

Allan Carlson

Two Becoming One Flesh: Marriage as a Sexual and Economic Union

“As time marches inexorably on, human society...evolves.” So philosophized Judge William L. Downing in striking down the state of Washington’s Defense of Marriage Act in August, ruling that same-sex couples have a right to marry. Indeed, evolutionary language seems tightly bound to the “gay marriage” agenda. “There is an evolution of society,” cooed Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien last year when announcing a new national policy opening marriage to homosexual couples.¹ Jacqueline Murray, columnist for *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, agreed that evolution is at work here: “Extending marriage to people of the same sex may be the final frontier and the logical conclusion of this evolution.”² Writing in *The Boston Globe*, Virginia Postrel argued that social institutions such as marriage are themselves “the result of an evolutionary process”; gay marriage, as such, represents another promising “experiment in living” contributing to forward evolution.³ Ellen Goodman concluded that the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court’s ruling that homosexuals have a right to marry “may be as evolutionary as it is historic,” adding, “The evolution of gay rights and marriage laws now merge into the definition of marriage written by the Massachusetts court.”⁴

This focus on social evolution is reveal-

ing. It points toward the ideology that drives the same-sex marriage campaign, and the deeper conflict of ideas in which we are now engaged. On the one hand, there is the view put forth by prominent early anthropologists that marriage is, in essence, an unchanging, universal institution, coextensive with humanity. As Edward Westermarck explained over a century ago: “Among the lowest savages, as well as the most civilized races of men, we find the family consisting of parents and children, and the father as its protector.” Holding this family system together was marriage, combining “a regulated sexual relation” with “economic obligations.” In Westermarck’s view, distinct *maternal*, *paternal* and *marital* instincts all existed, each rooted in human nature. Indeed, he argued that “the institution of marriage...has developed out of a primeval habit.” While variations in the details could be found in different human cultures, the fundamental marriage bond was unchanging.⁵ Or, as George

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Murdock wrote in his great 1949 anthropological survey: “The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping.” Moreover, “[a]ll known human societies have developed specialization and cooperation between the sexes roughly along this biologically determined line of cleavage.” Murdock concluded:

[M]arriage exists only when the economic and the sexual are united into one relationship, and this combination only occurs in marriage. Marriage, thus defined, is found in every known human society.⁶

The conservative defense of marriage implicitly appeals to this vision of a necessary and unchanging institution, rooted in human nature.

“The Evolution of Marriage”

On the other hand, a different theory of marriage has exerted a profound influence, from the 1880s to our day. As one prominent sociologist has explained, “Social science developed only one comprehensive theory of *family change*, one based on nineteenth century evolutionary ideas.”⁷ Applying Darwin’s concept of “natural selection” to human behavior, these theorists have argued that human marriage is an *evolving* institution. As we have already seen, this very notion—and the theory behind it—today drives one major argument for same-sex marriage. Where did this theory come from? What does this theory of social evolution say? How has it affected American beliefs? Is the theory true?

The classic formulation of “the evolution of marriage” idea is found in Lewis Morgan’s 1877 book *Ancient Society*. In fact, this book was the result of a U.S. government investigation of the social lives of American Indians. Morgan focused particular attention on the Iroquois, but drew broader conclusions. In his view, the family

was a fluid agent, never stationary, moving in evolutionary fashion from lower to higher forms. The three main stages in this process, he claimed, were:

- *Among pre-historic savages, group marriage*, where unrestricted sexual intercourse existed within a tribe, such that every woman belonged to every man, and every man to every woman. Sexual orgies were routine practices. In this perfectly promiscuous social order, Morgan argued, children were common to all and descent or lineage was traced through the mother’s family, the maternal “gens,” since paternity could not be established. This, in turn, gave power and authority to women.
- *Among barbarians, the pairing family*. This construct rested on the nuclear pairing off of one man with one woman, and a limitation on inbreeding through creation of the incest taboo. And yet, the pairing family still held on to remnants of the old ways, as where sisters would be the mutual wives of their mutual husbands, and where maternal lineage would remain primary. Still, enforcement of the incest taboo led to an evolutionary advance, Morgan contended, including the expansion of human skulls and brains.
- *Finally, among civilized people, the monogamous family*, resting on patriarchal controls and enforced chastity and fidelity among women, in order to ensure the fathers’ lineages.⁸

Other ethnographers quickly exposed the fatal flaws in Morgan’s analysis. Yet his theory took on an ideological life of its own. One writer who immediately drew out the political implications of Morgan’s work was Friedrich Engels, co-author of *The Communist Manifesto*. In his 1884 book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property,*

and the State, Engels underscored Morgan's importance:

The discovery [of] the original maternal "gens" has the same signification for primeval history that Darwin's theory of evolution had for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value [has had] for political economy.

