



Family Policy Brief

Traditional Marriage is Essential for a Healthy Society

The natural family, composed of a father, mother and their children, has always been the foundation of every healthy and successful society. Throughout recorded human history and across all cultures, traditional marriage, defined as the union of a man and a woman, has always been essential to creating, promoting and protecting the family.

Time and again, scholars have found this to be true, including some like the renowned British anthropologist, Joseph Daniel Unwin, who originally set out to prove the opposite. He quickly concluded, *“In human records, there is no case of an absolutely monogamous [his term for traditional marriage] society failing to display great [cultural] energy. I do not know of a case on which great energy has been displayed by a society that has not been absolutely monogamous.”*

Yet in nations around the world, marriage is under assault by those who would radically redefine it to include same-sex individuals and even relationships between multiple people.

To fully understand the critical role of marriage and why radically redefining it is such a threat to the future of any society, it is important to understand a little about “social institutions” and how they provide “social goods.”

A “social institution” is the network of shared meanings, norms, definitions, expectations and understandings held by the members of a society. It is what guides and governs how they understand they are expected to act and interact, what is socially desirable and legitimate, what they should be striving for and so on. Major social institutions include the family, marriage, a military or defense system, a governmental system and religious traditions. A society is essentially the sum of its unique social institutions and their interactions over time.

Societies create, perpetuate and protect social institutions because they provide “social goods,” which is the term for benefits to society as a whole and to the individual members of a society. Among the most important social goods produced by the institution of man/woman marriage are those that benefit children. Marriage is and always has been primarily about children and what is best for them, because the rising generation literally is the future of every society.

Marriage has proven to be the most effective way to transform a man into a husband/father and a woman into a wife/mother and to ensure that a child will know and be cared for by his biological parents. The married parent/children relationship is not only the best way to guarantee that these children will be provided with the basics of life, but also that they will be nurtured and raised in ways that will make them responsible and contributing members of that society. Social science research has confirmed the practical experience of countless societies over the millennia: by all measurable indicators one might select, children do best when raised by their married biological parents. Married people and their children tend to be happier, healthier, wealthier and more

productive members of society, benefiting both them as individuals and the society as a whole.

The way societies perpetuate social institutions is by instilling the values, guidance, expectations and sense of what is legitimate in the rising generation, a process referred to as “socialization.” Clearly, when the set of shared understandings that comprise a current social institution changes, the society itself changes. Those who are demanding that same-sex marriage be legalized are not simply demanding that the existing institution of marriage just be extended to them. What they are actually demanding is that society scrap the time-proven institution of man/woman marriage and replace it with a radically different, untested and unproven institution of “genderless marriage.” This new social institution may still be called “marriage,” but it will be very different from the one that has been proven to produce the social goods so critical to any society. Instead of marriage being recognized as it now is, as the best environment and circumstance in which to bear and raise children, marriage would become nothing more than official governmental recognition of any two individuals’ professed affection for each other.

The burden of proof that such a radical redefinition will not harm society rests squarely and entirely on those advocating this wrenching change. Yet same-sex marriage advocates cannot show that this radically redefined new institution of “marriage” would or could provide any of the essential social goods that traditional marriage now does. In reality, what they are demanding is that society blindly launch a social experiment with future generations as the guinea pigs. And to make their demands even more outrageous, it would take several generations for negative results from this social experiment to be manifest. By then, it will be impossible to turn back the clock and redefine the institution of marriage back to what it is now. This is because the subsequent generations will have been socialized with this radically different set of understandings, expectations, beliefs and sense of purpose and legitimacy. Society would be changed forever. The social goods now provided by marriage may not be reproducible by any other means.

Clearly, any society would be foolish to take this gamble on its future. No member of a society who understands the nature and seriousness of the threat and who cares about their children’s or grandchildren’s future would support it. Yet some societies have been foolish enough to begin this one-way social experiment. The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain and South Africa, along with the state of Massachusetts have already legalized same-sex marriage. Some of the negative impacts are already starting to manifest themselves in less than a generation. The Netherlands, for example, the first country to legalize same-sex marriage, has already seen an explosion in the illegitimacy rate and a rapid decline in the number of couples who are getting married.

Fortunately, most countries still recognize the threat and are taking steps to try to protect the institution of marriage. A number of them have amended their constitutions or have adopted laws to define marriage as only the union of a man and a woman. So far, 27 states in the U.S. have amended their state constitutions, and others are in the process of doing so. A report issued by a commission created by the French National Assembly, that country’s national legislature, has strongly recommended against legalizing same-sex marriage, allowing same-sex adoptions or allowing same-sex couples to have children by artificial means.

All societies have a compelling governmental interest in preserving the institution of marriage. They have not only the right to protect marriage, but the responsibility to future generations to do so. The very future of every society depends upon it.