

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE FAMILY

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Social science data demonstrates two nearly incontestable conclusions: (1) stable, traditional marital structures provide profound benefits for men, women and children, while (2) the breakdown of stable, traditional marital structures imposes significant social costs upon individuals and society at large. Nevertheless, growing numbers of social scientists are noting that the disintegration of the family unit is proceeding apace. This suggests that we have either forgotten – or ignored – what would have been unthinkable just a few generations ago: that families play a profoundly important social role, and that without healthy families we simply cannot have a healthy society.

We now have a historic opportunity to re-awaken the conscience of the world regarding the social role of the family. I will first address the benefits of stable marital relationships to men, women, and children. I will then canvass the costs that society has incurred as a result of the decline in marital stability. I will conclude by calling upon the world community to recommit itself to marriage and the natural family.

I. THE BENEFITS OF STABLE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage, as it has been conceived by and practiced in Western societies for centuries, has marked benefits for marital partners and their offspring. Marriage is more than the union of two persons, it is a social institution “culturally patterned and integrated into other basic social institutions, such as education, the economy, and politics.”¹ Marriage, in a real sense, underlies

¹ STEVEN L. NOCK, MARRIAGE IN MEN’S LIVES 11 (1998).

every social institution. It comes as no surprise, then, that marriage affects some of society's most consequential interests:

Married people are generally healthier; they live longer, earn more, have better mental health and better sex lives, and are happier than their unmarried counterparts. Furthermore, married individuals have lower rates of suicide, fatal accidents, acute and chronic illnesses, alcoholism, and depression than other people.²

Historically, in the West and elsewhere, the need to articulate the benefits of marriage has been largely unnecessary. American courts, for example, have recognized for some time that marriage is “fundamental to our existence and survival”³ and “of basic importance to our society.”⁴ However, it has become commonplace of late within American academia (and international academia as well) to deride, or at least ignore, the benefits of traditional marriage.⁵ Nevertheless, there is a growing body of research showing that marriage is indispensable to the welfare of society and to the individuals that comprise it. Much recent research, in fact, shows that traditional, heterosexual marriage has significant benefits for children and their mothers and

² *Id.* at 3.

³ *Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel. Williamson*, 316 U.S. 535, 541 (1942).

⁴ *Boddie v. Connecticut*, 401 U.S. 371, 376 (1971).

⁵ *See, e.g.*, Norval D. Glenn, *Closed hearts, closed minds: the textbook story of marriage*, *SOCIETY* (March 13, 1998) (available on Westlaw at 1998 WL 11168753) (noting that undergraduate textbooks by and large “convey a determinedly pessimistic view of marriage” and “suggest that marriage is more a problem than a solution”); Brigitte Berger, “The Social Roots of Prosperity and Liberty,” 35 *SOCIETY* 44 (March 13, 1998) (available on Westlaw at 1998 WL 11168752) (“Although of late we can witness a public rediscovery of the salutary role of the nuclear family of father, mother, and their children living together and caring for their individual and collective progress, policy elites appear neither to have fully understood that public life lies at the mercy of private life, nor do they seem to have apprehended the degree to which the [traditional] virtues and [traditional] ethos continue to be indispensable for the maintenance of both the market economy and civil society.”)

fathers. I will detail the personal – and social – benefits of stable marital and family life for children and youth, and for the men and women who take (and honor) their marital vows.

1. Benefits flowing to children and youth

According to one scholar, traditional marriage is “by far the most emotionally stable and economically secure arrangement for child rearing.”⁶ Recent research, moreover, indicates that – for children – nothing compares to a solid, stable marriage between their biological parents.⁷*Id.*, n.9.

a. Traditional marriage supports children’s education. Studies consistently show that children in two-parent families are significantly less likely to drop out of high school than

⁶ Berger, above note 5, at 44.

