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The God-Given Marital Mandate: Monogamous, Heterosexual, Intrafaith¹

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What are the two basic institutions established by God in Eden for the benefit of humanity? If a typical Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) were asked that question, the immediate response would invariably be: “Marriage and the Sabbath.”² Now, for many decades that response would have been considered sufficient. For instance, the term “the Sabbath” has readily and universally been understood by Adventists to refer specifically to the “seventh-day Sabbath,” as set aside by God at the end of the six days of creation.

What about the word “marriage”? What kind of conjugal relationship spontaneously comes to mind when this term is used? In the past it appeared that Adventists automatically assumed that a “proper” biblical marriage had to be a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith union. However, this historic view has recently been challenged and questioned by some SDAs.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this point. In 1992 an article appeared in *Ministry* magazine on how to share the Adventist message with people of other cultures. In discussing the thorny problem of plural marriage, the writer stated that to refuse to baptize a practicing polygamist into the SDA Church was a “serious example of cross-cultural confusion.”³ The author, a leading Adventist educator, regarded monogamy as merely one of “the optional variables of Western culture,”⁴ a practice which actually “hindered church growth.”⁵ Is mo-

¹This article is an edited and expanded revision of the second chapter of the author’s doctoral research (D.Min. project dissertation, Andrews University, 1993); published as Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993).

²A careful study of Genesis 1 and 2 supports this conclusion. See also, Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 46-48.

³Borge Schantz, “One Message—Many Cultures: How Do We Cope?” *Ministry*, June, 1992, 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

nogamy simply one alternative among many, or is it a universal biblical standard for all marriages?

A second illustration relates to interfaith marriages. For decades the SDA Church has disapproved of marriages between Adventists and non-Adventists. In support of this position, the 1992 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* specifically states: "Adventist ministers should not perform the marriage ceremony of Adventists with non-Adventists."⁶ However, new trends are arising. At the 1993 Annual Council in Bangalore, India, an opposing perspective was proposed. A president of one of the divisions of the church pointed out that in his part of the world the women members far outnumber the men in the church. And, it was stated that "in many cases if a woman wanted to marry she would have to marry a non-Adventist."⁷ Another division president added that in some countries marriage could be conducted only by ministers or priests. Thus, if an SDA minister did not conduct the wedding for an Adventist marrying a non-Adventist, would Adventists be comfortable with a Buddhist priest conducting the marriage service for an SDA?⁸ As a result of discussions such as these a new position has been adopted and recently published in the 1997 *Minister's Manual*. Interestingly, this new statement concerning interfaith marriages still comes under the subheading, "When You Should Not Officiate." However, the former distinct prohibition has been somewhat attenuated, and now merely records that the SDA Church "strongly urges Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings."⁹ As can be observed, more and more SDAs are becoming increasingly open to this idea of interfaith marriages. As one pastor recently put it: To refuse to marry a non-Adventist to an Adventist "is religious bigotry."¹⁰

A third and final illustration relates to the issue of gender differentiation. A few years ago a vocal SDA feminist edited a book in which Adventist women tell of their lives and faith. One chapter is written by a woman who taught in two SDA academies, worked as a Bible instructor, and later went back to school and subsequently graduated in theology. This was all before what she calls her "Martin Luther experience."¹¹ She tells of her "unusual calling" from God, she feels, that came to her in a dream—a dream about being in love with another woman! She became involved with this woman who was studying to become an

⁵Ibid., 8.

⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 246.

⁷See the article by J. David Newman, "Marrying non-Adventists," *Ministry*, February, 1994, 5.

⁸Ibid.

⁹See *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997), 261.

¹⁰Jack Robinson, "To Wed Or Not to Wed . . . That Is the Question," Unpublished Manuscript, February, 1994, 10.

¹¹Lin Ennis, "Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality," in *In Our Own Words*, eds. Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, CA: Adventist Women's Institute, 1993), 229.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

SDA, and she describes this “love” as something that “felt right in a way that transcends moral argument.”¹² Talking about her new lesbian identity, she says:

Many people, mostly Christians of other faiths, have said how providential my meeting my first lover was, coming, as we did, from thousands of miles for a chance weekend. They say God used that experience to open my mind, that that first love had to be that powerful to convince me to break with the last vestiges of tradition cherished as truth. I was so devoted to my previous socialization that it took me years to see that this was God’s leading.¹³

Shocking, disturbing, perhaps even blasphemous words! Yet, this is an example of some of the thinking that is infiltrating into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This should come as no great surprise when one realizes that in the mid-1980s a leading SDA ethicist suggested that Adventist Christians should encourage homosexuals who do not believe they can change to live together in faithful homosexual unions.¹⁴

These three illustrations of polygamous, interfaith, and homosexual unions being accepted by some within Adventism make one acutely aware of the need to restudy the Holy Scriptures on the issue of marriage. While there is obviously a tremendous amount to be learned from the Bible on this issue, this article will be restricted to a few reflections on the specific marital structure as established by God in the beginning, as well as the implications that this has for all Bible-believing Christians.

