



HLI EDUCATIONAL SERIES

*Looking at life and family issues in the light
of faith and reason.*

PART III: PERSON, FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND STATE

*Do you want
healthy, happy, and
productive citizens?
Then you must
defend marriage
and the family.*



Part III: Person, Family, Community, and State – All Depend on Upholding Marriage

Do you want healthy, happy, and productive citizens? Then you must defend marriage and the family.

We have been discussing how who we are as persons made in God's image reveals what we must do, since God has placed in us – in our united body and spirit – His very meaning for our lives, our purpose for being. Sin has in many ways harmed our ability to grasp this basic truth, but God has given us the grace of the sacraments, especially of marriage, and the teaching of the Church established by His Son, to help us recover and share this love and responsibility. Where else these days will you hear the basic truths about the importance of a loving family for children to flourish?

*The family has central importance in reference to the person. It is in this cradle of life and love that people are born and grow; when a child is conceived, society receives the gift of a new person who is called "from the innermost depths of self to communion with others and to the giving of self to others." It is in the family, therefore, that the mutual giving of self on the part of man and woman united in marriage creates an environment of life in which children "develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny." (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (n. 212); quoting John Paul II's *Christifidelis Laici* (n. 40) and *Centessimus Annus* (n. 39), respectively. Emphasis in original.)*

Not only this, but we are surrounded by story after tragic story that confirm what happens when God's love is left unreceived and His law denied.

In this part of our series on marriage, we will look more closely at how the decay of society around us reveals the consequences of turning away from God and His plan for marriage and family. Before we step out of Church teaching and into the research and observations of a society at war with itself we should note the truly incredible wisdom in the doctrine of the Church, the harmony between the moral and social doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Can We Really Separate One Church Teaching from Another?

It's funny. Many Catholics have a general idea of the moral teaching of the Church, though most might reduce it to a series of *don'ts*: Don't kill, don't have sex outside of marriage, and so on. But in truth the moral teaching of the Church begins in an enormous *Yes!* Without saying so, this series has been affirming the moral doctrine of the Church; laying out the *Yeses* required by love, all of which begin in our choice to receive the gift of God's love.

Yes to the love of God and to His will in my life! Yes to the gift of love from those He has given me to love! Yes, especially, to this person God has given me to love as spouse; or to this great vocational call to serve Our Lord! Yes to this child! And with our choice to receive the love God has given us, these great opportunities for freedom and flourishing, we say yes to the responsibilities that come with them.

Therefore, by receiving these gifts and the responsibilities that come with them, we necessarily say no to anything that corrupts them, that turns us from the love of God. *No to abortion or any killing of the innocent! No to contraception, the denial of conjugal love and the gift of life! No to abusing our sexual gift by using it outside of marriage, before I have promised my entire self to another!*

It would be an understatement to say that these teachings are unpopular these days, even if we understand how they logically follow from the love of God and neighbor. But here is a very important point that is often missed: The same love of God that is the foundation for the Church's moral doctrine is also the foundation of the Church's social doctrine – that is, her teaching on how we should live together in society, how society should be ordered, and the rights owed to persons and families.

How many times have we heard a politician utter the utterly nonsensical claim: *I don't believe the Church's teaching on contraception, abortion and marriage; but I really do support her social teaching!* This makes no sense whatsoever. It's like a football fan saying "I don't believe in offense, but I believe in defense!" It

just shows that the person doesn't really understand what he's saying.

Yet many have, often unwittingly, set the social doctrine of the Church against her moral doctrine, as if the currently unpopular moral teachings on sexuality and marriage can be set aside for the "greater good" of some kind of justice that requires more government to answer to society's ills. But this is an error, and one that is increasingly obvious. There is no just society where innocent life can be destroyed and where marriage is not upheld and valued. The more we abandon the most fundamental gifts of God's love for us, the more we find ourselves at odds with each other, clamoring for the State to save us from the natural and logical consequences of our abandonment of respect for life and marriage. The more the goods of marriage, family, and local community are marginalized, the more people seek justice by empowering a government that becomes increasingly overreaching, and even hostile to these great gifts and the Church that still upholds them.

Church Teaching on Marriage, the Family and Society is One

The Church sees things quite differently, and her view is affirmed by a great deal of research on the family and society, as we will see. Again, Pope Saint John Paul II's clear view of the good of family and common good of society sets our sights correctly:

The first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology' is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. (Centessimus Annus n. 83)

The Church has reinforced the value, rights and centrality of marriage and the family in society since Pope St. Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891:

No human law can abolish the natural and original right of marriage, nor in any way limit the chief and principal purpose of marriage ordained by God's authority from the beginning: "Increase and multiply." Hence we have the family, the "society" of a man's house - a society very small, one must admit, but none the less a true society, and one older than any State. Consequently, it has rights and duties peculiar to itself which

are quite independent of the State. (n.12)

So let's be done with any claims to upholding Catholic social teaching that do not also uphold her moral teaching. With her teaching on marriage and the family, the Church's claim to authority is very strong indeed, and as we are about to see, well-supported by widely available scientific research.

The Data Confirms – Marriage is best for spouses, children and society

Child Trends is not an organization that any informed person would accuse of being “conservative,” much less “Catholic.” The research institution often forwards positions that the Church would in no way support, yet their oft-cited 2002 survey of all relevant sociological research found that “family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.” (“Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can be Done about It?” Moore, Jekielek, and Emig.)