⁷ This research has many implications, particularly for those who are voluntarily choosing to ignore the patent benefits of marital parenting in the pursuit of individualistic lifestyles:

[W]hile only a couple of decades ago childbirth was sought almost exclusively by married couples in their prime childbearing years, many applicants for access to the new technologies are now single, and some are post-menopausal. Nor do these new applicants necessarily wish to establish traditional family forms. Some want their children to have only one legal parent; some want their children to have no father but two mothers; some want to establish "traditional" parental relationships by conceiving with sperm from a deceased partner.

Marsha Garrison, *Law Making for Baby Making: an Interpretive Approach to the Determination of Legal Parentage*, 113 HARV. L. REV. 835, 839-40 (2000). Garrison also notes that

[d]uring a 12-month period in 1986-87, there were approximately 4,000 requests from single women for artificial insemination. [citation omitted]. While there are no current national data on the proportion of [artificial insemination] users who are single women, anecdotal evidence suggests that the phenomenon is increasing in frequency. For example, the director of one California sperm bank has estimated that 40% of its [artificial insemination] recipients are single lesbian women. [citations omitted]. Births to unmarried mothers have also risen dramatically in recent years. In 1970, 10.7% of U.S. births were to unmarried women; by 1995, 32.2% were. [citations omitted].”

children in a one parent family.⁸ In some studies, the likelihood of dropping out more than doubles for children in single-parent households.⁹

b. Traditional marriage minimizes the likelihood of poverty . Studies also show that children raised outside marriage are more likely to be raised in poor economic conditions.¹⁰ These children suffer not only from economic deprivations, but also from a lack of parental attention and from high rates of residential relocation, all of which can work to disadvantage the child's development.¹¹

c. Traditional marriage aids in crime prevention . Recent studies emphasize the critical role dual-parenting plays if children are to become law abiding citizens. As one researcher noted, "the single most important factor in determining if a male will end up incarcerated later in life is . . . whether or not he has a father in the home."¹² The mother-child relationship is equally important. "As mothers spend less time with infants and toddlers . . . the boys' developing brains, and thus their behavioral systems, are affected."¹³ Children without this crucial early

⁸ Linda J. Waite, Does Marriage Matter?, 32 DEMOGRAPHY 483, 494 (November 1995).

⁹ *Id.* Importantly, Waite notes that these statistics "take into account differences in a number of characteristics that affect educational attainment," thus accentuating the accuracy of the statistics' indications.

¹⁰ Waite above note 8, at 494.

¹¹ *Id.* (citing N.M. Astone & S.S. McLanahan, Family Structure, Residential Mobility, and School Dropout: A Research Note, 31 DEMOGRAPHY 575-84 (1994)). "The presence of two parents potentially means more parental supervision, more parental time helping with homework, and another parental shoulder to cry on after a hard day." *Id.*

¹² MICHAEL GURIAN, THE GOOD SON: SHAPING THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR BOYS AND YOUNG MEN 182 (1999) (referring to research studies conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University).

¹³ *Id.* at 42-43.

bonding are “more likely to start out on a path of later narcissism and out-of-control behavior as [they] compensate[] for [the] early deprivation.”¹⁴

d. Traditional marriage supports healthy socialization . Marriage is an unequalled institution for fostering healthy socialization. “[C]hildren of divorce do not accept monitoring or supervision from live-in partners nearly as much as they do from married parents.”¹⁵ Young adults in single-parent households are more likely to give birth out of wedlock, and are more likely to be out of both school and the labor force.¹⁶ Furthermore, “children who spend part of their childhood in a single- parent family . . . report significantly lower-quality relationships with their parents as adults and have less frequent contact with them.”¹⁷

The above research, taken together, demonstrates that – for the good of our children – society has a compelling interest in promoting and preferring stable, heterosexual marriage. “Adolescent children care about marriage and view it positively . . . [they] endorse marriage,

¹⁴ *Id.* at 43. Gurian notes that today there is a cultural strain on the early bond between both mothers and fathers. “Most boys lose their mothers not because of death but because the importance of the mother-son bond has been gradually diminishing in our culture, and thus in the home. Pressures on contemporary mothers are such that mothers can’t mother their sons as they wish and need to. Similar pressures have for years frayed the father-son bond” *Id.* at 42. Gurian also notes that “[t]he reason the question of working mothers and child care is so developmentally crucial now is that mother-child attachment itself has changed a great deal by force of culture. Our economic system forces many mothers to work far away from their babies, and the ‘aunties’ — the child-care workers provided by our culture — are generally so slightly paid that they don’t stay around long enough to form bonds. This situation is potentially dangerous to the developing child.” *Id.* at 74.