The Pattern Established in Eden

The book of Genesis provides a concrete account of the institution of marriage. In the first two chapters of the Bible the question of human sexuality is directly dealt with. These opening chapters of Scripture are determinative for a biblical theology of sexuality, since here the pattern is established and pronounced “very good” (Gen 1:31) by God Himself.¹⁵

J. Kerby Anderson aptly observes: “Foundational to a Christian understanding of sexuality is God’s plan in creation found in Genesis 1 and 2.”¹⁶ While some information is to be found in Genesis 1, the primary focus of this section will be on Genesis 2, where most of the data relating to marital form is located. The passages that specifically relate to the institution of the first marriage are located in Genesis 2:18, 21-24 and 1:27, 28:

¹²Ibid., 231.

¹³Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁴David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984): 16.

¹⁵See Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 (Spring 1988): 5.

¹⁶J. Kerby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Ethical Issues*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 165.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.

And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said,

"This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."¹⁷

Various biblical scholars have analyzed these passages and have come to several conclusions regarding the essence and meaning of marriage.¹⁸ In this study, however, only the factors relating to the actual structure of the marital relationship will be examined from the biblical record. Before addressing the actual form of the original marriage, the question as to whether marriage is simply a social custom or a fundamental divine institution needs to be briefly considered.

The Originator of Marriage

Some have posited that marriage is merely a societal or secular institution, or one of "the optional variables of Western culture,"¹⁹ as noted above. For example, J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson give the following definition: "Marriage is the state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group."²⁰ If this is so, then whatever form of marriage a society approves, whether monogamous or polygamous, heterosexual or homosexual, intrafaith or interfaith, must be considered acceptable.

¹⁷Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

¹⁸See, for example, Samson Osimbo Obwa, "Polygamy Among the Southern Luo of Kenya: A Critique of Both the Practice of Polygamy and the Reaction of Mission-Founded Churches to It in the Light of Biblical Teaching" (M.A. thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1978), 50-56; Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (Summer 1991): 309; Davidson.

¹⁹Schantz, 11.

²⁰J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson, "Marriage," *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), 786.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

However, beyond being simply a sexual relationship approved by society, marriage in the first chapters of Genesis involves a divine dimension. Genesis 1:27 says that *God* created them, “male and female,” and charged them to be “fruitful and multiply” (1:28). This conjugal relationship is explicated further in the following chapter. Genesis 2:18 records the words of God: “I will make him a helper.” In other words, it was *God* who decided to create “a suitable companion” (2:18, TEV) for the man. Then, it was *God* who “brought her to the man” (2:22) to be his wife. Thus, both passages specifically state that God is the originator of the marriage relationship.

Clearly, as Geoffrey Bromiley states, “God was the author of this union.”²¹ He was the one who instituted marriage in the beginning.²² Samuel Dresner notes that “the Midrash suggests that God Himself performed the first wedding ceremony for Adam and Eve.”²³ Or, as Ellen White observed, “God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe.”²⁴

The Number of Partners

From Genesis 2:21-24 it becomes clear that this marriage took place between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns in this passage is noteworthy: God decides to make “a helper” for “the man” (2:18); He selects “one” rib from “the man” (2:21), and fashions it into “a woman” whom He then takes to “the man” (2:22); “the man” says that “she shall be called woman” (2:23); thus, “a man” leaves his parents and is joined to “his wife” (2:24).²⁵ In this distinct way the original marital form can be seen to be monogamous. As John Calvin stated:

But though here no mention is made of *two*, yet there is no ambiguity in the sense; for Moses had not said that God has assigned many wives, but only *one* to one man; and in the general direction given, he had put the wife in the singular number. It remains, therefore, that the conjugal bond subsists between two persons only, whence it easily appears, that nothing is less accordant with the divine institution than polygamy.²⁶

²¹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3.

²²Gerhard Jasper, “Polygyny in the Old Testament,” *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969): 50; also, Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton, MD: Doulos Publishers, 1987), 3.

²³Dresner, 316.

²⁴White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

²⁵George Bush comments: “As for polygamy, it is clearly forbidden by the fact that a single pair only were created, and by the terms of the command, that a man shall cleave to his wife (not wives) *only*,” George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Genesis; Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction*, 2 vols. (New York: Newman and Ivison, 1852), 1:69 (emphasis original).