A wide variety of academic research has been compiled in an excellent report authored by Dr. Teresa Notare and Dr. H. Richard McCord for the USCCB entitled “Marriage and Family in the United States: Resources for Society.” In it, Notare and McCord present a wide range of studies affirming the value of marriage for spouses' and children's well-being:

- “Happily married adults report fewer depressive symptoms than all other marital groups.” (Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives* (2008), p. 3, citing “Marital Status: Links to physical and mental health,” MIDUS (Midlife in the United States) — A National Study of Health and Well-Being; available at, www.midus.wisc.edu; accessed 7/14/11.)
- A review of 130 studies about the relationship between marriage and well-being found “an intimate link between marital status and personal well-being.” (Robert Coombs, “Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review,” *Family Relations* 40 (1991): 98.)
- Married couples have more meaningful sexual relationships (including higher emotional satisfaction) than non-married people. (Linda Waite, Does Marriage Matter? *Demography* 32 (1995): 491.)
- The majority of classic studies demonstrate that the lowest rates of



mental disorder are found among the married and that cohabitation does not replicate these benefits of marriage. (Benjamin Malzberg, “Marital Status in Relation to the Prevalence of Mental Disease,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 10 (1936): 245 - 261.)

- “The norms of adult maturity and fidelity associated with marriage encourage men and women to avoid unhealthy or risky behaviors — from promiscuous sex to heavy alcohol use.” (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good* (2008), p. 20, referencing Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), pp. 53 - 55. See also, Alan V. Horwitz, Helene Raskin White and Sandra Howell-White, “Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 895 - 907; Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, “Marital Status Continuity and Change among Young and Midlife Adults: Longitudinal Effects on Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (1998): 652-686.)
- For women, marriage combats depression, provides particularly high psychological benefits and significantly lowers the risk of suicide. (See, Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, (2005), p. 28. Wilcox references a number of classic and current studies, notably, Susan L. Brown, “The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being:

Depression Among Cohabitators Versus Marrieds,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (September 2000): 241 - 255.)

Academic research compiled in the report shows even greater benefits for children when raised by parents who have a stable, happy marriage:

- Children from stable, married families are significantly less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and thoughts of suicide compared to children from divorced homes. (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good*, (2008), p. 10, referencing, Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, (2005). See also, Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, (New York: Crown, 2005).)
- “The rate of virginity among teenagers at all ages is highly correlated with the presence or absence of married parents. (Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Children*, (2009), p. 7, citing Deborah M. Capaldi, Lynn Crosby and Mike Stoolmiller, “Predicting the Timing of First Sexual Intercourse for At-Risk Adolescent Males,” *Child Development* 67 (1996): 344-359.)
- For girls, sexual intercourse will likely be delayed until marriage if the girl experiences the “love of a father who places her well-being above his own and who acts as a natural protector. ... If she is denied such fatherly love, then the girl is likely to try to seek it elsewhere - often inappropriately and often at very young ages [sic].” (Wade F. Horn, *The Importance of Being Father*, cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, 2002), p. 145.)
- For boys who are raised by their own biological fathers and mothers, they are “less likely to get in trouble than boys raised in other family situations.” (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good*, (2008), p. 17, referencing: Elizabeth Marquardt, *Family Structure and Children’s Educational Outcomes*, (2005); Paul Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation,” *The Future of Children* 15 (2005): 75-96.)

This is just a small snapshot of findings from various academic sources on the psychological and behavioral advantages of those in stable marriages. The same report compiles research showing the deleterious effects of various

forms of less stable unions on the health, well-being and economic viability of adults and children alike, as well as additional benefits regarding the physical and economic health of adults and children in stable, happy marriages.

Notare and McCord's thorough report concludes that, based on data from a wide range of academic sources:

[T]he evidence from research indicates that children raised in intact families do better in school; are more likely to attend college and enter the work force in stronger positions; are physically and emotionally healthier; are less likely to be physically or sexually abused; less likely to use drugs or alcohol and to commit delinquent behaviors; have a decreased risk of divorcing when they get married; are less likely to initiate sexual activity, become pregnant/impregnate someone as a teenager; and are less likely to be raised in poverty.

The relational ties and community assets forged through marriage result in many positive outcomes for society. Marriage is a "seedbed" of pro-social behavior that fosters social connections, civil and religious involvement, and charitable giving. Marriage connects men and women to the larger community and encourages personal responsibility, family commitment, community voluntarism, and social altruism. Marriage is the greatest social educator of children. It is the institution that most effectively teaches the civic virtues of honesty, loyalty, trust, self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, and respect for others. The virtues cultivated between men and women in marriage, and between parents and [their] children, radiate outward into civil society. They deepen in married men and women strong habits of devotion to civic life. (pp. 23-24)

A Basis for Conversation with Those who Disagree

Regardless of one's political or religious beliefs, shouldn't the well-being of children be the primary consideration when it comes to policy related to marriage? Children have a right to the best we can give them, which gives us

all a reason to want to uphold and defend in law the one natural institution that is shown by the data to be the best setting for children's health and well-being. To devalue the natural institution of marriage and family is to roll the dice with the well-being of children, which is why we all have a stake in this.

Further, the benefits do not merely accrue to the family members themselves – they accrue to society as a whole in the form of more stable citizens who support the common good rather than requiring assistance in the most basic services. A just society is one in which all are willing to contribute to the well-being of those who find themselves in need due to disability or misfortune. But according to a great deal of sociological research, to devalue marriage, as has unfortunately been happening for some time in many countries, is to increase the conditions for just the sorts of social ills that we all recognize as problematic.

In the final part of this series we will look at the challenges to marriage, and how the Church responds to them in charity and truth.

Resources used in this article, which we recommend for further study:

- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, especially chapter 5: The Family, the Vital Cell of Society
- *Rerum Novarum*, an Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, 1891
- *Centessimus Annus*, an Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1991
- *Marriage and the Family in the United States: Resources for Society*, (2012), Prepared by Theresa Notare, PhD and H. Richard McCord, EdD for the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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