From a Communist, high praise indeed. And yet, in an important break with Morgan, Engels refused to see modern monogamous marriage as superior or good:

Monogamy...does by no means enter history as a reconciliation of man and wife and still less as the highest form of marriage. On the contrary, it enters as the subjugation of one sex by the other, as the proclamation of an antagonism between the sexes unknown in all preceding history.

Specifically, Engels denied that romantic sexual love could survive in monogamous marriage. Moreover, he claimed that the human urge for primeval group marriage continued even in civilized nations through a turn to prostitutes by the men, and to adultery by the women.

Engels also described how the pending communist revolution would foster an evolutionary, or dialectical, return to group marriage. He outlined at least four steps to be taken by the revolutionary vanguard:

(1) *Put all women into outside labor.* "[T]he emancipation of women is primarily dependent on the reintroduction of the whole female sex into the public industries."

(2) *Socialize property.* "With the transformation of the means of production into collective property the monogamous family ceases to be the economic unit of society. The private household changes to a social industry. The care and education of children becomes a social matter."

(3) *Institute free love.* "Will not this be sufficient cause for...a more unconventional intercourse of the sexes and a more lenient

public opinion regarding virgin honor and female shame?"

(4) *And start with 'no fault' divorce.* "If marriage founded on love is alone moral, then it follows that marriage is moral only as long as love lasts."⁹

Where the essentialist, conservative view of marriage saw changes in marriage over time as either a weakening or strengthening of the normative institution, Engels' evolutionist view held to a teleological end involving a visionary post-marriage, post-family social order.

Losing the Economic Function

I dwell on Engels here because a watered-down version of this Marxist evolutionary understanding spread far and deeply in the United States, working to undermine both the *economic* and the *sexual* aspects of marriage. To this day, no matter how carefully camouflaged, the cultural Left's arguments for societal "evolution" (including the "evolution" toward same-sex marriage) still derive from Engel's profound (mis)interpretation of Morgan's discredited work.

Regarding the economic function, for example, the first important *Social History of the American Family* appeared in 1917; it relied heavily on the evolutionary argument. "American history consummates the disappearance of the wider familism and the substitution of the parentalism of society," wrote historian Arthur Calhoun. Since natural parents were, by and large, unfit for parenthood in the new industrial order, society came "to accept as a duty" the upbringing of the young. Ever more children passed "into the custody of community experts who are qualified to perform the complex [sic] functions of parenthood... which the parents have neither the time nor knowledge to perform." Calhoun concluded:

The new view is that *the higher* and more obligatory relation is to society rather than to the family; the family goes back to the age of savagery while the state belongs to the age of civilization. The modern individual is a world citizen, served by the world, and home interests can no longer be supreme.¹⁰

Another influential, sanitized version of marriage and family structures in evolution appeared in the work of sociologist William Ogburn of the University of Chicago. An analytical Marxist, Ogburn emphasized that the prime force in history was technology or “material culture,” and that after a period of time, what he called “culture lag,” social institutions would adjust to the new material realities. Commissioned by President Herbert Hoover’s Research Committee on Social Trends to examine family life, Ogburn described in 1933 an American marriage and family system steadily diminishing—or rather, evolving. Once “the chief economic institution, the factory of the time, producing almost all that men needed,” the family now stood stripped of all productive tasks, these having passed to the factories. At the same time, “the educational and protective functions” of the family had gone to government, because state institutions had “greater technical efficiency.” Already by the 1930s, he reported, American homes “are merely ‘parking places’ for parents and children who spend their active hours elsewhere.” Even so, “the evidence points to the further transfer of functions from the home,” including the care of pre-school children.¹¹

During the 1940s and 1950s, prominent sociologists called “functionalists” attempted to take this bad news about the evolutionary loss of family functions and

turn it into a positive good. Talcott Parsons of Harvard University, the leader of this school of thought, acknowledged that among Americans “many of the ‘auxiliary’ functions [of the family], such as those of *economic production* which are common in kinship units, are here reduced to a minimum.” But this was all to the good, he thought, for it made modern families sleek and efficient, able to focus on critical psychological tasks: “The relations are clarified because this modern family is ‘stripped down’ to what apparently approaches certain *minimum* structural and fundamental essentials,” he wrote. Indeed, “the American family has