²⁶John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 136.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Wright and Thompson correctly note that “monogamy is implicit in the story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam.”²⁷ O. J. Baab concurs, stating: “The creation account in Genesis writes of the first marriage in clearly monogamous terms.”²⁸ Even Eugene Hillman, who attempts to prove that polygamy was legitimate according to Mosaic Law, admits that “if we accept it as divinely revealed truth that our species started from only one pair of human beings, then certainly the original marriage must have been monogamous.”²⁹

Based on the fact that God made only one wife for Adam, Robert Hitchens suggests: “Had He intended for man to be polygamous He would have created several wives.”³⁰ Similarly, Mavumilusa Makanzu, aware that God “did not create two or more women, but one,”³¹ maintains that this divine institution of monogamy has been clearly expressed ever since creation.³² As Walter Wegner aptly remarks:

If we are correct in viewing the union of Adam and Eve of Genesis 1 and 2 as the family as God wants it to be, then there can be no doubt about the fact that the marriage held up for the emulation of ancient Israel was a *monogamous* one.³³

Thus, as Parrinder concludes: “The fact that the first human beings are represented as having been one man, with one wife, clearly sets up monogamy as the original intention of God for the human race.”³⁴ In Ellen White’s words: “This first marriage is an example of what all marriages should be. God gave the man one wife. Had he deemed it best for man to have more than one wife, he could as easily have given him two; but he sanctioned no such thing.”³⁵ Since

²⁷Wright and Thompson, “Marriage,” 787.

²⁸O. J. Baab, “Marriage,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 3:281.

²⁹Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975), 151.

³⁰Hitchens, 15.

³¹Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa, 1983), 58.

³²*Ibid.*, 58, 62. Furthermore, Makanzu notes, additional support for monogamy comes from the fact that the Song of Songs “cannot be understood in the context of a polygamous marriage;” 59.

³³Walter Wegner, “God’s Pattern for the Family in the Old Testament,” in *Family Relationships and the Church: A Sociological, Historical, and Theological Study of Family Structures, Roles, and Relationships*, Marriage and Family Research Series, ed. Oscar E. Feucht (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), 29 (emphasis original).

³⁴Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 30.

³⁵Ellen G. White, “Marriages, Wise and Unwise,” *The Youth’s Instructor*, 10 August 1899, 437.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

the first marriage is seen to be unambiguously monogamous, this marital form is thus understood as representative of the “will of God.”³⁶

The Gender Issue

From both Genesis 1 and 2 it becomes plain that this marriage took place between two people of the opposite sex. The repeated use of contrasting gender terms illustrates this: God creates a “male” and a “female” and charges them to be fruitful (1:27, 28); He fashions the rib He took from the “man” into a “woman,” and then takes “her” to the “man” (2:22); the man calls her “woman” because she was taken out of “man” (2:23); thus a “man” leaves his parents and is joined to his “wife” (2:24). In this well-defined manner it can be easily noted that the original marital form was heterosexual.

The obvious complementary anatomical differences serve to further illustrate this point. In addition, the fact that the commission to “multiply” (Gen 1:28) can only be fulfilled by means of people of the opposite gender additionally supports this view that the original marital pattern as set up by God was decisively heterosexual.³⁷

In commenting on the first biblical passage concerning the creation of the human species (Gen 1:27), Dresner recognizes the fact that “heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation.”³⁸ Though not as explicit, Andrew Dearman concurs with this assessment in his article in a book dealing with homosexuality and biblical ethics, saying: “In the Genesis accounts one finds the theological basis of marriage rooted in the complementary nature of humankind as male and female created in God’s image.”³⁹ Greg Bahnsen is much more direct, noting that the creation account reveals that sex is to take place only within the context of marriage, a marriage which is “exclusively heterosexual in nature.”⁴⁰ Thus, since heterosexuality is the “proper creation order,”⁴¹ “homosexuality is precisely a perversion of nature.”⁴² Or as Dresner put it: “Homosexuality is a violation of the order of creation.”⁴³

³⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 182; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 24; cf. Walter Trobisch, who calls monogamy “God’s original and final will,” Walter Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, “Here Is My Problem,” Series 1 (Kehl/Rhein, Germany: Editions Trobisch, 1980), 21.

³⁷See Andrew Dearman, who makes the same point; J. Andrew Dearman, “Marriage in the Old Testament,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 54-55.

³⁸Dresner, 309.

³⁹Dearman, 53.

⁴⁰Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 29.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 28.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 30. Anderson concurs saying: “Homosexuality is a violation of the natural process God intended for human sexuality.” 166.

⁴³Dresner, 309. See also, Bahnsen, 31.

The Faith Factor

Now while the above concepts of monogamy and heterosexuality can be quite plainly seen from the text of Genesis, the issue of the similarity of the religious faith of the marriage partners requires a deeper search.