¹⁵ Sanford M. Dornbusch et al., *Single Parenthood*, SOCIETY 30 (July 1, 1996) (available on Westlaw at 1996 WL 9295204).

¹⁶ Waite, above note 8, at 494.

¹⁷ Waite, above note 8, at 495 (citing D.N. Lye, et al., *Childhood Living Arrangements and Adult Children’s Relations with Their Parents*, 32 DEMOGRAPHY 261-80 (1995)).

want to get married, and want to have children.”¹⁸ And, although young people are increasingly bombarded with pessimistic views about marriage, they “yearn[] for a return to stable family life, and . . . are much less likely than their elders to consider divorce a good option.”¹⁹ Any breakdown in the importance placed upon traditional marriage impairs the social welfare of future generations.²⁰

2. *Benefits flowing to adults.*

The advantages of marriage for children are derivative of the benefits gained by those who enter into the marital vow. Marriage is the ultimate social bond that can be formed between a man and woman because

[b]y their marriages, husbands and wives accept an obligation to be faithful, to give and receive help in times of sickness, and to endure hardships. Not everyone will be able to remain true to such vows. However, it is more difficult for a married than for an unmarried person to break such promises *because* they are part of our laws, religions, and definitions of morality. Others have taken identical vows throughout history. Collectively, society enforces these ideals both formally

¹⁸ Dornbusch et al., above note 15.

¹⁹ Elizabeth VanDenBerghe, *The Enduring, Happy Marriage: Findings and Implications from Research in STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: PROCLAMATION PRINCIPLES AND SCHOLARSHIP 28* (David C. Dollahite, ed., publication forthcoming, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City).

²⁰ *See, e.g.*, David Popenoe, “Family Caps,” *SOCIETY* 25, (July 1, 1996) (available on Westlaw at 1996 WL 9295227):

That substantial family disintegration has occurred in the United States in recent decades is now widely recognized. Here are some of the key statistics: From 1960 to 1990 the divorce rate in the United States doubled or tripled (depending upon how one calculates the rate); the percentage of families headed by a single parent tripled, growing from 9 percent to 27 percent; the percentage of out of wedlock births increased from 5 percent of all births to 30 percent; and the percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, growing from 17 percent to 36 percent. It is very much in the public interest for the government to prevent such family disintegration--to promote marriage and the two-parent family and to try to limit single-parent families and out of wedlock births.

and informally. Nothing can be said about any other type of intimate relationship between two adults.²¹

It should come as little surprise, then, that this ancient social union has particular (and unique) social value. This unique social value, moreover, does not flow from some natural selection process in which healthy, strong, bright, and charismatic people are the most likely to marry and, therefore, the most likely to benefit from the union. “Married people do not simply *appear* to be better off than unmarried people; rather, marriage changes people in ways that *produce* such benefits.”²²

It follows that society has a compelling interest in promoting, sustaining, and preferring the oldest social institution shown to change people in propitious ways; ways that make the world a better place. Recent studies strongly support the propositions that traditional marriage promotes physical health, mental and emotional health, and social productivity.

a. Traditional marriage promotes physical health. There is a positive – and multi-factored – causal relationship between marriage and physical health:

²¹ NOCK, above note 1, at 4 (emphasis in original). By contrast, not all forms of alternative “marriage” proposed today contain all elements of the traditional marital vow. For instance, at least some same-sex advocates specifically disavow any notion of sexual monogamy, asserting that sexual commitment to a single partner is “inconsistent” with the “gay” lifestyle. *See, e.g.*, Robert H. Knight, *How Domestic Partnerships and Gay Marriage Threaten the Family* (visited March 2, 2000) <<http://www.frc.org/insight/is94f5hs.html>>.

