

The Meaning of Marriage: A Christian Perspective in Zambian Context

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the institution of marriage. It seeks to clarify the meaning of same-sex union from a Christian point of view and tries to tease out how this may be located within the conception of the institution of marriage. It is an attempt at redressing what seems to be a growing misuse of the term "marriage" in so far as it is applied outside the context of heterosexual union, a situation that, in the authors' view, if left unchecked, may lead to the loss of the meaning of the term. Against this backdrop have been some contentious maneuvers by some sections of society in Zambia to push for the legalisation of same-sex marriages, which has bred divergent views among Zambians. The rationale behind the study, therefore, was to provide a critical difference between the union of the same sex and that of the opposite sex. Methodologically, the study was a desk review that sought reliance on secondary data to analyse and bring to light what marriage means in line with Christian teaching. It is apparent from the analysis of the paper that the general feeling of the majority Zambians is that the fact that other countries have legalised same-sex unions should not sway Zambia as a nation, as she has her own ground to position her stance on the matter, with the church as her pillar.

Keywords: Marriage, Same-sex union, LGBTQ, Catholic Teaching, Christianity, Zambia.

1.0 Introduction

This paper aims at problematizing the meaning of the term 'marriage' in the wake of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning (henceforth, LGBTQ). The meaning of marriage is both a romantic and divisive topic to explore in a country like Zambia, where the legalisation of same-sex union 'marriage' seems to be looming. Most people do not know where to stand or how to respond to the noise made each day on television, radio, and social media about homosexuality. It is absolutely known that marriage is a long-standing social institution ingrained in human rituals. One wonders, in this case, what the meaning of marriage is in today's society. Is it still relevant and revered, holding to its outermost meaning, or has it become a beloved but antiquated idea that can refer to anything? In the view of the authors, the church, as the custodian of moral teaching, has a role to play in this critical issue.

Nevertheless, this paper seeks to clarify the meaning of the word married, particularly in relation to Catholic ways of teaching and what the Bible addresses. Hence, to give the critical difference between the same-sex union and that of marriage (man and woman). It brings to light what marriage means in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church in connection to Christianity as a whole. Despite the fact that other countries have legalized same-sex marriage, each country has its own ground to stand on, and in the case of Zambia, the church has been a pillar of reference in this regard.

1.1 The Problem

The current highly contested Same-sex marriage arrangement seems to have reduced the institution of marriage to simply a mere contact or union of two individuals, as opposed to what it ought to be. Contrary to what it has been reduced to, marriage, in its real heterogeneous sense, is supposed to play a regulatory role in human lives; save as a system for organising and allocating rights and responsibilities. This study, therefore, problematises what seems to be a seeping manoeuvre by some sections of society in Zambia to advocate for the legalisation of same-sex unions which in the view of the researchers, if allowed, would undermine the meaning of marriage as an ordained institution, and as was originally intended from the Christian point of view.

1.2 Objectives

The research objectives were;

1. To describe the same-sex union and the heterosexual marriage union, respectively, against what is enshrined in the institution of marriage from the Catholic perspective.
2. To determine the locale of the call for the same-sex marriage union within the conception of the established institution of marriage and restate the legitimacy in the meaning of the term ‘marriage, and
3. To recommend some ‘appropriate’ conception or treatment of the same-sex marriage union to safeguard the loss in the meaning of the term ‘marriage.

2.0 Methodology

Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative approach whose objectives are descriptive and holistic (Creswell, 2012¹; Flick, 2014)². It was essentially a Desk Research that employed the document analysis method. This is a method that seeks reliance on secondary data from existing documents and previous research to justify the given objectives. In this approach, the researcher depended on the use of data already collected by other scholars. A systematic search of online databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and ProQuest was conducted to identify relevant literature about the original meaning of marriage as a divine institution, against the (contested) meaning of what seems to be the currently popularised same-sex marriage union. The search included articles, reports, and books published in the last ten years. Literature was screened based on its relevance, quality, and reliability. Only sources that provided insights into the required information were selected for analysis. Care was taken to avoid such pitfalls of Secondary Data Analysis as the limitation due to the fact that some of the sources pursued may have been collected and compiled for purposes different from what the current study pursued (Johnston 2013)³. One of the cautionary measures applied, therefore, was to ensure that there was a match between the research questions and the existing data for careful reflective examination (Heaton, 2008⁴; Johnston, 2012⁵; Smith, 2008⁶). It is noteworthy that data collection went hand in hand with data analysis (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999⁷). The selected data were extracted, organised and synthesised to provide a comprehensive overview of the matter under investigation. Data were analysed thematically using descriptive and analytical skills. Secondary data analysis, as applied in this context, helped in the generating of new knowledge required by this study.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Definitions and Etymology of the Word ‘Marriage’

The etymological root of the word marriage made its first appearance between 1250 and 13000 AD (Paprocki 2007)⁸. According to Paprocki (2007), the word marriage has its origin in the Latin word *matrimouiu*, which means mother and action, state, or condition. Later, it became the French word *matremoinme*, which developed into the middle English word marriage. That being the case, the original word could be used as a noun for husband in male form or wife in female form. Therefore, the longevity of the traditional and the universal nature of its applicability across countries, cultures, classes, and centuries are indicative of its enduring position (*Ibid*).