Genesis 2:18 records God's words: "I will make him a helper suitable for him." The Revised English Bible (REB) states: "I shall make a partner suited to him." Similar to the REB, other versions interpret the crucial phrase as "a suitable companion" (TEV), "one like himself" (BBE), and "who is like him" (S&G). These Bible versions better capture the true essence of the Hebrew term *k'negdô*, which means a "counterpart,"⁴⁴ one "corresponding to him."⁴⁵ Obviously, for Eve to be a truly suitable partner to Adam, she had to have the same basic faith perspective as her spouse. Studies by Umberto Cassuto and others appear to bear out this contention that the Bible indicates a compatibility of ethical and religious beliefs as part of the original marital pattern.⁴⁶ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* suggests that the context of Genesis 2:18 shows that the woman is to be a partner with the man in the areas of both family and worship.⁴⁷

A second passage in the creation story that suggests this indispensable religious concord is located in Genesis 2:24. The man and woman are to cleave to each other and become "one flesh." This is a covenant partnership, a mutual dependence and a genuine reciprocity in all areas of life,⁴⁸ which is impossible for two who hold differing religious convictions.

Ellen White consistently spoke out against marriage between an unbeliever and a believer, which she defined as one who has "accepted the truth for this time."⁴⁹ These interfaith marriages are "forbidden by God,"⁵⁰ and are prohibited in the Bible.⁵¹ Thus, she admonishes that it is better to remain unmarried than to commit "sin"⁵² by violating God's clearly revealed will.⁵³

⁴⁴Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 591.

⁴⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 149. Further support for the corresponding nature of the relationship between man and woman can be seen in the "ring construction" of the entire creation account of male and female. See Davidson, 14.

⁴⁶See, for example, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, part 1, *From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1981), 127.

⁴⁷John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 48.

⁴⁸Davidson, 21-22.

⁴⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:364.

⁵⁰Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 500.

⁵¹See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:363, 364; idem, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 271.

⁵²Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1952), 351.

⁵³White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:507.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

Now that it has been reasonably demonstrated that the original marriage in Eden was a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith union, the question naturally arises: What significance does this first marital pattern have for believers? Is it merely a desirable, yet optional model? Is it simply an ideal? Or is this first marriage to be viewed as an unchanging standard, a biblical mandate?

Significance of the First Marriage

The passage in Genesis 2:24, which forms the closing statement about the first marriage, begins with the Hebrew term *‘al-kēn*. While in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) it is interpreted “for this cause,” several English Bibles render it “therefore.”⁵⁴ An investigation of the Pentateuch indicates that the Bible writer frequently utilized this concept when making explanatory statements about an occurrence. This happened when people or place names were being identified.⁵⁵

More importantly, this usage also occurs in passages where the writer explains the reason behind the observance of certain regulations and laws.⁵⁶ In this regard, Angelo Tosato points out the use of *‘al-kēn* in the fourth commandment of Exodus 20:11: “On the seventh day of creation he rested; for this reason [*‘al-kēn*] he ordered that the sabbath should be observed.”⁵⁷ Tosato recognizes that Genesis 2:24 is similarly structured.⁵⁸ He posits: “The initial *‘al-kēn* (‘therefore’), in fact, certifies beyond any doubt that he [i.e., the inspired Bible writer] intends here to explain something.”⁵⁹ Thus, he concludes that this passage “speaks of marriage in a normative way.”⁶⁰

Other scholars have likewise noticed the significance of *‘al-kēn* in Genesis 2:24.⁶¹ Nahum Sarna states that this term introduces an observation on the part of the writer in which some “fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God’s original creative act and seen as part of the ordained natural order.”⁶² Similarly, Herbert Ryle recognizes that this “sentence beginning with ‘therefore’ supplies the application, or relation, of the ancient narrative to later

⁵⁴See, for example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, and NRSV.

⁵⁵See, for example, Gen 19:22; 25:30; 26:33; 29:35; 30:6; 31:48; 33:17; Exod 15:23.

⁵⁶See, for example, Exod 13:15: Because God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, “therefore” (*‘al-kēn*), they were to celebrate the Passover. The “therefore” thus establishes the law. Other passages, such as the following, reveal a similar type of structure: Gen 32:32; Lev 17:11, 12; Num 18:24; Deut 15:11.

⁵⁷Angelo Tosato, “On Genesis 2:24,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (July 1990): 406.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 398 (emphasis original).

⁶⁰Ibid., 404.

⁶¹See, for example, James Comper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Cleveland, OH: F. M. Barton, 1903), 1:18; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1973), 37-38.

⁶²Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 23.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

times.”⁶³ Thus, it appears that just as God had instituted the monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage of the first parents of the human race, He intends that this pattern be normative for marital relationships for the rest of humanity for all time.

The significance of this first marriage is further underscored by the evidence that arises from a more intense investigation of the grammar of Genesis 2:24. The first verb, *ya^{ca}zāb* (“he will leave”), is in the imperfect tense, followed by two consecutive perfects, as normal. When this type of tense is understood as a frequentative imperfect, it is rendered, as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) has it, as something occurring customarily: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.”⁶⁴ However, the Hebrew imperfect can also be interpreted in other ways. It can express actions to be repeated in the future, as the American Standard Version (ASV) puts it:⁶⁵ “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

The imperfect tense may also be used to express a command, informing people of what ought or ought not to be done.⁶⁶ Genesis 2:24 could thus be legitimately translated: “Therefore a man should leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife, and they should become one flesh.” Robert Lawton concludes that when rendered this way, “the verse can be understood as a description of divine intention.”⁶⁷ Since this text begins with the introductory term “therefore,” the Hebrew imperfect would be more faithfully translated as expressing a command, thus indicating that here a standard is being set,⁶⁸ a norm established, a mandate given by God Himself.