Domestic tranquility before the storm.

been evolving into a new stability in which the emphasis is on the nuclear family.”¹² Critical to this evolution was what Parsons called “role differentiation,” where wives/mothers took on the emotional tasks of gratification, warmth, and stability, while husband/fathers focused on instrumental tasks in the outside world:

If the nuclear family consists in a defined “normal” complement of the male adult, female adult and their immediate children, the male adult will play the role of instrumental leader and the female adult will play the role of expressive leader.¹³

Parsons acknowledged that this “companionate” family exacted a high emotional price from husband and wife as they elaborated and refined their functional roles. Men served their families as Chairman-of-the-Board figures, looking outward. Women looked inward, focusing on “glamour patterns,” “personal adornment,” and the crafting of a pleasant home environment to ease psychological tensions.¹⁴ “Personality adjustment” toward these ends, Parsons insisted, became the core task of the

companionate marriage of the 1950s.

Another figure in this school, William J. Goode, saw the whole world essentially adopting this model. Characterized by few productive tasks, weak ties to kin, high mobility, relatively high divorce, and “intense emotional” interaction, this structure marked the next step in global family evolution: “Everywhere the ideology of the [companionate] family is spreading.... It appeals to the disadvantaged, to the young, to women, and to the educated.” The companionate family succeeded, Goode said, because of the close fit between this family form and the modern industrial system. Revealingly, though, in 1963 Goode also argued that the strong role differences between husbands and wives were more-or-less permanent: “[W]e do not believe that any family system now in operation, or likely to emerge in the next generation, will grant full equality to women.” Why? Because, “[t]he family base upon which all societies rest at present requires that much of the daily work of the house and children be handed over to women.”¹⁵

While seeming to affirm the traditional family, the narrow conception of family tasks in “companionate marriage” actually left families vulnerable. For example, federal policy came to favor the functionless home. Government housing agencies pushed designs that eliminated workrooms, pantries, large kitchens, sewing rooms, and parlors—to be replaced by functionless “open spaces.” As urban planner John Dean explained in 1953, suburban homes should focus on maintaining “family interaction without recourse to the traditional house-keeping dwelling unit.” Instead of designs “inherited from the family farm,” homes should be built more in harmony with modern life patterns focused on psychological intimacy and consumption.¹⁶ Architect Svend Reimer, writing in 1951, stressed that “housing attitudes must be

related to long-term trends of social change in the family.” They must *evolve*. In place of formal, single-purpose, and work rooms, suburban homes should have open, “flexible rooms that serve the every day life of the family and reduce household chores to the minimum.” He concluded that “[t]he goal of home construction lies in...a frictionless family life.”¹⁷ Similarly, federal education policy under the Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes Acts, which had favored training in homemaking and homebuilding tasks from 1914 into the early 1950s, shifted curricula in favor of training girls in more ambiguous psychological tasks.

The Feminists Return

Alas, in 1963, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* appeared. The book lashed out at the “companionate marriage” celebrated and defended by Parsons, Goode, and the other functionalists. Indeed, a conservative reading of Friedan’s book is possible, as she exposed the weaknesses of the suburban life model. Some aspects of her argument even implied a return to an older, more agrarian form of family life. But in the end, Friedan herself turned out to be an acolyte for social evolution. She simply argued that the functionalists wanted to have their evolutionary cake and to eat it too.

Friedan pointed to the fatal inconsistencies in the functionalists’ argument. As she reported, Parsons himself had admitted

...that the “domestic” aspect of the housewife role “has declined in importance to the point where it scarcely approaches a full-time occupation for the vigorous person”; that the “glamour pattern” is “inevitably associated with a rather early age level”...[and] “that in the adult feminine role there is quite sufficient strain and insecurity... [manifested] in the form of neurotic behavior....”

And still, Friedan complained, Parsons had

the gall to insist that women adjust themselves to these fragile, disordered, and unfulfilling roles.

The suburbs, which Parsons praised as fitting homes for companionate families, drew her scorn. Friedan called them “ugly and endless sprawls,” where women did “the time-filling busy work of suburban house and community.” She blasted “the open plan” of new suburban housing, “noisy” places without walls and doors, where the woman in her kitchen would never be without her children, and where the “one free-flowing room” created a continual mess.

