like ours it has been very difficult. A 15-year-old boy needs his father, for the support of another male. A 19-year-old girl needs her daddy, her hero, her support when mom just is not enough. A wife needs her husband, her partner, her soul mate. There were times that I did feel alone, which was mostly at night when the house was quiet and the kids in bed. At such times, "You have this wanting to have your partner there just for the normality of marriage and the day-to-day conversation which we did at the end of each day".

It was hard on me in the beginning as he was working in the most isolated place. That put extra pressure on me as we communicated via text messages. He was also frustrated for being isolated, which in turn he pushed onto me whenever we spoke. It was hard to deal with both my husband's bit of depression as well as my son's, but I seem to have managed not withstanding all the pressures.

My son did play up at times with attitude issues, but I finally stopped being so soft due to the depression and started to do the proper parenting thing (both mom and dad). Therefore, I pushed and became what a mom should be, the disciplinarian as well the confidant, and taught both children how important it is to have each other.

My daughter at times became the rock I needed to lean on when things just got so overwhelming. She became the one that would reassure me that things would be ok, thereby bringing the positive attitude into my mind and heart. My daughter was the one who adjusted so much quicker to what was happening to the family. As the complete transmigration family arrangement became part of our lives, we all seemed to adjust and carry on with our daily lives.

When my husband is home during his time off, my daughter and I seem to find it hard to adjust as

we had got so used to doing things “our way”, with “our” decisions. I have to remember to include him in arrangements. I found myself putting my life on hold when he was home, because of the need to spend as much time with him as possible before he left again for West Africa.

I knew that when he was away working he still felt isolated at times when he knew I was socializing and he was not here with us. I sometime felt guilty, but as time went by, I got used to the routine. I seemed to not feel that guilt anymore and I started to enjoy the independent time.

Living the transmigration way eventually becomes normality. My son enjoyed the time when dad was home so they could have the father and son times together. Their newfound interest in bikes also helped with the bonding. I observed that my son thrived during the time he spent with dad. My daughter spent her precious time with dad as the time was so short, but she and I grew closer.

After all, is said and done, life goes on. The children grew up and became more considerate and able to adjust. The family has become closer and we are learning that family time is the most important time ever.

Although this family does not mention that they are members of any church is there a possibility that previously they were members of a church who had “lost” them? Can the church reach such families and how? Does the church actually need such families?

THE SINGLE PARENT FAMILY DYNAMICS WITH A DISABLED³⁵ CHILD

My name is Milly* I am the fourth child of the family of five siblings. I married in 2011 and my daughter aged 12, is disabled. My husband has two sons aged 20 and 21 years old from a previous marriage. My story revolves around a hijacking incident that happened in 2000.

My youngest brother has cerebral palsy and living with a handicapped person to me was normal. The difficulties faced growing up in the family did not affect me personally, as I was able to distance myself from my brother’s differences. This all changed when I was 23 years old and in my last trimester of pregnancy. I had decided to have my child on my own due to my then partner’s physical abuse. I felt lonely, not because I did not have family around me, but as there was no soul mate present in my life.

Then on a day in 2000, all my plans were altered. After visiting my maternal grandmother, during

³⁵ Disabled: adj a lacking one or more physical powers, such as the ability to walk or to co-ordinate one’s movements. b (as collective n; preceded by the): the disabled. An acceptable alternative to the word disabled is differently abled . The more acceptable reference is a “special needs person”.

an abortive hi-jacking I was shot in the abdomen. The bullet penetrated my unborn baby in the left buttock and exited below her left kidney. My baby girl was born 8 weeks prematurely and weighing 1.96kg, that was just the beginning. While being rushed to hospital in a critical condition I concentrated all my thoughts on my unborn child not knowing if the baby was alive or not.

After my operation, finding out that my baby was on life-support as her lungs had not being fully developed was a shattering experience. When I saw that I knew that was a challenge I had not being prepared for. Nothing can prepare you for that sight. Slowly coming to terms with the fact that you have a premature baby was one thing, but with my daughter being on life support is something entirely different and a daunting position for any mother. I had little time to focus on myself as all my attention was on my daughter.

Two days later, my life was crushed again when after a test feed, at 4 days old, the doctor found an injury to the large intestines, the damage being caused by the bullet, and my child needed surgery. The operation was to fix the intestines and they attached a colostomy bag. This was to allow the body to repair the intestines as medication could only assist.

Going to see her after the surgery was a scary sight. Not only did she have tubes and machines around her she had now part of her intestines pulled through from her abdomen in a bag that was there to catch any faeces. Again, I found myself alone, even though I was surrounded by family, friends and hospital staff.

I realized later that I could not hold or cuddle her like you would a normal baby, because then the bag comes away from her body and then causes a mess. This was something I had been looking forward to and was taken so harshly from me. She had the colostomy bag for five long months. Even though she was a very easy baby, it still was not easy to ACCEPT. It was during this period that the doctors suspected damage to the lower spine affecting the use of her legs.

After her colostomy bag was removed and another stay in hospital, my life seemed to take on a scene of normality. We could try to build up on all the time we missed, the cuddles and the hugs and playtime. This was something new to both of us as her colostomy bag used to get in the way, but now she could be a 'normal' baby.

Coming to terms with everything that had happened in those few weeks was not easy. I could try to think back and see how I felt and I realized very early that I began to appreciate just how fragile life

is.

We found that she really enjoyed water and began swimming lessons to assist in strengthening her lungs that were underdeveloped due to the premature birth. This has become her sport of preference and she has begun to partake in galas.

Now 12 years later, I have come to realize that a disabled child is just like any other child, they require the same love and attention as everybody else. Although she has special needs for her life, I have found a normal person who is just unable to walk.

I always remember something that was said to me, when she was still a baby, “God never puts something on our plate that HE knows we can’t handle”.

I have faced many challenges over the years, and I have come to know myself more and I am a stronger person for going through it, in a sense lonesome but not altogether alone. I am unsure if there has been a provident hand in all this. Maybe at some point all this will be revealed for what was a difficult and challenging time in the past for a prosperous future. I have found a soul mate that has accepted my daughter with all her challenges. We have also found a church in which we are happy and they have reached out to my special needs daughter. My husband, daughter and I look forward to a prosperous future taking the experiences from our past as a pillar of strength.

During her time of loneliness, could the church have assisted in helping her understand that this was temporary? Did the church miss an opportunity to strengthen a vulnerable person? What could have compassion done for her during this traumatic period?

SUMMARY

Marriage and family are fundamental to society. It is clear that marriage has influenced society and has been influenced by society. Society is a combination of the many facets of human life and none of the parts of this grouping is exempt from change. Economic, religious, institutional, political and social developments have each played substantial roles in this evolution. In the current period families have been put under great tension as seen from the personal accounts. The strength of the family is in a way the strength of society and of the nation.

From this study there is far more to understanding how religion and society interact in building families, society and nations. Presently we have pressures on marriages including co-habitation, same-sex unions, single parenting, polygamy which are changing these dynamics. As the Church, we are therefore to be the custodians of this fundamental institution of society and need to guard it as the “jewel of great price”. Is it possible that we can then use family as a barometer to gauge the state of society and the country?

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