Even though these words in Genesis 2:24 were evidently penned by a human being, since they are the utterance of divine revelation, “Christ could quote them, therefore, as the word of God (Matt. xix. 5).”⁶⁹ Therefore, since it is a clear expression of God’s will, this statement is of great import for all.

⁶³Herbert E. Ryle, *The Book of Genesis*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1921), 39. See also, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 70.

⁶⁴See Robert B. Lawton, “Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 97.

⁶⁵See also, KJV, NIV, NKJV, NASB.

⁶⁶S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, 3d ed. (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1892), 43. See, for example, Gen 2:17; 3:14; Exod 20:3-17; 21:12; Num 15:14.

⁶⁷Lawton, 98.

⁶⁸This type of construction can be found in passages such as Exod 22:30, Deut 22:3, and 2 Sam 13:12. For example, in Gen 34:7 the word *kēn* precedes the imperfect, and the phrase is rendered as a prohibition, “for such a thing ought not to be done.”

⁶⁹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:90. See also, Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 1:14; A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Surrey, England: Soncino, 1947), 12; Howard F. Vos, *Genesis* (Chicago:

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

Gordon Wenham correctly understands this verse as “applying the principles of the first marriage to every subsequent marriage.”⁷⁰ According to Sereno Dwight: “This is the Great Original Law of Marriage binding on the whole human family.”⁷¹ Speaking about this first marriage, Ellen White said: “God gave to Adam one wife—showing to all who should live upon the earth, his order and law in that respect.”⁷² Thus, this first monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage becomes the only acceptable biblical pattern and model for all marital unions.

Before concluding this brief study, it would be instructive to consider the marital structure evident during the second “beginning” of this world—the story of Noah and the flood.

The Model Evident at the Flood

Even though a considerable amount of Genesis is devoted to the story of the worldwide deluge,⁷³ it is apparent that not much is directly recorded about the marital status of those involved in the narrative. However, the few facts that are mentioned need to be carefully examined.

Genesis 6:1-4, 11-13 describes the corruption of the antediluvians:

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

Moody, 1982), 25; F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), 1:227. For a more detailed study of Matt 19:5 see chapter 5 of the author’s *Polygamy in the Bible*.

⁷⁰Wenham, 70.

⁷¹Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Hebrew Wife: Or, the Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1836), 9.

⁷²Ellen G. White, “The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood,” *The Signs of the Times*, 27 February 1879, 66. See also, idem, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 75.

⁷³See Gen 6-9.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."

The Genesis record is clear not only that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8), but that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; [and] Noah walked with God" (6:9). Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10). When God decided to destroy the earth with a flood because of its corruptness, God called upon Noah to build an ark to preserve selected animals and human beings. The record simply states that, when the ark and all the necessary preparations had been made, "Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (7:13). That there were precisely eight persons saved in the ark is clear from both Old and New Testaments (Gen 7:13; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5).

Some have felt that one of the contributing factors to the depravity of humanity was the practice of polygamy.⁷⁴ However, this conclusion has been challenged.⁷⁵ For example, Welch states that in the text it is neither stated nor implied that the marriages between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" were polygamous.⁷⁶ Thus, he maintains: "We must conclude that any attempt to establish a causal relationship between polygamy and the Flood is not warranted by the text itself."⁷⁷

The phrase in contention is located at the end of Genesis 6:2 and reads literally, "and they took for them wives of all whom they chose." Most versions render this clause similar to the NASB: "And they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose." But, as Robert Jamieson remarks, "the phrase 'took them wives of *all* which they chose' evidently implies something very different from the simple exercise of a free choice."⁷⁸ Jamieson concludes that this phrase indicates the practice of polygamy.⁷⁹ This understanding is clear in the Jerusalem Bible: "So they married as many as they chose."⁸⁰ This translation appears to be a legitimate rendering of the passage under consideration.

Other biblical scholars also understand this phrase as a reference to polygamy. For instance, David Clines renders it, "taking for themselves wives of as

⁷⁴See, for example, John Kitto, ed., *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, OH: Mark H. Newman, 1845), 2:306.

⁷⁵See, for example, Manas Buthelezi, "Polygyny in the Light of the New Testament," *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969): 59; Douglas E. Welch, "A Biblical Perspective on Polygamy" (M.A. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1977), 43-44.

⁷⁶Welch, 43.

⁷⁷Ibid., 44.