²² Nock, above note 1, at 3 (emphasis in original) (citing R.H. Coombs, Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review, 40 FAMILY RELATIONS 97-102 (1991)); *see also* Walter R. Gove et al., The Effect of Marriage on the Well-Being of Adults, 11 JOURNAL OF FAMILY ISSUES 4, 25 (1990) (“[T]he evidence suggests that [the link between individual benefits and marriage] is not primarily due to particularly competent and healthy persons being more likely to marry and stay married but instead is primarily due to the effect of the marital relationship on individuals”).

First, married men and women live longer than non-married individuals.²³ These statistics are especially significant for unmarried men who “face higher risks of dying than married men, regardless of their marital history.”²⁴

Second, married people are less likely to report “problem drinking” than are non-married persons.²⁵ Excessive alcohol consumption has been linked to a variety of health-related problems, including liver failure and heart disease. Although men are the clear beneficiaries of marriage in this regard, even married women are nearly one-third less likely to report drinking problems than divorced women.²⁶

Third, married persons, both men and women, are less likely to engage in risk-taking behavior.²⁷ With respect to activities such as drunk driving, smoking, and drug abuse, married

²³ Lee A. Lillard & Linda J. Waite, “Til Death Do Us Part: Marital Disruption and Mortality, 100 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY 1131 (1995); *see also* James S. Goodwin et al., The Effect of Marital Status on Stage, Treatment, and Survival of Cancer Patients, 258 JAMA 3125, 3125 (1987) (“Married persons live longer, with lower mortality for almost every major cause of death, in comparison with single, separated, widowed, or divorced or divorced persons.”); Gove, above note 61, at 7-8.

²⁴ Waite, above note 8, at 489. Researchers explain this causal relationship by pointing to marriage’s tendency to curb risky and unhealthy behaviors, increase material well being, and provide a network of help and support, all of which combine to lengthen an individual’s life. *Id.*

²⁵ Waite, above note 8, at 486. Problem drinking was measured by factors such as drinking more than one planned, failing to accomplish things on account of drinking, and being informed that drinking was hurting one’s health. *See id.*

²⁶ Waite, above note 8, at 487, figure 5. Waite notes that “excessive drinking is a particular male pattern of social pathology; for example, marital conflict is associated with problem drinking for men and with depression for women.” *Id.* at 486 (citing A.V. Horwitz & H.R. White, Becoming Married, Depression, and Alcohol Problems among Young Adults, 32 JOURNAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR 221-37 (1991); C.A. Robbins & S.S. Martin, Gender, Styles of Deviance, and Drinking Problems, 34 JOURNAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR 302-21 (1993); I. Waldron, Gender and Health-Related Behaviors, *in* HEALTH BEHAVIOR: EMERGING RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES 193-208 (D.S. Gochman, ed. 1988)).

²⁷ Waite, above note 8, at 486. Risk-taking behavior was determined by looking at five factors: (1) carelessness resulting in accidents around house and workplace, (2) taking risks against one’s

persons are less likely to engage in such activities compared with their non-married counterparts.²⁸ Perhaps even more importantly, however, researchers believe that marriage actually encourages responsible, healthy behaviors.²⁹

Fourth, research shows that traditional marriage positively impacts the sexual health of individuals. Not only are married persons less likely to experience sexual dysfunction,³⁰ they are also more likely to be extremely satisfied with their partner.³¹ According to one scholar, the long and monogamous relationships typically associated with married individuals allow for the development of partner-specific skills³² and facilitate “emotional investment in the

better judgment, (3) serious arguments or fights at home, (4) serious arguments or fights outside the home, and (5) problems leading to arguments with others. *See id.* at 486-87.

²⁸ VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 29.

