

THE IMPERATIVE VOTE BY BARRINGTON BRENNEN

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Dear citizens: It is imperative that I share on this topic. Yes, you guess it right—The Constitutional Amendments and the different views and other related issues. I am saddened to discover how so many are confused, not voting, or not voting because of misinformation given to them. Some say they cannot trust the Prime Minister, he has ulterior motives. Some say that it is a moral issue (on Bill No. 4) and scripture would not allow them to vote “yes.” Others say that The Bahamas is for Bahamians only, let the foreigners stay out. Some do not understand the role of the church in a society.

Some are confused because they are hearing lawyers giving different interpretations of the bill. They say: “Well, if the lawyers don’t know, I may as well don’t vote or vote no.” Never forget that around the world lawyers may posit one of three views when interpreting the same law--conservative, liberal, or centrist interpretation. Think for yourself. Do not allow the views to confuse you.

On another point, why would the Government or the Prime Minister have ulterior motives? These bills can stand on their own. They are simple and straight forward. Whether or not there are ulterior motives, the bills are pure and positions The Bahamas as a constitutionally balanced nation. Some argue that we lived without these changes for 43 years so why change them? Not everyone is aware of the pain and misery caused to individuals because of the current constitution. The stories were not in the newspapers or on television. We have also lived for 43 years not learning how to navigate a four-way stop junction. Some think it is “normal” to drive through a four-way stop junction. When will this behavior and attitude be changed? When will we stop allowing tradition to dictate to us without critically thinking about its relevancy?

Many years ago, I read a book entitled (it is in my library) “Sick Societies . . . Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony” written by Dr. Robert B. Edgerton. He discovered in his research of histories of nations/communities that when societies refuse to examine the relevancy of its current practices, traditions, or laws, that nation or community over time fades away or becomes extremely weak. He pointed that the many communities have actually disappeared as results of this behavior and attitude. Hence for those of us who think we are preserving our nation by voting “No,” they might actually be leading the nation in to a gradual decline and that can lead to nothingness.

I wonder why so many Bahamians forget that our nation is made up of many nationalities. I wonder why so many Bahamians forget that many of us love to use the United States of America to have our children so they can have free college education. I wonder why so many Bahamians refuse to look in to their own families and see the multi-nations represented. In my own family there is Italy, Ireland, Africa, St Marteen, America, France. When Bahamian citizens allow xenophobic ideologies to penetrate their thoughts and actions, they will push our nation in to a precipice of hate, shame and nothingness. Why are we so selfish, narcissistic, and self-absorbed?

Let's be reminded of the bills as presented by the Prime Minister in Parliament

Bill # 1 : The Bahamas Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2014

This bill seeks to achieve gender equality in a very important respect: it seeks to give a child born outside The Bahamas to a Bahamian-born mother and non-Bahamian father the same automatic right to Bahamian citizenship that the Constitution already gives to a child born outside The Bahamas to a Bahamian-born father and a non-Bahamian mother. The bill is therefore simply equalizing the sexes and, in so doing, eliminating an area of discrimination against women that has persisted for the past 41 years.

Bill #2 : The Bahamas Constitution (Amendment) (No.2) Bill, 2014

Bill #2 also seeks to achieve gender equality in another respect under the Constitution: it seeks to enable a Bahamian woman who marries a foreign man to secure for him the same access to Bahamian citizenship that a Bahamian man has always enjoyed under the Constitution in relation to his foreign spouse. In short, the bill seeks to achieve gender equality in this regard.

Bill #3 : The Bahamas Constitution (Amendment) (No.3) Bill, 2014

Bill #3 is of particular interest because it seeks to remediate the one area of the Constitution that discriminates against men. At present, an unwed Bahamian father cannot pass his citizenship to a child born to a foreign woman. This bill seeks to change that. It will give an unwed Bahamian father the same right to pass citizenship to his child that a Bahamian woman has always had under the Constitution in relation to a child born to her out of wedlock.