⁷⁸Robert Jamieson, *Genesis-Deuteronomy*, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 88 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰The NJB similarly states: "And married as many of them as they chose."

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

many women as they chose.”⁸¹ David Atkinson concurs: “Here the ‘sons of God’ take as many as they choose.”⁸² Based on this phrase in Genesis 6:2, Emil Kraeling concluded: “A polygamous situation is implied in these words.”⁸³ Dwight goes a step further and says: “The fact that Polygamy became general, or that men took them wives of all whom they chose, is here obviously assigned as the cause of that universal corruption and violence, which occasioned the Deluge.”⁸⁴ Ellen White understood this passage similarly:

When men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, they took them wives of all which they chose. This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world, which brought the wrath of God upon them.⁸⁵ This custom was practiced after the Flood, and became so common that even righteous men fell into the practice and had a plurality of wives.⁸⁶

Walter Kaiser, in basic agreement with the above perspective, directly expresses the link between polygamy and the flood: “It was precisely because of man’s autocratic and polygamous ways that God destroyed the earth with a flood. That could hardly be construed as tacit divine approval of polygamy—it is the reverse!”⁸⁷

An examination of the scriptural account reveals that the marriages of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth were all monogamous unions at the time of the flood (Gen 7:13). Dresner observes that “Scripture takes pains to tell us that of those who entered the ark each male had a female companion.”⁸⁸ Then, warning that this monogamous element must not be overlooked, he states: “Noah and his sons

⁸¹David J. A. Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the ‘Primeval History’ (Genesis 1-11),” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (July 1979): 36.

⁸²David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 131. See also Bush (1:116), who says these men were “perhaps disdainful to govern themselves by the limitation of one woman to one man.” B. Jacob also sees this as a passage referring to polygamy; see B. Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, ed. and trans. by Ernest I. Jacob, and Walter Jacob (New York: KTAV, 1974), 45.

⁸³Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1-4,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (October 1947): 197.

⁸⁴Dwight, 6.

⁸⁵White does not say that this was the “only sin” which brought about the flood, but rather, that it was “one of the great sins” which precipitated the deluge. Among other factors, she also notes: “It was their abominations and horrible, idolatrous sacrifices which had called for their destruction;” White, *The Story of Redemption*, 67. In another of her writings, she states: “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God;” Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864; reprint, Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 3:64.

⁸⁶White, *The Story of Redemption*, 76.

⁸⁷Kaiser, 183.

⁸⁸Dresner, 312.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

each have a single wife.”⁸⁹ On the contrary, polygamists were judged and destroyed by the flood. Ellen White highlights this by discussing Noah’s monogamous marriage and his preservation in the ark in contrast to polygamy.⁹⁰ In fact, she notes that these antediluvians “would not leave off their sins, but continued in their polygamy,”⁹¹ and were thus exterminated. Thus, God’s direct judgment of polygamy by means of the flood, while saving only monogamous couples in the ark, makes plain His will concerning the number of partners in a marriage. An additional, yet less obvious matter concerning marital structures at the time of the universal deluge needs examination. The key verse considered here is Genesis 6:12, which notes that “all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” Dresner notes that the ancient rabbis interpreted the “flesh” corrupting its “way” as a reference to homosexuality, among other sexual evils.⁹² Thus, the rabbinic understanding of the flood story affirms that the wickedness of the antediluvians was essentially sexual.⁹³ Dresner concurs, noting that the “violation of the natural order of sexual life,” including that of heterosexuality, was the “crime” that brought about the flood.⁹⁴ Interestingly, Ellen White confirms this notion, stating: “The Sodomitish practices which brought the judgment of God upon the world, and caused it to be deluged with water, and which caused Sodom to be destroyed by fire, are fast increasing.”⁹⁵ In brief, the violation of the marital norm of heterosexuality was one of the reasons for the Genesis flood.

One final factor deserves consideration: How did the pre-flood population relate to the issue of interfaith marriages? Genesis 6:2 states “that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.” This passage has generated considerable debate, especially in recent times. The primary question revolves around who these “sons of God” were that married the “daughters of men.” The two main interpretations will be noted here. In discussing the “sons of God,” Joseph Hong

⁸⁹Ibid., 313. Some scholars have recognized something rather unusual in connection with the Hebrew terms used to refer to the clean and unclean animals taken into the ark. In Gen 7:2, instead of the normal words for male (*zākūr*) and female (*nēqēbāh*), the phrase *’išw’išō* (“a man and his wife”) is used to describe the animals. It has been suggested that this phrase, “male and his mate” (NRSV), was used by the writer to indicate that all living creatures that entered the ark, whether birds, animals, or human beings, were classified as being in a “monogamous” relationship. See Dresner, 313; A. O. Nkwoka, “The Church and Polygamy in Africa: The 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution,” *Africa Theological Journal* 19 (1990): 147. Cf. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, part 2, From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew U, 1964), 73-74.