²⁹ This may be so because “marriage provides individuals with a sense of meaning in their lives and a sense of obligation to others, thus inhibiting risky behaviors and encouraging healthy ones.” Waite, above note 8, at 488 (citing W. Gove, Sex, Marital Status, and Mortality, 79 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY 45-67 (1973); D. Umberson, Family Status and Health Behaviors: Social Control as a Dimension of Social Integration, 28 JOURNAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR 206-19 (1987)). Additionally, scholars have noted that “marriage provides individuals – especially men – with someone who monitors their health and health-related behaviors,” which may also curb the tendency to engage in potentially harmful activities and encourage healthy, productive ones. *Id.* (citing Catherine E. Ross, Reconceptualizing Marital Status as a Continuum of Social Attachment, 57 JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY 129-40 (1995); D. Umberson, Gender, Marital Status, and the Social Control of Behavior, 34 SOCIAL SCIENCE AND MEDICINE 907-17 (1992)).

³⁰ Edward O. Laurmann et al., Sexual Dysfunction in the United States, 281 JAMA 537 (1999).

³¹ Waite, above note 8, at 491.

³² *Id.*

relationship.”³³ Marriage also reduces a significant anxiety that only non-monogamous individuals face – the fear of sexually transmitted disease.³⁴

Fifth, and perhaps flowing from all of the above, research indicates that married individuals “suffer less from illness and disease and are better off than their never-married or divorced counterparts when they do fall ill.”³⁵

b. Traditional marriage promotes mental and emotional health . The health benefits of marriage do not stop with the body. A growing mountain of research strongly indicates that “the psychological well-being of the married is substantially better than that of the unmarried.”³⁶ “Married people have lower rates of depression and suffer significantly less from any psychiatric disorder than their divorced, never-married, or cohabitating counterparts.”³⁷ Married individuals,

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ “A marriage marked by fidelity, obviously, circumvents the need for . . . caution [regarding sexually transmitted diseases], and offers a secure, rewarding, and emotionally safe context for displaying physical affection.” VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 31.

³⁵ VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 29 (citing Coombs, above note 22; G.T. STANTON, WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS: REASONS TO BELIEVE IN MARRIAGE IN POSTMODERN SOCIETY (1997); Waite, above note 8; Gove, above note 22)); *see also* L. Verbrugge, Marital Status and Health, 41 JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY 267-86 (1979) (report of a comprehensive study using numerous national surveys and looking at acute and chronic conditions, conditions limiting physical and social behavior, and medical treatment). Specifically regarding cancer, one study showed a direct causal nexus between marital status and survival after diagnosis with cancer. Goodwin et al, above note 23, at 3129 (noting that married persons tend to be diagnosed earlier, more frequently receive curative treatment, and are more likely to survive). Scholars noted that one main contributing factor to the higher survival rate among married persons was the degree of social support married persons typically enjoy, which support helps cancer victims cope with the stressful events surrounding cancer diagnosis, treatment, and cure. *Id.*

³⁶ Gove et al, above note 22, at 7.

³⁷ VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 30.

furthermore, are less likely to be admitted to a public mental institution,³⁸ less likely to be admitted to a psychiatric clinic,³⁹ and more likely to cope with psychologically stressful events.⁴⁰

Marriage has also been linked with reports of increased happiness, life satisfaction, and overall occurrence of positive emotions.⁴¹ Marriage offers individuals a “spiritual connection to their deepest values” and satisfies the basic human need for “emotional and physical closeness.”⁴² Some scholars have opined that marriage “provides individuals with a sense of obligation to others, which gives life meaning beyond oneself.”⁴³ Furthermore, “some consensus exists that marriage improves women’s material well-being and men’s emotional well-being.”⁴⁴ Indeed, “no part of the unmarried population – separated, divorced, widowed, or never married – describes itself as being so happy and contented with life as the married.”⁴⁵ As one scholar put it, “[t]he positive effect of marriage on well-being is strong and consistent, and selection of the

³⁸ Gove et al., above note 2, at 5, 9, table 1.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 13 (citing L. Pearlin & J. Johnson, Marital Status, Life Strains and Depression, 42 AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 704-15 (1977)). Some researchers have linked married individuals’ heightened ability to handle traumatic events with the intimate relationship existing between spouses. “[I]ntimate social relationships . . . increase effective coping by strongly enhancing two intrapsychic resources, self esteem and one’s sense of mastery, both of which [are] important coping resources.” *Id.* at 14 (citing R.C. Kessler & M. Essex, Marital Status and Depression: The Importance of Coping Resources, 61 SOCIAL FORCES 484-507 (1982)).