Dehlin *et al.* (2015)⁹ seem to provide a fundamental view in relation to the central contention of this study when they contend that the Mormon religion teaches that marriage should be between a man and a woman and that its members should obey the law of chastity. They place the focus of their argument on the assertion that "sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife". Violations of this code, they argue, include "adultery, being without natural affection, lustfulness, infidelity, incontinence, filthy communications, impurity, inordinate affection, and fornication".

3.2 History of the Same-Sex Union

California was the first state to enact a statewide process to recognise same-sex couples when it created its domestic partnership registry in 1999. Domestic partnerships offered California same-sex couples some of the benefits normally associated with marriage, namely, hospital visitation rights and the ability to be considered next of kin when settling the estate of a deceased partner. In 2000, Vermont enacted Civil Unions, a status designed specifically for same-sex couples to give them a broader set of rights and responsibilities akin to those associated with marriage. According to Gary and Taylor (2015)¹⁰, Massachusetts became the first state to legalise marriage for same-sex couples in 2004. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the provision of the federal Defense of Marriage Act passed in 1996 that limited federal recognition of marriages to different-sex couples. That ruling prompted an unprecedented wave of lawsuits in every state where same-sex couples were not permitted to marry. After numerous rulings in these cases affirming the right of same-sex couples to marry in a series of states, the Supreme Court's June 2015 decision meant that same-sex couples could marry anywhere in the country.

Moreover, as society has begun to treat same-sex couples more like different people, the differences between the two groups have narrowed. For example, compared to 20 years ago, proportionately more lesbians and gay men were in cohabiting same-sex relationships, and Globally, marriage or some other form of legal recognition through civil or registered partnerships is now widely available to same-sex couples across Northern, Western, and Central Europe, large portions of North and South America, and in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Conversely, homosexuality remains criminalised in some cases by punishment of death, throughout much of Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, as well as in Russia and many Pacific and Caribbean island nations (*Ibid*).

3.4 Homosexuality and the Christian Faith

Crook (2013)¹¹ observes that in as much as we may be concerned about heterosexual relationships, it is also clear that many people are homosexual. He notes that a precise determination of how large the number

of homosexuals is may not be possible. However, he estimates that in America alone, the range is between two and ten per cent of the population.

The terms heterosexual and homosexual are by no means as précises as most people assume. Heterosexual is usually used to designate people who are attracted to persons of the opposite sex, and homosexual refers to people who are persons of the same gender (Crook 2013: 132). But, according to both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, a line cannot be sharply drawn between the two. Rather, there is a continuum with people falling somewhere between exclusive heterosexuality and exclusive homosexuality, although there is no sharp line. However, Fromer's characterisation of homosexuality seems to be helpful. He describes a homosexual person as one who feels a strong erotic attraction to persons of the same sex, and who prefers to engage in sexual activities with members of the same sex (Fromer, 1983:81)¹².

In our attempt to consider homosexuality from a Christian perspective, we begin to look at biblical teachings. There is some basis that the pro-homosexual sections of our society are trying to use in advancing their agenda, and that is, the rarity of biblical references to homosexual activity which they use to question the importance which many contemporary Christians attach to the matter. In the Old Testament, there are two pertinent narratives and two legal prohibitions. The first narrative is the account of the visit of two angels to the home of Lot in the city of Sodom (Genesis 19: 1-11)¹³. Sentenced to destruction because of its sinfulness, Sodom lost its opportunity for reprieve when the men of the city attempted the homosexual rape of God's emissaries who were visiting Lot. The second narrative, found in Judges 22-30, describes a somewhat similar situation. On his way home after regaining control of a concubine who had run away from him, a Levite who lived in Ephraim stopped for the night in Gibeah, in the territory of Benjamin. The men of Gibeah demanded that his host deliver the Levite into their hands so that they could have sex with him. The concubine was given to the men in place of the Levite, and she died after the night of sexual abuse. The Levites took vengeance by calling for violent retaliation against the tribe of Benjamin. What wrong did the townspeople do or intend to do in these two passages? In spite of the contemporary biblical scholars finding in them no reference at all to homosexuality, historically the passages have been interpreted to be a condemnation of homosexual activities. Henceforth, homosexuality has been considered (from a Christian perspective) a sin, with many Christian ethicists unequivocally calling homosexual acts sinful (Crook 2013:135). In the New Testament, the only passage in which homosexuality is discussed is Romans 1:18-32. This passage is part of Paul's discussion of the entire world's need for Christ (Romans 1:16—2:29). The sin of the Gentiles, from which they need redemption, is idolatry and homosexuality, according to Paul, is a consequence of that idolatry (*Ibid*).

