



## Interview with Glenn Campbell

*Regarding release of his Turkish book, "Against Marriage" (Dec. 2012)*

*1-What motivated you to start writing these essays?*

I had been through my own marriage and divorce, and I can say I was totally unprepared, both for how my marriage unfolded and the difficult way it ended. The way I dealt with my own Post-Traumatic Stress is I went to the local divorce court in Las Vegas and started looking at the whole legal system of marriage and divorce. I sat in on a lot of other people's divorce cases as a sort of entertainment and this made me see how deluded people are about marriage when they go into it. You fully understand marriage, the full legal aspects of it, only when you are getting divorced. After a while, the idea for this book started to take shape, mainly inspired by my study of divorce court.

*1a-Because your own marriage did not go well, couldn't we say that you have a personal grudge against marriage and this is coloring your perception?*

I don't think so. First of all, my own marriage was long over when I started writing. It was almost five years later, so it's not like I was out for vengeance. It was mainly watching other people's divorces that inspired me. Divorce is really fascinating, because that's when all the bills come due. All the delusions you had when you got drawn into marriage come back to bite you in the end.

*2-What did you think about the marriage before you got married?*

I thought it wouldn't make much difference. In America, we have very liberal attitudes toward people living together, so there's really nothing you can do when you are married that you can't do when you are single. I thought marriage was just a legal and social convenience. We wouldn't have to make out separate wills, for example, and I could refer to my partner as my "wife" instead of my girlfriend. What I didn't realize is that we were also merging our financial lives and our fates in a way that ultimately wasn't healthy. In many ways, this simple legal distinction changed our relationship immensely and not in a good way.

I must confess that my beliefs about marriage before I got into it weren't entirely consistent. One side of my brain was thinking, "This won't make any difference," but the other side was thinking, "OK, this legitimizes our relationship. It must be real now."

*3-Can we ever talk about a thing such as "good marriage"?*

Of course! There are good relationships and many that last a lifetime. But it isn't the institution of marriage that makes them that way. If marriage didn't exist, these relationships would still be strong.

*4-Have there ever been any free relationships in the history? Was marriage always the only option?*

We don't have much history to work with! The world even fifty years ago was a much different one. The main change is birth control. Throughout most human history, having sex meant having babies, and a society had to have a mechanism to assure that young people didn't have sex or babies randomly. You needed this institution of marriage to assure, for example, that a man didn't abandon the woman he impregnated and that stable conditions were in place to raise the child. Marriage was a perfectly logical process in, say, medieval Europe. If you wanted to have sex you had to be prepared for the babies that followed and this meant a stable, socially sanctioned relationship with the blessings of the community.

Today, marriage and childrearing are almost completely separate issues. At least in America, if a man fathers a child, his legal responsibilities for it are exactly the same regardless of whether the couple is married or not. Either you're in the household helping to support the child or you are paying child support. Your marriage status has nothing to do with it. So the original purpose of marriage is now gone, yet people still get married. Why do they still do it? I think it's delusion. People think that by joining this thousand-year-old tradition they are somehow improving their lives and improving the relationship, which simply isn't true.

*5-Everything around us points to marriage. All religions, ideologies, science, art, culture and traditions encourage marriage. Under such conditions, how do we struggle against this giant institution?*

I'm not in the business of struggling against giant institutions. I don't care about changing the Catholic Church, the government of Turkey or any other institution. In all of my writings, I'm only speaking to you, the reader. Regardless of what institutions do or say, no one has more control over your life than you do. All I want to do is show you how your own thinking may be flawed, as mine was.

*6-We also know that millions of people suffer in their marriages. What should married people do to get out of this trap, as soon as they realize it is a trap?*

I don't have an easy answer to that. That's exactly the dilemma I was facing when I was married. I knew, early on, that the marriage wasn't working, but my sense of obligation kept me in it. I not only had my wife to think about but also her children from previous marriages who I had vowed to support. I hung on to the bitter end, trying desperately to make it work. I would not have filed for divorce if I thought there was any other option. But after I took that step and dealt with the consequences, I realized that divorce was much healthier for both of us and that my holding on for so long really caused a lot of damage. My most important advice is that if divorce is going to happen, it should be done soon and quickly. It doesn't serve anyone to drag it out.

**6a-Previous marriages? You mean you married a woman who had been married more than once before? Shouldn't that have been a warning to you?**

I think so! I laugh about it myself. But when one is in love, one doesn't think rationally. We all know this. People in love are not sane. They are the worst people to be making fateful choices about lifetime commitments.

**7-Should marriage be totally abolished?**

Of course not. Marriage is part of our culture and is here to stay. It's just one of the ways people organize themselves. You wouldn't try to abolish marriage any more than you would try to abolish a religion you didn't agree with. Marriage is one option society offers you. You either take it or you don't.

**8-What options do we have for the relationship, if we don't get married?**

I can only speak about America, not any other country. In America, virtually every benefit of marriage is available to single couples. You can still have sex and live together. You can still have children. You can make up wills and list each other as beneficiary. You can buy real estate and open bank accounts together. You can pick and choose any options of marriage that you want. The only difference is you are doing it deliberately in a step-by-step process, not all at once in a single step. Anything that you don't explicitly decide to share remains your own individual property.

In America, the only benefits of marriage that you can't get when unmarried is the sharing of certain health insurance and retirement benefits. You also can't get your foreign partner American citizenship if you aren't married. I think it is questionable whether you are morally entitled to these benefits anyway. The Bible and Koran don't say anything about immigration and health insurance.

Otherwise the only practical difference between being married and unmarried is whether you choose to join yourself with another person slowly and deliberately, thinking about each step, or whether you do it all at once, on a single date, not fully understanding all the effects.