Bill #4 : The Bahamas Constitution (Amendment) (No.4) Bill, 2014

Finally, Bill #4 seeks to end discrimination based on sex. This involves the insertion of the word “sex” in Article 26 of the Constitution so as to make it unconstitutional to discriminate based on whether someone is male or female.

What is so difficult about these bills? They are simple and a must for a progressive nation. They are not confusing. Some, especially spiritual leaders are confusing many. They see Bill #4 to be “opening the door” for same sex marriage. This is utterly false. The spiritual leaders are mesmerizing their members who trust them to connect their roles as Christians to these amendments. Do you know what really has opened the door to same-sex marriages world-wide? It will be the same in our country. It is a heart matter. People on their own accord desire to express themselves freely. That is where it starts. No law or constitutional article will instigate or prevent that. It has never done it in any country.

Let me first surprise everyone. These bills are “Christian” bills as well as neutral bills. They do not conflict with Christian beliefs, neither do we need to be Christian to enact them. They are founded in human rights. The argument by the pastor of the Bahamas Harvest Church is wrong. Bill #4 will not introduce same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage will stand on its own IF it comes. How can we not vote for such a sensible bill because we fear it will allow something else we do not want? That is not a healthy approach. This adamant language against same-sex marriage is actually promoting it. Never forget this principle. The more we oppose something, the more it becomes attractive. Nevertheless, the two are not connected. These leaders are driving fear in many hearts about transgenders and bathrooms. Last week I traveled to the United States and England and did not have any problem or concern about transgender in the bathroom. There were no signs, not even a unisex bathroom. The truth is how would you know that a transgender is in the bathroom with you? The truth is they have been with us for years and using the same bathrooms.

Then what are some of the “What if” questions? A few weeks ago I wrote this:

“Remember fellow citizens, what ifs blur the brightness of our future. What ifs can block the sun rays of freedom. What ifs can send a dark cloud over justice. What ifs can push us into a deep pit of do-nothing-ness. Let us keep focused on the real intention of these four bills—equality for both males and females under the law. No matter how they are worded, someone will have a what if. So let us remove the what ifs and replace them with “we will do it” simply because it is the right thing to do.”

Here is a somewhat obscured illustration I gave in the article “What If?” on March 23, 2016:

“What if my six-year old son developed cancer because I gave him food to eat? Then wouldn’t it be wise not to feed him to prevent him from getting cancer? On the other hand, wouldn’t it be inhumane not to feed him? If I do not feed him, he will die. So naturally I must take the risk of feeding him so he can live. Why should I allow my fear of him getting cancer, of which I have no proof, cause me not to give him food to eat? Shouldn’t I just give him the food and let the future deal with my “what ifs.” Feeding him is simply the natural thing to do.”

For those spiritual leaders who feel they must preserve “spirituality” in the nation, they must be reminded that governments are to be “secular” in nature and not “religious” Religious leaders are not to “preserve spirituality” through legislation but only through lifestyle. They are simply about human rights for everyone. However, deep down, human rights seems to be a tough tablet for many Christians to swallow. That is this matter of rights and freedoms for everyone. They are confused about perceived “roles” with actual rights and privileges. They are allowing the misunderstanding of perceived roles of males and females in the Bible to color their input on these bills. I want to share here that although the Bible was written in a deeply patriarchal world and it painfully colored the language, when you look closely, God did not always use the patriarchal system. A patriarch is the oldest male in the family who becomes in effect the CEO of the family. Note that “patriarchs” chosen by God in the Old Testament were not the oldest child and was often the youngest. He came out of the norm. Jesus went against traditions and talked to women. He held children in his lap. What’s the point? Many Christians are holding on to traditions or beliefs that are really not Christocentric or demands from God. Most importantly they want to make this modern country a theocracy. Theocracy ended before Christ died and will never again be until the earth is made new again. It is fair for me to remind all of us that God gave both male and female equal authority, voice and vote in the Garden (Genesis 1:25-27). He did not give in the beginning any one, not even the male, power over another. They had equality.