⁹⁰See White, *The Story of Redemption*, 76.

⁹¹White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:67.

⁹²Dresner, 311. He references the *Genesis Rabbah* 27:3, as one of the places where the issue of homosexuality in this regard is noted.

⁹³See Dresner, 311.

⁹⁴Ibid., 310.

⁹⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989), 121. See also *ibid.*, 120, 121; *idem*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 82.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

claims that “when the term is used elsewhere in the Old Testament, it clearly has the meaning of ‘heavenly beings’ or ‘angels’.”⁹⁶ After citing passages in Job and Psalms,⁹⁷ he says, “today most interpreters of Genesis agree that the identification with celestial beings is the best suggestion.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Hong frankly admits that this understanding is not free of difficulty.⁹⁹

Subsequent to considering the “angel” interpretation, Ronald Youngblood points out some of the difficulties attending this view. For example, he notes that in Luke 20:34-36 Jesus informs us that angels do not marry, which “statement would flatly contradict Genesis 6:2, 4 if the ‘sons of God’ in that passage are angels.”¹⁰⁰ This is especially true since the text views these relationships as marriages, using the “standing expression for marital union.”¹⁰¹ Another problem is raised by John Willis, who challenges: “If indeed angels were intended by the author, then one is hard put to explain why God did not become grieved with them and destroy them rather than mankind.”¹⁰²

Various scholars have submitted considerable evidence which indicates that it is preferable to interpret the “sons of God” as referring to human beings rather than angels. Firstly, from a textual perspective, Willis makes the following point:

The sons of God could be the men that called upon the name of the Lord (see 4:26), and who *walked with God* (5:22, 24; 6:9; the OT and NT frequently refer to God’s people as “sons of God”—cf. Prov. 3:12; Isa. 1:2, 4; Heb. 12:5-9), and *the daughters of men* might be “worldly-minded or materialistically-minded women,” such as those condemned in Isaiah 3:16-4:1; 32:9-13; and Amos 4:1-3.¹⁰³

Correspondingly, Old Testament exegete H. C. Leupold, after referencing several texts,¹⁰⁴ states: “Hos. 1:10 is, if anything, a still stronger passage, saying specifically to Israel, ‘Ye are sons of the living God’.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶Joseph Hong, “Problems in an Obscure Passage: Notes on Genesis 6.1-4,” *The Bible Translator* 40 (October 1989): 422.

⁹⁷Hong cites Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; and Pss 29:1; 89:6.

⁹⁸Hong, 422.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 81. In agreement with Youngblood’s perspective, Jacob reminds us that “the Bible never thinks of angels as beings with sexual urges;” 45. Youngblood also questions: “Since this would be the first mention of angels in Scripture, why would the author not simply call them ‘angels’ in order to avoid all ambiguity?” 81.

¹⁰¹H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 253.

¹⁰²John T. Willis, *Genesis*, in *The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. John T. Willis (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1979), 165. See also, Jacob, 45. Leupold notes: “Here, then, would be the very queer sequence of thought: v. 2, *angels* sin; v. 3, *men* are punished;” 253-254.

¹⁰³Willis, 164.

¹⁰⁴Leupold (250) includes Deut 32:5, and Ps 73:15 here. Later (251), he refers to Ps 80:17 as well.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Second, considering the immediately preceding passage, Leupold responds categorically to the question as to who these “sons of God” are: “Without a shadow of doubt, the Sethites—the ones just described in chapter five as having in their midst men who walked with God, like Enoch (v. 22), . . . men who publicly worshipped God and confessed His name.”¹⁰⁶

The third factor which supports this view is seen in the very next verse, which states: “My spirit shall not abide in *man* for ever” (Gen 6:3, RSV). Willis declares that this divine response of judgment on the people because of their mixed marriages (noted in vs. 2) confirms the notion that these “sons of God” are indeed human beings.¹⁰⁷ As demonstrated above, this interpretation makes the most sense, since it was mankind that suffered the destruction of the devastating deluge, and not angels.¹⁰⁸

Based on the textual evidence, Youngblood reasons that “from the standpoint of biblical usage, then, there can be no objection to interpreting ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6 as ‘men’.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, this understanding is preferred in the setting of the passage.¹¹⁰ Thus, as B. Jacob has concluded: “According to the whole context these ‘sons of God’ must be human beings.”¹¹¹

Taking this study of the illegitimate marriage between the righteous and the wicked one step further, Victor Hamilton remarks:

The sin, then, is a forbidden union, a yoking of what God intended to keep apart, the intermarriage of believer with unbeliever. . . . The order of the two remaining verses [3 and 4] in this pericope is interesting. That is, the word about the divine displeasure comes between the cohabitation scene (v. 2) and the reference to the children produced by the unions (v. 4). By placing the verse where it is, the author is making the point that this forbidden union itself is offensive to Yahweh, rather than the fact that such a union produced (hybrid) offspring.¹¹²

Analogously, Youngblood has explained that the action of these “godly men” “to intermarry with members of the wicked line of Cain,”¹¹³ resulted in the judgment from the Lord by means of the deluge.¹¹⁴ Ellen White hints at the

¹⁰⁵Leupold, 251. See also the following passages which have been referred to in order to show the way the concept “sons of God” has been used in Scripture: Deut 14:1; Isa 43:6; Luke 3:38; 1 John 3:1, 2, 10.