**9-What are the unbearable times of a marriage?**

The most unbearable times in a marriage are when you can't say what you are really thinking because you know your partner will blow up. With time, the subjects that you can't talk about get bigger and bigger, until you are hardly saying anything at all.

**10-Even those who are critical of marriage (feminists, some leftists) do get married at the end. What do you think, is the reason for that?**

It is extremely difficult to resist this calling. Marriage is the "elephant in the room" in any relationship. (The big thing that no one talks about but everyone is thinking about.) Everyone is looking for approval from others, and marriage seems to provide it. It seems like you don't have to explain yourself anymore. You're just "husband and wife". There is also a great temptation to believe, when your relationship isn't progressing, that marriage is going to somehow improve things. It doesn't improve anything, but people still think, "Why not give it a try?" It seemed to work for my parents and my grandparents and my great-grandparents, so why not me? What you don't realize is that these people were living in an entirely different world than we are today. We have more

freedom today and that means more responsibility. You don't blindly choose your parents' way of life any more than you would blindly follow their career path.

If you have already been living together with your partner for years, have already worked out all your boundary issues, and you decide to make it "official" with a marriage ceremony, you can invite me and I won't object. The mistake is thinking that marriage itself can improve your relationship or help you work out your issues. If there are any problems in your relationship, marriage is going to make them worse, not better.

**11-***In Turkey (and in many other societies) there is what we call "marriage pressure". How can one struggle against that?*

In America, there isn't the same sort of family pressure there is in Turkey. I'm not saying it isn't there, but it's much more subtle. In America, you now can openly live with your partner, of any gender, without shame and with full acceptance from society. When there is marriage pressure in America, it is usually from parents who are recent immigrants to the country from more traditional societies.

In a sense, though, we all face social pressures to live our lives in certain ways. If it isn't explicit pressure—"When are you going to get married?"—then it's subtle and implicit pressure. I know there are some societies where you are virtually forced to get married, but I don't think Turkey is one of these. You still have the choice. Your family won't disown you if you don't get married. You just have to decide whether you want to put up with the flak you get from them whenever you get together.

The important thing to remember is this is your life, not theirs. Whatever decisions you make, you're the one who has to live with them. You don't want to do something to make your parents happy for a few minutes but then live in misery for years. The funny thing about family pressure is it never seems to go away no matter what you do. Once you do one thing to make your family happy, they are still unhappy and want you to do something else. If you get married, the next pressure is, "Why aren't you having children?" That's another big issue. Thanks to birth control, these are choices that previous generations didn't even have, and you have to make them yourself based on your own personal judgment. You can't let your family make these decisions for you.

**12-***There is the claim that commercial capitalism encourages loneliness so that it can sell more products. Who, do you think, consumes more; singles or the married?*

Maybe its the opposite. Sometimes, I think capitalism wants you to be married so you're trapped and they can sell you more useless stuff. Honestly, though, capitalism is the most liberal force in the universe. They will go wherever the money is. If there are a lot of gay unmarried couples in the community, capitalism will find ways to sell them things. Capitalism isn't like religion with a fixed set of rules. Capitalism goes with the flow.

**13-***How does marriage effect the children? And can unmarried partners easily handle the children if they have independent lives?*

One of the reasons I got married is we were raising children together—hers from previous marriages—and I thought marriage would somehow make it easier. What I've learned since then is that marriage has nothing to do with child rearing, legally or practically. In America, I know many

unmarried couples who are raising children. There is still a mom and a dad—or two moms or two dads. One of them usually spends more time with the children and the other usually works more. They are both home at night and live in an arrangement that looks a lot like traditional marriage. They just haven't taken the legal step of getting married. If you ask them why they are not married, they say, "We have never seen the need for it."

If you are dedicated to your partner and your children, then you don't need marriage to tell you how to behave. On the other hand, if your relationship falls apart, or one biological parent refuses to support the children, then there is a legal mechanism for that, called child support. (A payment made from one parent to the other to support their children.) In America, child support is a completely separate legal issue from marriage, even though they are usually handled at the same time in divorce proceedings. If you made the children, then you are legally responsible for supporting them, regardless of your marital status.

As for the children's emotional health, I don't think marital status matters to them either. It matters to them whether Mommy and Daddy love each other or Mommy and Daddy are always fighting and can't talk to each other. That is pretty much independent of marital status, except that when people are married, they are under more pressure to stay together when they no longer belong together.

*14-You describe the wedding disorder very well in your book. But shouldn't a relationship have some rituals which mark certain milestones?*

I say rituals are dangerous! You don't need milestones. Your love alone should be enough. I say that if you truly love someone, are truly attached to them, then your love alone is enough to keep you together. Marriage is just a complication, erasing too many of the boundaries between you and essentially forcing you together when you don't belong together.

Every relationship has its ups and downs. There are times you draw close to each other and times you want to pull away. This is natural. Marriage, by merging all your accounts at once, makes it harder to pull away when you should. It's like handcuffing yourself to your partner. Love is no longer a free-will choice. If you think handcuffs strengthen your love, you are wrong. They just make love harder to prove.

*15-Considering the western societies, how do you see the future of marriage? The latest statistics show that an increasing number of adults now cohabit or live alone; is marriage finally being called into question?*

I don't deal in statistics. I don't care what the great mass of humanity is doing or whether marriage is rising or falling in popularity. All that really matters is you and me.

I do care about freedom, that a society allows people to make their own choices about how to live their own lives. America has become very liberal about this. America hasn't always been liberal, but it has been relatively quick to change. Some places like Iran are still very conservative where you have little freedom. I see Turkey as somewhere in-between. There are a lot of things we may not like about our society, but the important thing is whether we can find an accommodation in it, find some little corner where we can quietly live as we choose.

(Dec. 22, 2012)