However, rather than arguing for a return to an older model of family living, Friedan insisted on the elimination of the last remnants of economic cooperation in the home:

[F]or the suburban and city housewife, the fact remains that more and more of the jobs that used to be performed in the home have been taken away: canning, baking bread, weaving cloth and making clothes, educating the young, nursing the sick, taking care of the aged. It is possible [for women] to reverse history—or kid themselves that they can reverse it—by baking their own bread, but the law *does not* permit them to teach their own children at home....¹⁸

Instead, social evolution now pointed toward young mothers in the workplace, small children in day care, and a final end to the traditional home.

So energized and directed, Friedan’s book had a powerful impact. The equity feminist movement quickly gained strength and won important political victories through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which mandated sexual equality in employment practices, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which did the same for schooling. Federal policy, which had already worked in the 1940s and 1950s to create economically functionless homes, now aimed at ending even the “di-

vision of labor” between husband and wife, as expressed through the recently favored “companionate” model.

Sexual Evolution

This evolutionary approach to the family also radically altered the understanding of the “sexual” aspect of marriage: specifically, by shifting its core meaning from “procreation” to “pleasure.” Ogburn, again, was instrumental here. He emphasized the profound importance of the sharply falling American birthrate: “In 1930, for the first time there were fewer children under five years of age in one census year than in the one preceding.” This presaged an emptying of the schools and depopulation. More important for him, it pointed to a different kind of marriage:

[T]here are many wives without children.... In other families with only one or two children the mother devotes only a few years to child rearing. Families without children may almost be classed as a different type of family.

Indeed, Ogburn called for a fundamental reappraisal of the meaning of marriage:

*The relationship of husband and wife is clearly at the center of the problem of the modern family since most families have children with them for only a part of married life or not at all and since so many other functions of the family have declined. The stability of the future family is not clearly seen.*¹⁹

Ernest W. Burgess and Henry J. Locke, in their 1945 book *The Family* agreed that as families shed their formal legal and economic functions and shrank in size with fewer children, they reorganized around psychological tasks. This new step in social evolution rested on “mutual affection,” “sympathetic understanding,” and “comradeship,” rather than procreation. The home now focused less on children and

more on psychological intimacy and sexual love.²⁰

Indeed, the “companionate marriage” elevated sex as a mode of self-definition. True, during the 1940s and 1950s, sexuality remained tied by popular mores and expert opinion to marriage. But as functional productive tasks and children diminished as the ends of marriage, these same experts urged men and women to reach for higher levels of sexual and emotional compatibility. Companionate marriage, the experts said, rested on passion, romantic affection, emotional intimacy, and “shared ecstasy”—*not* children.²¹

Unwittingly, but clearly, this analysis fed directly into the sexual revolution of the 1960s. First came the separation of sex from procreation, an advance bolstered by the introduction of the birth control pill in 1964. For a brief time, however, acceptable sex and marriage remained bound. The U.S. Supreme Court caught this spirit in its 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision. While the Court declared that married couples had a constitutional right to buy and use birth control, it also reaffirmed that “marriage is a coming together for better or worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred.”²² This was the last time that the nation’s High Court would use such language. Within a few years, a new singles culture embracing sexual experimentation, a feminist movement affirming equality in pre-marital sex, and media attention to “swinging” and “wife-swapping” out in the suburbs combined to separate sex from marriage. The so-called “Population Bomb” scare during the late 1960s gave another radical imperative to change: children should be avoided in marriage altogether. “Motherhood: Who Needs It?” was the feature article in a September 1970 issue of *Look* magazine. Hope for the nation lay with those “younger-generation females” who recognized that “it can be more loving

to children not to have them.”²³ The “childless marriage,” once deemed a profound sadness, became the “child free” marriage, noble and forward-looking. According to historian Stephanie Coontz, the final step in the sexual revolution came in the 1970s, when “a gay movement questioned the exclusive definition of sexual freedom in terms of heterosexuality.”²⁴

In short, the evolutionary appearance of the diminished “companionate marriage”—one without economic function and one with the sexual function redefined from “procreative” to “pleasure seeking”—cleared the path for more claims to change, and eventually to demands for “gay marriage.” Indeed, according to one scientist, due to their “playful, creative character ...[y]ou could say that homosexuals are at the pinnacle of human evolution.”²⁵ And who can deny such superior humans their due?