¹⁰⁶Leupold, 250.

¹⁰⁷Willis, 162.

¹⁰⁸See also, *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰⁹Youngblood, 82.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹Jacob, 45.

¹¹²Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 264-266.

¹¹³Youngblood, 82.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 82-83.

DU PREEZ / THE GOD-GIVEN MARITAL MANDATE

same situation when she notes that the righteous descendants of Seth displeased God by intermarrying with the idolatrous Cainites.¹¹⁵

In contradistinction to those who were destroyed by the flood, when one looks at the biblical record it is clear that each of the four couples saved in the ark had a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage. Ellen White notes: “Noah had but one wife, and their united family discipline was blessed of God. Because Noah’s sons were righteous, they were preserved in the ark with their righteous father [see Ezek 14:14, 20].”¹¹⁶ Apparently, by preserving in the ark only those who were not involved in polygamous, homosexual, or interfaith conjugal relationships, God was conveying His divine approval on the marital pattern that He had originally established in Eden.¹¹⁷

When the flood waters subsided, “Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him” (8:18). Here was the beginning of the new world, with Noah as the second founder of the human race.¹¹⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx notes:

Yahweh, so to speak, set about doing his work all over again. Noah became the new “first man” and, like Adam, “walked with God” (vi.9). This creation was an explicit covenant (ix.9) and God gave a renewed blessing to the marriage of the new “first man and woman” (ix.7).¹¹⁹

The identical charge that God gave to the world’s first couple, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28), He now repeated to Noah and his sons (9:1), all of whose marriages complied with God’s original standard. Dresner posits that, “in this, the pattern of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is replicated.”¹²⁰ In choosing these monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith couples to be the progenitors of the new race on earth,¹²¹ God was in a sense repeating history.¹²²

Summary and Conclusion

By way of summary, the following should be noted: The illustrations mentioned at the start of this article demonstrate that new concepts are currently creeping into the Seventh-day Adventist Church—perspectives that seek to rec-

¹¹⁵White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:60-61.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 3:100.

¹¹⁷See Dresner, 313; Nkwoka, 147; cf. Cassuto, 73-74.

¹¹⁸See Obwa, 30; Samuel Ellis Wishard, *The Divine Law of Marriage, Or, The Bible Against Polygamy* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 13; David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (London: Epworth, 1953), 136.

¹¹⁹Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, vol. 1, *Marriage in the Old and New Testaments*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 72-73.

¹²⁰Dresner, 313.

¹²¹Wishard, 11.

¹²²*Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy?* [A Debate Between Orson Pratt and J. P. Newman] (Baltimore: John S. Dye, 1874), 15.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ognize polygamous, homosexual, and interfaith unions as acceptable forms of Christian marriage. This study of the marital mandate, as established by the Creator God in the book of Genesis, however, radically challenges these opinions. First, it was seen that it was the Creator God Himself who originated and established the institution of marriage. Second, the original marriage was unambiguously monogamous, heterosexual, and intrafaith. Third, Genesis 2:24 establishes this form of conjugal union as the divine design, the only standard and an unchanging biblical mandate for all marital relationships. As was shown, this specific monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marital pattern was in essence replicated and reinstated by God through Noah and his family at the start of the new world after the universal deluge.

In a recent “Family News” letter, James Dobson, talking about what is happening throughout the world, remarked: “There is a highly coordinated international effort to redefine marriage.”¹²³

In view of this current crisis, it would be well for all Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, to promote and reemphasize God’s original standard and pattern for marriage—that everyone needs to abstain from all polygamous, homosexual, interfaith sexual alliances, and to uphold the God-given marital mandate as set up in Eden: monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith conjugal relationships. As Ellen White indicated: “Heaven looks with pleasure upon marriage formed with an earnest desire to conform to the direction given in the Scriptures.”¹²⁴ Referring to the edenic original, she noted: “When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”¹²⁵ If conscientiously adhered to, this plan for marriage will prove to be “one of the greatest blessings ever given to the human family.”¹²⁶

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¹²³Family News from Dr. James Dobson (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, June 1998), 4. Though his primary concern was homosexuality, Dobson also addressed polygamy and noted that American citizens should get their individual states to “define marriage as being between one man and one woman;” 6.

¹²⁴White, *The Adventist Home*, 70.

¹²⁵White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

¹²⁶Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967), 202.