3.4 The Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation and the Advocacy for LGBTQ

On December 29, 1991, Zambia was declared a Christian nation by the Second Republican President Fredrick Chiluba. President Chiluba intended that as a Christian Nation, Zambia would be governed by righteous principles of the Word of God and that righteousness and justice must prevail at all levels of authority so that the righteousness of God would exhort Zambia (Cheyaka, 2016)¹⁴. Cheyaka further observes that twenty-five years later, in 2016, the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs was created and one of its mandates was to actualise the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation. The declaration has, however, been contested by some sections of society for what is alleged to be its shortcomings. Some have referred to it as a *hollow religio-political* proclamation, alleging that it has not translated into praxis (*Ibid*).

Even though the Declaration of Zambia has received some criticisms - mostly based on its objectives and application, it has, however, helped to provide sufficient grounds to buttress the Church's stance on the matter of LGBTQ. This is because the mere nominal reference of Zambia as a Christian Nation challenges and motivates the citizenry to adhere to the righteous principles of the Word of God in all aspects of life.

Thus, the fact that other countries have legalised same-sex unions should not sway Zambia, as a nation, as she has her ground to position her stance on the matter, with the church as her pillar. It is apparent from the findings of this study that the general feeling of the church and therefore of the citizenry on the matter is that their nation should not be divided, as it stands on the motto One Zambia, one nation, undergirded by its stance as a Christian nation, living by the Christian virtues.

3.5 The Current Position on the Matter of LGBTQ in Zambia

Currently, Same-sex sexual activity is proscribed by Sections 155 and 156 of Zambia's penal code (as amended in 1933 and repealed and replaced by Act No. 15 of 2005). The law criminalises consensual same-sex sexual conduct, with penalties upon conviction for engaging in "acts against the order of nature" of fifteen years to life imprisonment. Convictions under the lesser charge of "gross indecency" carry a penalty of up to fourteen years imprisonment (Republic of Zambia 2005, Penal Code Act 1931, Chapter XV: Offences against morality: Sections 155–156)¹⁵.

Whereas the LGBTQ community has enjoyed support and won legal approval elsewhere in the international community, in Zambia, the statutory instruments have not been invoked to provide a specific stance on the matter. This could arguably be exacerbated by the fact that even the very institution of marriage is not adequately articulated in the Act to provide sufficient grounds for advocacy. For instance, the current Marriage Act, Chapter 50, of the laws of Zambia does not define the term marriage. However, the said Act provides guidelines and procedures on how to contract a valid statutory marriage. In order for a party to contract a statutory marriage, among others, there is a need to file a notice of intention to marry with the registrar within not less than 21 days (Section 6 of the Marriage Act, Chapter 50 of the Laws of Zambia)¹⁶. The marriage must also be solemnised by a licensed church minister, priest, or pastor in a designated or licensed place or building. Further, the Marriage Act allows persons who are 21 and older to consent to a marriage, and persons below the age of 21 require the consent of the judge and parents (The Marriage Act; Chapter 50 of The Laws of Zambia).

4.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide a critical difference between the union of the same sex and that of the opposite sex and problematise the idea of permitting the LGBTQ in the Christian nation of Zambia. The paper has interrogated the meaning of 'marriage' in the wake of LGBTQ. It has revealed that marriage is a long-standing social institution in Zambian society today, entrenched in citizenry's religious life based on Christian values and principles, so much so that it is still relevant and revered, holding to its outermost meaning and that the church, as the custodian of moral teaching, has a role to play in it. The critical difference between the same-sex union has been given, highlighting the Christian meaning of marriage. Despite the fact that other countries have legalised same-sex marriage, Zambia has its own ground to stand on, and the church has been a pillar of reference in this regard. It is therefore apparent from the analysis of the paper that the general feeling of the majority of Zambians has been that their

nation should not be divided on such matters of foreign origin as LGBTQ, as they stand and united by the motto One Zambia, one nation, with shared values, principles and beliefs.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the authors recommend the following:

1. The current generation Should consider the reason for the biblical prohibition of same-sex conduct as the same reason why modern loving homosexual partnerships must also be condemned, namely that they are incompatible with God's created order. And since that order (heterosexual monogamy) was established by creation, not culture, its validity is both permanent and universal.
2. Those advocating for same-sex unions should realise that there can be no 'liberation' from God's created norms; the liberation is found only in accepting them.

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