

## **ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE**

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December 31, 2016

### ***The State of Civilization's Foundation: Marriage and the Family (2016)***

American civilization and the broader western civilization have embraced a radical re-definition of marriage and family. This is beyond the culture's accommodation to same-sex marriage. For example, the approval of unwed parenthood is now at 61%; the approval of divorce at 71%; and the approval of premarital sex at 53%. Rather shockingly, support for plural matrimony (i.e., polygamy) has risen from 7% to 16%. The logic of this change is obvious: Given the accommodation to same-sex marriage, on what ethical and legal basis is American civilization going to deny the right of citizens who wish to have multiple partners in a marriage? What was once unthinkable becomes debatable and gradually becomes acceptable. I am not a prophet, but I predict that over the next decade we will see an ethical and legal accommodation to bigamy and polygamy as a civil right.

Another major cultural and legal accommodation involves the growing number of births out of wedlock. In fact, the number of nations where there are more births out of wedlock than in has risen to more than 20. This phenomenon is actually growing worldwide, including Japan, Chile and China. Is this a positive development? These facts make it difficult to view this development as positive:

- Unmarried parents are more likely to split up.
- Their children learn less in school and are more likely to be unhealthy or behave badly.
- Unmarried parents are poorer, less well-educated and more likely to be teenagers.

In addition, governments are also finding it difficult to deal with unmarried, cohabiting adults in terms of the law. There are three major approaches governments are taking in terms of the law for cohabiting adults:

1. Nations such as England and the United States make no legal provision or protection for couples who are not married but are cohabiting. In terms of the law, get married or stop living together. There is no other legal category outside of the marriage contract.
2. In France and the Netherlands, for example, there are several categories from which couples can choose. There are "marriage lite" contracts that incorporate some aspects of marriage, such as tax breaks or asset-sharing if the couple breaks up. In the Netherlands, more than half of unmarried couples formalize their relationship with a "cohabitation agreement," which can be tailored to specify how assets and expenses will be shared should there be a break-up. In France, about 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of unmarried couples

have PACS, which is a legal agreement that can be ended by a registered letter or by marrying someone else, without giving notice to the cohabiting partner.

3. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, couples are automatically given many of the rights and duties of marriage after they have lived together for a certain number of years.

In other words, in this Postmodern world where marriage is no longer treated as sacred, cohabiting arrangements are creating confusion and standard legal protections for couples no longer obtain. The negative impact on children from such arrangements is well documented. All of this is evidence of what happens when culture departs from the ideal God established in the Creation Ordinance of Genesis 2:18-25.

Related to the confusion created by cohabiting adults is the growing and blatant practice of abortion as purely an option for birth control. *The Economist* recently reported on nations worldwide that have seen abortion become the primary form of birth control. What follows is a summary of the salient facts from this article:

- In Greece, abortion is seen as an ordinary form of birth control.
- The abortion rate is rising in Latin America and some parts of Africa and Asia.
- Former communist countries have some of the world's highest rates of abortion.
- During the period of the Soviet Union, abortion was the only method of birth control, and in some communist nations, the average woman would have 5 to 8 abortions during her lifetime. But today in Russia this has all changed. Russia now has mandatory counseling and "reflection periods" of several days before an abortion can be carried out. Russia officially declares that abortion is the "murder of a living child" and instructs counselors to "awaken maternal feelings" and to convince women of the "immorality and cruelty" of abortion. The patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church has even called for a ban on all abortions.
- A recent study in the *Lancet*, a medical journal, estimated that 56 million abortions are carried out annually worldwide, ending a quarter of all pregnancies worldwide!

The confusion and disrespect for life represented by this report indicate once again how far human civilization has departed from the value of life assigned by God in Scripture. Life has infinite value and worth because it is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26ff). This image of God concept provides the foundation stone for human identity and value. To disregard that is to enter the never-never land of Postmodern pluralism and relativism.

Human civilization is abandoning God's design for the covenant nature of marriage and increasingly embracing the fluidity and confusion of cohabitation. As a result, people are hurt deeply and children from such relationships suffer terribly. When 56 million abortions occur every year worldwide, ending 25% of all pregnancies, human civilization is willingly terminating the lives of 56 million humans created in God's image (see especially Psalm 139:16).

None of this can be pleasing to our God. He can only be grieved and hurt by what He sees his creatures doing with the two most precious gifts He has given: Life and Marriage. Only His grace and mercy can save us!

See *The Economist* (16 January 2016), pp. 16, 67-68 and (3 December 2016), pp. 50-52; and Ross Douthat in the *New York Times* (31 May 2015).