

# Marriage and Civil Society: The Role of Marriage in Preserving Human Rights

*Janice Shaw Crouse, Ph.D.*

The Roman philosopher and orator, Cicero, once said, “The first bond of society is marriage.” He believed that an in-tact family structure — a married mom and dad — was essential to the well-being of a strong society. Indeed, the institution of marriage has been the bedrock of civilization for thousands of years; yet today, marriage and family, as we have known it, is under attack around the world. While the social science research is clear and unequivocal — marriage is central to the welfare of both individuals and the entire social order — unwarranted changes in family structure are profoundly reshaping our post-modern society and threatening the human rights and human dignity of citizens around the world.

Globally, 70 percent of people believe still believe marriage is intended to be for life, and 75 percent claim it is a personal lifetime goal. Around 90 percent of Americans will marry during their lifetime; the two-parent household is still the rule rather than the exception for white America and 66 percent of the population lives in a married couple family. However, for many European countries (the southern ones in particular), marriage today is “irrelevant.” In fact, a majority of Europeans believe a long-term stable relationship to be just as good as marriage. And within the United States, the marriage rate has dropped by nearly 50 percent over the last 42 years.

These are staggering statistics. How did we go from cultures that cherished marriage as its most sacred cornerstone to ones that view it as a costly and nonessential legality – “just a piece of paper”? Marriage is under attack from 3 major areas: (1) the rise of cohabitation as a substitute for marriage, (2) the normalization of promiscuity, casual or “free-sex” and (3) the promotion by activists of their so-called, “same-sex marriage” agenda.

**Cohabitation:** Increasingly, cohabitation is displacing marriage. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 439,000 unmarried couples were living together in 1960. Fifty years later, that figure has ballooned to 7.5 million. However, when we take an honest look at the facts, cohabitation does very little to promote healthy, stable and lasting relationships. Nor do cohabiting couples contribute to community and national well-being.

**Promiscuity:** But marriage is not just being replaced by a subpar substitute; it is also being assaulted from the inside. Infidelity has been found to be the single most-cited cause of divorce in over 150 cultures, and in western countries, between a quarter and half of all divorcees cite a spouse’s infidelity as the primary cause. Promiscuous sex causes pain *before* marriage and lingering problems later on during marriage. It diminishes trust between couples and is a destructive escape from problems within the relationship. Before 1970, when California established “no-fault” divorce, the spouse who wanted to end the marriage had to identify the other spouse as the one “at fault,” likely due to unfaithfulness. Since the 70s, however, “no-fault” divorce has taken marriage from an everlasting covenant partnership and permanent contractual

agreement and reduced it to an unbinding, and often temporary, arrangement. As a result, couples have felt more at liberty to pursue extramarital relationships when the going gets tough. They know the law will not hold them accountable, and neither will society.

**“Same-Sex Marriage:”** Societies today are in a state of utter confusion as to what marriage means, and the foundation of traditional family values is in danger of collapse. Since 2001, ten (10) countries — Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, South Africa and Sweden — have granted marriage rights to same-sex couples on an equal footing with heterosexuals. Gay activists claim to be the victims of discrimination and bigotry, and that they are being denied their civil and constitutional rights. But in his article, “Same-Sex marriage – Challenges & Responses,” *Townhall* columnist Gregory Koukl counters, “Same-sex marriage is not about civil rights. It is about validation and social respect. It is a radical attempt at civil engineering using government muscle to strong-arm the people into accommodating a lifestyle many find deeply offensive, contrary to nature, socially destructive, and morally repugnant.”

**Conclusion:** Many of those who thought that “sexual freedom” would be liberating have found, too late and to their regret, that the dregs of “Fortune’s cup” are bitter indeed.<sup>1</sup> What we’ve learned, to our sorrow, is the consequences of the decline in marriage and breakdown of the family, have not only negatively affected generations of individuals on a personal level; the decline of marriage has undermined our social institutions and shaken the stability of nations. Worse, the decline in marriage undermines basic human dignity and human rights; it is a threat to civil societies.

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<sup>1</sup> From Homer – “The bitter dregs of Fortune's cup to drain.”