⁴¹ Wendy Wood et al., Sex Differences in Positive Well Being: A Consideration of Emotional Style and Marital Status, 106 PSYCHOLOGICAL BULLETIN 249, 251 (1989) (citing Walter R. Gove, The Relationship Between Sex Roles, Marital Status, and Mental Illness, 51 SOCIAL FORCES 34 (1972)).

⁴² VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 33.

⁴³ Waite, above note 8, at 498.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 30 (quoting Coombs, above note 22).

psychologically healthy into marriage or the psychologically unhealthy out of marriage cannot explain the effect.”⁴⁶

c. Traditional marriage encourages social productivity . Marriage, finally, has a significant (but often overlooked) impact on social productivity. Marriage, to take but one example, has proven to be a positive factor in the workplace. Besides providing health and psychological benefits, marriage positively affects wages and productivity. One study, in fact, has indicated that married men logged more than double the hours of cohabiting, single men.⁴⁷ This translates into a “wage premium” for marriage that positively affects men and (in particular) African-American women.⁴⁸

Another scholar has noted that marriage tends to minimize what Karl Marx described as the alienation between a worker and his employment. “[M]arriage and family still involve the unspecialized, holistic self, providing a context where people bring together their many specialized roles . . . and [can] strategize about the future of family and career within a union that provides value and continuity.”⁴⁹ Yet another noted scholar has concluded that the development and reinforcement of the Western marital model (and the inter-generational conception of family built upon that model) is the essential foundation for personal liberty and an efficient market economy.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ross, above note 29, at 129.

⁴⁷ Waite, above note 8, at 495, figure 15.

⁴⁸ *Id.* Some scholars have suggested that the wage premium for married individuals evidences enhanced productivity – most likely the result of more time (because the other spouse is at home attending to those affairs), reduced negative health behaviors, and increased incentive to perform well so as to provide for the family. *Id.*

⁴⁹ VanDenBerghe, above note 19, at 34.

⁵⁰ Berger, above note 5, at 44.

In sum, the weight of social science demographic research indicates that marriage has unique benefits for women and men, as well as for the children that develop from and within the marital union. Marriage offers individuals (and society) natural and inherent benefits. Indeed, the procreative and normative functions of marriage provide the very foundation of civilized society. Efforts to devalue motherhood, diminish parental involvement with children, devalue religious norms and even re-define the very concept of marriage itself – all well underway in the modern world – bring with them high and tragic social costs.

II. THE COSTS OF DESTABILIZING TRADITIONAL MARITAL STRUCTURES

I now move to the social costs incurred by society as a result of the destabilization of the family. There are growing signs of distress – including poverty – in Western society. This distress is directly linked to the breakdown of marriage and family. As one scholar has written:

Much of the debate about the growing gap between rich and poor . . . focuses on the changing job force, the cost of living, and the tax and regulatory structure that hamstring businesses and employees. But analysis of the social science literature demonstrates that the root cause of poverty and income disparity is linked undeniably to the presence or absence of marriage. Broken families earn less and experience lower levels of educational achievement. Worse, they pass the prospect of meager incomes and family instability on to their children, making the effects inter-generational.”⁵¹

Family breakdown, in short, disables the future generation. As demonstrated above, “[r]esearch has documented that natural family structures benefit nearly every aspect of children’s well-being. This includes greater educational opportunities, better emotional and physical health, less substance abuse, and lower incidences of early sexual activity for girls, and less delinquency for boys.”⁵² In the United States, 50% of children who live with a single mother

⁵¹ Patrick F. Fagan, “How Broken Families Rob Children of Their Chances for Future Prosperity,” The Heritage Foundation Background, No. 1283 (June 11, 1999).