Faith and Reason

So what shall we make out of all this? Traditionalists of a religious bent might suggest turning to Genesis 1 and 2, where they see marriage portrayed as an immutable aspect of God’s creation, fixed from the beginning:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”.... Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh.²⁶

These passages affirm marriage as both heterosexual (“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”) and economic (the passage regarding “subdue” and “have dominion”). It might even be said that the author of

Genesis seems to agree with Westermarck and Murdock.

What does evolutionary biology teach? Far from agreeing with contemporary “gay marriage” advocates, Darwin actually built his evolutionary theory on the idea of “reproductive success.” Since homosexuality is, by definition, sterile, the behavior stands as an obvious biological dead-end: a “genetic aberration,” Darwin labelled it.

Contemporary evolutionary scientists implicitly agree. Writing in *Science*, for example, paleo-anthropologist C. Owen Lovejoy argues that “the unique sexual and reproductive behavior of man”—not growth of the cortex or brain—“may be the sine qua non of human origin.” The human “nuclear family” was not the product of, say, nineteenth-century bourgeois culture or twentieth-century Levittown. Rather, the paleo-anthropological record shows that the pairing-off of male and female “hominids” into something very much like traditional marriage reaches back over *three million years*, to the time when our purported ancestors left the trees on the African savannah and started walking on two legs. As Lovejoy concludes:

...both advances in material culture and the Pleistocene acceleration in brain development are sequelae to [i.e., follow after] an *already established hominid character system*, which included *intensified parenting and social relationships, monogamous pair bonding, specialized sexual-reproductive behavior, and bipedality*. [This model] implies that the nuclear family and human sexual behavior may have their ultimate origin long before the dawn of the Pleistocene.²⁷

Other new evidence supports this conclusion. A 2003 paper featured in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* examines “skeletal size dimorphism” (that is, the difference in male and female size) in *Australopithecus afarensis*, a human ancestor said to have lived three to four million years ago. Among the apes and other mam-

mals, sexual dimorphism is greatest when sexual coupling is random or where one male accumulates numerous females. Dimorphism is least when male and female pair off in monogamous bonds. Overturning earlier assessments, this new study finds that *Australopithecus* males and females were nearly the same size, no different than men and women today. According to the Kent State research team, this means that this human ancestor was monogamous, with male and female in a permanent pair bond, “a social complex including male provisioning driven by female choice.”²⁸

Ronald Immerman of Case Western Reserve University reports in a 2003 issue of the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* that, from the very beginning, our distinctly human ancestors showed a unique reproductive strategy where a female exchanged sexual exclusivity for special provisioning by a male. “This sharing of resources from man-to-woman is a universal,” Immerman reports. From the beginning of the human race, it appears that *women* chose *men* not on the basis of physical size, but because of male skills in *provisioning* and *loyalty*: that is, women have bonded to men who reliably returned to the cave, hut, or split level tract home, with fresh meat or a good pay check. In this monogamous order, promiscuity stands out as a disease, an evolutionary danger. At the same time, the ethnographic “data suggest an independent man (to) child affiliative bond which is part of [*Homo sapien’s*] bio-cultural heritage,” one found nowhere in the animal kingdom. Immerman explains this trait, as well, by evolutionary selection. Besides looking for reliable providers, women “were simultaneously selecting for traits which would forge a social father: a man who would form attachments—bond—with his young and who would be psychologically willing to share resources with those young.”²⁹

It would certainly be going too far to say

that modern evolutionary theory and Genesis have converged; significant differences remain over key matters, such as timing. All the same, it *would* be fair to say that new research guided by evolutionary theory *does* agree with the author of Genesis that humankind, from our very origin as unique creatures on earth, has been defined by heterosexual monogamy involving long-term pair bonding (that is, marriage in a mother-father-child household) and resting on the special linkage of the reproductive and the economic: where two become one flesh. So the evolution of marriage did occur—but only *once*, three to four million years ago, when “to be human” came to mean “to be conjugal.” All the other cultural variations surrounding marriage are mere details. “Change” must therefore be understood as the mark of cultural strengthening or weakening around a constant human model. And, rather than being the “pinnacle” of evolution, homosexuality and “gay marriage” emerge as obvious evolutionary and cultural dead-ends. Such practices are by definition sterile, and evolutionary theory—on its own terms—depends on reproductive success.

