

God and (Opposite-sex) Marriage

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

At most weddings, preachers dogmatically insist that marriages cannot last unless couples put God first. However, it seems more sensible to urge that couples put *each other* first. Indeed, there are many nonreligious couples that are ecstatically happy doing just that.

The late, great secular humanist Paul Kurtz and his wife Claudine were such a couple. Kurtz wrote and spoke eloquently about the commitment that married couples should have with one another; and more importantly, he “walked the walk.” (Moreover, Kurtz helped popularize the call for humanist weddings, funerals and other ceremonies.)

The late atheist Tai Solarin and his late atheist wife Sheila Solarin also had a great marriage. There was no talk of putting God first. There was, however, talk of mutual respect, sharing and caring. (This couple eventually established the Mayflower School, the first secular school in Nigeria, fostering humanist values among its many high-achieving students.)

The great 19th Century freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll had a wonderful marriage. He was also an eloquent defender of the institution of marriage. Despite the fact that he was one of the greatest orators of his day, a courageous colonel on the side of the North during the Civil War, and a successful attorney, he said that his proudest achievement in life was that he had never caused his wife a moment’s pain. His wife and two daughters adored him and he was a great proponent of women’s rights.

Indeed, one important trait that these marriages all had in common was a lack of sexism. Conversely, so-called “sacred” texts are filled with passages from their patriarchal authors calling for women to obey men. (Thankfully, most Christian preachers today have stopped including in the marriage vows that wives must obey their husbands.)

Some religious teachings even call for the beating of disobedient wives. Furthermore, popular religious texts condemn divorce, unless at least one spouse has committed adultery.

However, why should any couple be forced to stay together until at least one of them dies, no matter how much they might despise and hurt one another? Why should the institution of marriage be deemed more important than the happiness and welfare of the *people involved* in the marriage? Essentially, conservative and reactionary religionists are saying that miserable couples should sacrifice themselves so that the institution of marriage can remain intact.

One has to wonder why a perfectly wise, omnibenevolent and omniscient God did not first and foremost condone divorce in cases of emotional, mental and physical abuse. How could it possibly be worse to commit adultery than to mercilessly knock a spouse unconscious or worse? Where was this God's priorities, and why does he not intervene when husbands are pummeling or even killing their wives?

In theocracies, married couples regularly put God first. As a result, wives have no control over their fertility and have so many children that their entire identity as women becomes rooted in motherhood and serving their husbands. This clearly does not seem to be a recipe for happiness for many women.

Marriage is a relationship between two human beings. Why do so many people insist that it cannot work unless there is a possibly existent God at the head of it? Theists simply make marriage much more complicated than it has to be.

Some couples go to patriarchal clergymen for advice on how to improve their marriages. Yet these clergymen basically insist that the way to find marital bliss is for the wife to obey her husband and to blindly trust in his leadership and authority. This poor advice understandably leaves reasonable wives to feel bitter and resentful toward their husbands and their clueless clergymen.

There have been many good secular books written on how couples can improve their marriages, and these books give far better advice than that found in ancient religious texts. Secular books providing advice on marriage provide modern solutions to modern problems. They deal with problems ancient religionists never even encountered.

Rather than considering the natural feeling of lust to be one of the seven deadly sins, secular advisors (and even some religious advisors) give married couples

good advice for spicing up their sex lives. Rather than promoting the primitive notion of patriarchy, secular advisors push for equality between the sexes. This seems to be a much better way to build happy, fulfilling marriages, at least for most people living in democratic societies.

Catholic priests seem to be the worst clergymen trying to dispense marital advice. They are lifelong, presumably sexually frustrated celibates promoting a patriarchal, homophobic worldview in which birth control and abortion have long been condemned. It seems highly unlikely that such men would have much experience upon which to draw conclusions as to how married women could improve their lives, and how married couples could improve their sex lives.

Finally, one of mainstream religion's greatest failures is that it not only prohibits divorce, but does not provide advice as to how to bring about amicable splits. However, divorces are simply inevitable, and no one benefits from a bitter divorce, especially if children are involved. Reasonable people understand the reality of divorce. They seek to minimize the damage when married couples split. They do not put any God first. They put the children and women's safety first. And why shouldn't they? If people cannot have a good marriage, there is no reason whatsoever to assume that they cannot have a good divorce if they are willing to work at it.