⁵² Craig H. Hart, Ph.D., “Combating the Myth that Parent’s Don’t Matter,” at 3 (address

live in poverty; by contrast, only 10% of children residing in two-parent homes live below the poverty level.⁵³

But even more than education, emotional health and poverty is at issue: the very safety and lives of women and children depends upon marital stability. A groundbreaking survey of the scientific literature performed by Dr. David Popenoe and Dr. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead found that cohabiting, unmarried women “are more likely than married women to suffer physical and sexual abuse.”⁵⁴ The consequences of cohabitation are even more serious for children. Doctors Popenoe and Whitehead conclude that:

the most unsafe of all family environments for children is that in which the mother is living with someone other than the child’s biological father. This is the environment for the majority of children in cohabiting couple households.⁵⁵

In sum, stable martial unions promote the health, safety and social progress of women, men and children. Unstable marital relations promote poverty, crime, abuse and social disintegration. These realities, moreover, are particularly acute for women and children. While the assault on marriage, motherhood and child rearing – in large part – has been championed by feminist organizations who purportedly seek the betterment of women and children, their efforts (as shown above) have not always improved the lives of actual women and children. Modern activists for women’s rights would do well to heed the fact that “the family as an institution

delivered at the World Congress of Families II, Geneva, Switzerland) (available on-line at www.worldcongress.org).

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Dr. David Popenoe and Dr. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation Before Marriage,” at 7 (The National Marriage Project, Rutgers University 1999).

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 8.

exists to give legal protection to the mother-child unit and to ensure that adequate economic resources are passed from the parents to allow the children to grow up to be viable adults.”⁵⁶

III. A PLEA FOR HELP

What is the import of the foregoing? First, the family is essential to social progress. Second, the family – particularly in the developed world – is functioning less well than (perhaps) at any other time in history. Third, and finally, as members of society, and as people of faith, we must work together to restore the family to its proper strength and function.

The threats facing men, women, children and the family do not confront one faith, country or culture alone. All religious faiths, all cultures and all countries must stand together to combat the erosion of morality and the family. The profound importance of the natural family transcends religious and cultural boundaries. The Qur’an states that “Allah has made for you mates from yourselves and made for you out of them, children and grandchildren.”⁵⁷ The Bible, in the second chapter of Genesis, reflects the same truth: “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.”⁵⁸ The profound importance of the family unit established by Adam, Eve and their children is recognized in The Torah⁵⁹ and explained in the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church:

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life.

⁵⁶ Dr. Maria Sophia Aguirre, “Family Economics and the Information Society: How are They Affecting Each Other?” at 12 (paper presented at the World Congress of Families II, Geneva, Switzerland) (available on-line at www.worldcongress.org).

⁵⁷ The Qur’an, Al-Nahl (Sura 16:72).

⁵⁸ The Holy Bible, Genesis 2:17.

⁵⁹ The Torah, Bereishis 2:18 (explaining that man was not intended to live alone, but to marry).

Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society.⁶⁰

The fundamental truth that the natural family is the basic unit of society, furthermore, extends beyond the great monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The classic Taoist text, *The Chuang Tzu*, explains that familial ties are the basis of any stable society because “[w]hen people are brought together by Heaven, . . . when troubles come, they hold together.”⁶¹

Why does the natural family holds us together when troubles come? Because a properly functioning natural family has extraordinary strength. Perhaps the most extensive study of adolescent behavior conducted anywhere in the world was completed in 1997 by the American Medical Association. That study found that the factors most “significantly related” to a decrease in risky adolescent behaviors were “parental expectations for scholastic achievement and the presence of connected, caring parents.”⁶² As a result, the authors of this study questioned the ways that many current social policies – such as emphasis on autonomy rights for children – “threaten family connectedness.”⁶³ They concluded that “one can only hope” that government at all levels will seek to “develop policies that support families.”⁶⁴

We must begin that effort. Because families are the fundamental unit of society, government policy must stop by-passing the unit that can best strengthen society. Fathers and mothers, by and large, love their children. Assistance that permits fathers and mothers to work

⁶⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶ 2207 (1994).