In the name of evolution, the campaign for same-sex marriage openly mocks the religious heritage of Western civilization. It ignores the hard-won lessons of human history. And it rejects the results of scientific inquiry, relying instead on sentiment to make its case. In all these ways, the campaign is radical indeed. Just as recklessly, this same campaign will, if successful, also subvert the *one* trait—permanent heterosexual pair-bonding focused on reproduction and child rearing—which science points to as *unique* to human nature and *vital* to human success, even to human existence, on earth. Advocates for change in the nature of marriage are playing with elemental evolutionary fire.

A New Home Economics

What then about the functionless home? What shall we do with that place which the rise of industrial organization has stripped of economic activity?

Part of the answer is that the economic evolutionists, from Engels to Ogburn to Goode to Friedan, have simply been wrong about the status of the home economy. It is true that many functions once conducted in homes were torn away by industrial organization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with disorienting results. And yet, much of this trauma—from the rise of public schooling in the 1850s to the building of “companionship” suburban homes in the 1950s—was driven by government engineering. Other choices could have been made.

Moreover, even in modern industrial nations, a vast amount of productive activity still occurs in households, albeit uncounted and unheralded. Australian economists now lead the way in documenting this truth. Duncan Ironmonger of the University of Melbourne offers a good summary of continuing home-centered activity, including meal preparation, laundry and cleaning, shopping, various forms of child care, elder care, gardening, pet care, repairs and maintenance, transportation, and volunteer community work. Moreover, he shows that the quality of these goods and services is often of higher value than that found in the marketplace (for example, compare the parental care of children to that found in a commercial day-care center). The problem is that all of these activities occur on a non-cash basis, so their “economic value”—so to speak—is unclear and easy for economists to ignore. In response, Ironmonger has carefully calculated the shadow value produced by “household industries,” through both labor and capital. For Australia, in 1992, he reports this so-called Gross Household Product to

be worth \$341 billion, *nearly equal* to the economic value added by all market production in that country. Assuming rough socio-economic equivalence between the United States and Australia (which is reasonable in this case), the same figure for America would be a Gross Household Product of almost \$10 Trillion in 2004.³⁰

What then about marriage? The traditionalist case points to the needed recovery of a cultural understanding of marriage as the union of *the sexual* (meaning *the reproductive*) and *the economic*, with an insistence that law rest on this human universal. In the short run, this would be vital to the defense of marriage at a time when it faces profound legal and cultural challenges, rooted in misguided evolution theories. In the long run, it would be essential to the very health, and survival, of our nation.

A second imperative therefore would be more productive and more vital homes. There are several successful contemporary models; I focus here on one. The clue lies in a throwaway line from Betty Friedan, who said:

It is possible [for women] to reverse history—or kid themselves that they can reverse it—by baking their own bread, but the law *does not* permit them to teach their own children at home.³¹

Well, that last item has changed—through the grassroots efforts and political action of homeschoolers since the early 1970s. From a mere handful then, homeschooling families may now number 700,000, and homeschooled children over two million. In home education, we see the broadly productive home visibly reborn, and an important “lost family function” returned to its proper place. The educational effects are vast: homeschoolers are reinventing both American teaching and learning, and the children excel. By grade eight, according to a recent federal government study, these children

are—on average—almost four years ahead of their public and private school counterparts. More importantly, however, these refunctionalized families also remake the very psychology of homes. They become beehives of activity: the evidence suggests that these families are more likely than non-homeschooling households to live in semi-rural locations, tend a vegetable garden, engage in simple animal husbandry, create home businesses, and turn to home births.

And regarding that last item, homeschooling families are also rebuilding the bond of marriage by recovering procreative sexuality. One 1997 survey found 98 percent of homeschooling children to be living in married-couple households. The sexual division of labor in these homes was more pronounced: 52 percent of homeschoolers lived in two-parent families with only one parent in the workforce, compared to 19 percent of children nationwide. And these families were noticeably larger: with nearly twice as many children as the national average. Indeed, 62 percent of homeschooling families have three or more children, compared to 20 percent nationwide; a third of these homes have four or more children, compared with only 6 percent nationwide.³² “Functional” and “prolific,” it appears, still go together, underscoring both the poetry and the power of that wonderful phrase, “They become one flesh.”

In contemporary America, same-sex marriage has won a hearing in part because many see heterosexual marriage in the early twenty-first century as falling far short of the traditional standard binding the reproductive and the economic. Accordingly, any effort to rehabilitate the institution of marriage must not stop with legal bans on “gay marriage.” It must also embrace true encouragements to the reconstruction of the function-rich and child-rich home.

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