Pastors, I need to point out something that is extremely important. In the New Testament times same sex relationship was much more prevalent than it is today in The Bahamas. It was the norm in the Greek and Roman world. There were actual laws that degraded females and gave all the power to males. This is the culture in which the Christian Church started but did not let it “get to them.” Christ started the church to change that to lead the people back to what was intended in the beginning. Oop! Yes, the Apostle Paul had to address the strange teachings (male superiority and homosexuality, etc.) only from the point of asking God’s people **to demonstrate** godliness in their own lives. Never once did he seek to or asked the people to press the Roman government to change the law/constitution to prevent same sex

relationships. Why? Because they understood that the role of the church and its followers is to **expose the gospel and not impose the gospel**. Note carefully here. Human rights and spiritual values are not always one and the same. But they do not conflict because they are for different purposes. For example, adultery is not illegal and should never be. But we Christians say it is immoral. Do you get it?

I am extremely nervous when I hear the language of our spiritual leaders.

IS IT A MORAL ISSUE?

When one cannot think for oneself and place more power in spiritual leaders, one can be easily swayed. Many spiritual leaders (not all) are saying that Bill #4 in particular is a moral issue. What do they mean? They are indicating it is about or leads to same-sex marriage or support homosexual behavior. Since it is out of the mouths of spiritual leaders, then they have to be right. Especially when they can quote scripture and give what seems to be “reasonable dialogue.” This reminds me of the story I read in the book “12 ‘Christian Beliefs’ that can Drive You Crazy.” It is a must read by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. The story is about a deeply devout Christian woman who was exhausted from overwork. She was about to give up on life. While driving home from work, she tuned in to the radio and heard a Christian preacher saying something that seemed to be speaking directly to her. The speaker said “. . . So you are down, troubled, lonely, you’re under crushing pressure. You wonder sometimes if things will every change for you.” This really sounded like the speaker was talking directly to her. He continued “My friend, there’s an answer for you from the Word of God.” “It is to stop thinking about yourself and start thinking of others. . . Repent of your self-absorption, and find peace in sharing.” Her head dropped. But since it was a spiritual leader on the radio, she figured he had to be right. So instead of staying home and resting during church time and dropping a few of the church and community activities that were causing her exhaustion, the pastor was telling her that the only reason for her feeling that way is that she was too self-centered. She believed him, so she picked up the church bulletin and looked for more church work to do. Was the pastor wrong? Yes he was. Be careful pastors. You can be leading your member away from Christ by working too hard for the church.

What’s the point? Often pastors do not understand how to live and teach balanced lives. Often pastors are more influenced by negative cultural traditions and believing and teaching they are Biblical or humane. One example is the role of females in the church. Another example is the treatment and attitude toward transgender, homosexuals, and just people who do not fit in what they call the “norm.” We teach that the church is a “hospital” for sick people but the sick people are being treated poorly. The “doctors” of the hospital are living

better lives than the “patients” and the “doctors” are not really seeking to “heal” the wounded. These “doctors” are actually creating toxic faith among the believers. An attitude of superiority, self-righteousness, anger and coldness has metastasized through the body of believers creating a cancerous mass that is inoperable. This is one reason too many Christians have become “spiritually” and “socially” blind and deaf.

Some pastors are very two-faced. Their own members know well their philandering or clandestine behavior. Yes, they can be the loudest with the “Amens.”

Do you realize that the constitution says nothing about that kind of behavior? It is a free choice, although it is “morally” wrong. That pastor will not go to jail for having an affair. But is it morally wrong. Now I am not suggesting that the bills are morally wrong. What I am saying is that some pastors are attaching undue meaning to something that is clear and right (Bill #4). Nothing is immoral about both male and females having the same rights. The constitution speaks to that and not spiritual correctness.

THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE

Let me shock some of you. Follow my reasoning. The Adventist Church teaches that the seventh day of the week is the day of worship—the Sabbath. (I am not asking you to agree with the Sabbath. Just read) However, we will not seek government to pass laws to close stores on Saturday nor require all to worship on that day. In fact, we will vote against such laws. Why? We believe in freedom. We believe in religious liberty. No national law is to dictate to its people how to live socially or spiritually.

Today in the Middle East there are countries telling men how to beat their wives, women cannot drive or get driver’s license, etc. Do you know these are religious laws that are crippling those nations? I do not want our nation to be like that. The Pilgrim Parents left England because the Christian Church pressured the government of the day to enforce unreasonable laws preventing people of other faiths to practice their own conscience. I am hearing that same trend today. I support people and every faith and of no faith to believe and practice their values as long as it does not violate human rights (you kill or harm someone). If Christians believe they are to be “the salt of the earth” and the “light to the world” this cannot be done through force but only by unconditional love and acceptance. To live “in the world” and not be “off the world” cannot mean we are to be a pain in the neck to those around us.

While Christians are seeking to “purify” the country through legislation let them be reminded that it will backfire someday. We are to “purify” the nation by our personal lifestyle, loving attitudes and unconditional acceptance. We are losing that emphasis through the discussion

of these bills by some of our spiritual leaders. These spiritual leaders sound so pious and honest, but they have all been misled.

Once again I stress, these bills are not related to anything else other than what they present-- Equality of all citizens. Oh, I just remembered another point. Some fear these laws will open the flood gates to foreigners to our country. There is no empirical evidence for this. My daughter and son are by birth French because their mother is French. They are by birth Bahamians also because their father is Bahamian. My children have no desire, wish or plans to live in the country of birth of their mother. The fact is the flood gates of illegal immigrants is wide open (in most countries) than anything else. The bills will simply make level the playing field for all.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE BAHAMAS

Bahamians, our country is not an "island" on its own. It is not an isolated piece of earth sheltered from all communication, trade, or traditions of the whole puzzle—the other nations. I think it is difficult for many to understand that the earth is a neighborhood where the residents make laws in order to live harmoniously. One of the unifying bodies in the world to make that possible is the United Nations (UN). The UN is not a body made up of leaders from another planet who dictates to earthlings. No. The UN is made up of earthlings who together (each country) agree on principles, rights, freedoms, laws, to make the "neighborhood" harmonious. The Bahamas is a part of this. I saw a document being circulated as "proof" that The Bahamas is being pressured by the UN for same sex marriage and to have these bills. First of all, WE are a part of the UN. There could be no UN without "WE." "WE" vote on these principles so "WE" (all countries) can live in harmony in this "neighborhood."

Have you wondered why the "Bill on Human Rights" was created? Simply because nations discovered that simple basic rights were not being enacted in many countries. Thus "In June 1946, the UN Economic and Social Council established the Commission on Human Rights, which consisted of 18 members from various nationalities and political backgrounds. The Commission on Human Rights, a standing body of the United Nations, was constituted to undertake the work of preparing what was initially conceived as an International Bill of Rights." Note that these are from different countries. The Bill of Human Right was voted on finally in 1948. If you read the bills themselves you will be amazed how natural they all are. But they had to be placed in writing. The very first article speaks volumes to us today:

Article 1, which lays down the philosophy on which the Declaration is based, reads: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

This had to be stated because in reality it was not so in every country. What’s the point? Bahamas, we are a part of a global community woven together into a tapestry of connecting forces, need to communicate, share, trade and travel among each other.

Here are a few other articles:

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Aren’t these common sense declarations? Note, the UN is not forcing us to have these bills. Common sense is. Note that in the document being circulated there is nothing about same sex marriage nor transgender bathrooms. It is simple about natural rights and behaviors that are much needed in our country today, similar to the above articles.

Oh how I wish our people will see the light. Voting Yes is imperative.