⁶¹ *The Chuang Tzu: A New Complete Translation of the Classic Taoist Text* (Martin Palmer and Elizabeth Breuilly, trans. 1996).

⁶² “Protecting adolescents from harm: findings from the National Longitudinal Study,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 278, No. 10 (Sept. 10, 1997) at 864.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

together to strengthen their families to improve the condition of their children will not only be more successful than other possible approaches, it will strengthen society itself.

There is a concerted, on-going effort by well-organized advocacy groups both nationally and internationally to undermine the family. There are efforts, for example, to use the lofty rhetoric of “human rights” to obtain absolute legal protection for unrestrained sexuality (even for children), redefine the very concept of marriage, diminish the role and importance of religion in public and private life, and reduce (and in some contexts, eliminate) parental control over the education and upbringing of their children.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Recently, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and an international agency known as UN/AIDS issued International Guidelines for HIV/AIDS and Human Rights (hereafter, “UNAIDS Guidelines”). The UNAIDS Guidelines call for (1) repeal of all laws condemning homosexual sodomy, (2) legalization of same-sex marriage, (3) mandatory and graphic sexual training of children, and (4) creation of “penalties” for anyone who “vilifies” homosexual behavior.

Paragraphs 101 and 102 of the Guidelines state with absolute clarity that all anti-sodomy laws and laws that prohibit same-sex relationships violate supposed international human rights norms and must be repealed. And, according to the Guidelines, states should give “legal recognition to same-sex marriages.” Guidelines at paragraph 30(h). The Guidelines are equally clear that children must be provided with *graphic* sexual education materials. Paragraph 95 asserts that the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds and the right to education provide children with the right to give and receive all HIV-related information needed to avoid infection and to cope with their status, if infected.” Guidelines at paragraph 95. Much of the “information” that would be provided to children under the Guidelines would involve graphic portrayals and discussion of homosexual conduct. In fact, that Guidelines assert that special exemptions from pornography and censorship laws may be required: “[e]ducational material which may necessarily involve detailed information about transmission risks and may target groups engaged in . . . sexual activity between the same sexes . . . should not be wrongfully subject to censorship or obscenity laws.” Guidelines at paragraph 116. Children, in short, could well be exposed to materials now considered obscene if – as the UNAIDS guidelines assert – “existing international human rights standards” involving children are enforced. Guidelines at paragraph 36; *id.* at paragraph 95.

But, perhaps the most troubling provision in the Guidelines is the clear call for legal punishment of *anyone* who may disagree with the above views. Paragraph 30h of the Guidelines calls for the creation of “penalties for vilification of people who engage in same-sex relationships.” Guidelines at paragraph 30h. Accordingly, it is not enough to simply normalize –

But we must not succumb to despair. Rather, at the dawn of the New Millennium we must call society at all levels to return to basic truths regarding the family: truths that have been recognized for centuries and validated by scientific research in modern times. The best way to improve society is to improve its families. By contrast, the quickest way to destroy society is to weaken its families.

Despite the clarity of the path, local, national and international leaders have not been quick to see it. Perhaps the reason why is explained by a quotation from Goethe:

What is the most difficult of all?
That which seems to you the easiest,
To see with one's eyes
What is lying before them.⁶⁶

We must all see what is lying before our eyes. Society has a shared commitment to the natural family. The time has come to recognize and act upon it.

in one fell swoop – all forms of homosexual behavior, anyone who has the temerity to oppose this development (including, it seems, religious leaders) must be subjected to legal “penalty.” A clearer assault on religious liberty can hardly be imagined.

⁶⁶ Goethe, *Xenien Aus Dem Nachlass #45* (quoted in Marian F. Zeitlin, Ratna Megawangi, Ellen M. Kramer, Nancy D. Colletta, E.D. Babatunde, and David Garman, *Strengthening the Family: Implications for International Development* (United Nations University Press 1995) at v).