

THE STATE OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY
IN NORTH AMERICA

Dr. Timothy O'Donnell, STD, KGCHS

Ad usum privatum

Thank you, your Eminence, for the opportunity to address this Council on the cultural and social situation of the family today, particularly in North America. Recently, a secular magazine in the United States published an article on the key events which affected and defined in some ways a generation. The article went back to the 1940's. The first generational question was: "Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?" Secondly, the next generation was asked: "Where were you when President Kennedy was assassinated?" The third generation category was asked: "Where were you on 9/11, when the World Trade Center was hit?" Lastly, the fourth generation was asked: "How old were you when your parents divorced?"

It is interesting to note several things: first how the question changed from "Where were you?" to "How old were you?" Secondly, the experience of divorce is placed on par with events which were highly dramatic, historically significant, and profoundly tragic. Clearly, even this secular article indicates that there is something wrong with divorce.

In the United States right now, we are facing numerous assaults on marriage and the family. There are assaults on the judicial front, in which we have courts which are seeking to force a change in fundamental public policy. For example, the chaplaincy corps in the United

States military has been told that they cannot counsel individuals on the issue of defending traditional marriage. There was a report that an elementary school student was suspended from school because he told another student that homosexuality was wrong.¹ In New York, the Roman Catholic governor Andrew Cuomo has just passed through the state legislature a legalization of homosexual marriage. Likewise, the Catholic governor of Maryland, Martin O'Malley, is presently trying to follow suit. In California, the Jesuit-educated Catholic governor Jerry Brown has just signed into law SB 48, which will take place take effect in January of 2012, mandating that textbooks highlight homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons and their activities in American history, and at the same time, forbidding "any sectarian or denominational doctrinal propaganda contrary to law."² The Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate by a 10-8 margin called for the repeal of DOMA, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. DOMA defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and it gives the state the authority to reject so called "same sex marriages". The Obama Administration has announced it supports the efforts to repeal this law.³

Clearly, there are powerful forces at work in the United States which are seeking to destroy a proper understanding of marriage and the family.

A well-financed militant homosexual movement continues to seek to destroy marriage. In addition to this, militant feminism, which denies any genuine difference between men and women, continues to take a toll on the public psyche. Pornography has become an enormous problem in United States, particularly with its accessibility on the Internet, wreaking havoc and

¹Tim Drake, *National Catholic Register*, September 28, 2011.

²Kathleen Gilbert, *Lifesite News*, July 15, 2011.

³"Catholic News Service" report, in *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, November 17, 2011.

destroying healthy relationships between men and women, particularly in marriage.⁴ In addition, the United States at the present time has virtually no restraint whatsoever on biotechnology research. The production, destruction, manipulation, and abuse of embryos is widespread, with an estimated 500,000 embryos currently frozen in laboratories and referred to as “spares.”⁵

We are now hearing stories that members of the homosexual community in San Francisco are donating their sperm and leasing wombs in India, paying women there to carry their babies to term and then bringing them back to the United States, adopting them as their children.

What makes matters worse is the hostility that is found within the secular press on such issues as abortion, family life, and same-sex marriage, which not only distorts Catholic teaching, but seeks to advance legal threats against the religious freedom of Catholics, Evangelicals, and other religious believers. As Archbishop Chaput recently commented:

The mass media tend to cover these disputed issues with a combination of ignorance, laziness, and bias against traditional Christian beliefs.⁶

This, of course, should give us all cause concern especially since John Paul II said in *Familiaris Consortio*, paragraph 86: “The future of humanity passes through the family.” Pope Benedict observed that family is clearly founded upon marriage, this being the common patrimony of humanity, the fundamental social institution, and the pillar of society.⁷ As this fundamental truth begins to collapse, it is not surprising to see that we are entering into a period of social chaos. The assault upon marriage and family involves fundamental errors concerning

⁴Patrick Fagan, see “The Quiet Family Killer: Pornography and Marriage,” of the *Heritage Foundation*: December 7, 2009.

⁵Sister Renee Mirkes and Chuck Weber, “Anything Goes,” in *Catholic World Report*, November 1, 2011.

⁶Jeremy Kryn, *Lifesite News*, August 24, 2011. See also Bishop Conley’s comments in “American Hostility to Religion,” by Kevin J. Jones, in *National Catholic Register*, November 8, 2011.

⁷Address, *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 13, 2006.

the nature of the human being, the nature of true and authentic freedom, and the very meaning of love.

Despite the pressures and growing chaos, there are reasons for hope and situations in which the Church's teaching still can be heard, even in this hostile environment. Within secular society itself, many are beginning to question this contemporary trend and its accompanying political pressure. It is important to recall that the question of "homosexual marriage" has been put to vote in 31 states in the United States, and every single time the proposition to allow homosexual marriage has been defeated. In addition to this, there continues to be a growing body of sociological data, which has now become readily assessable (although it tends to be ignored by the media), which point very clearly to the objective truth and validity of the traditional understanding of marriage and family.

For example, David Blankenhorn is the president of the Institute for American Values and has created the "US Marriage Index." This institute sought to use sociological data to judge the health of marriage in United States. The index made use of five basic statistics as follows:

- In the first, it looked at the percentage of adults between the ages of 20 and 54 who are married.
- Secondly, the percentage of adults who reported being "very happy" with their marriages.
- Third, the percentage of first marriages which are intact.
- Fourth, the percentage of births to married parents.
- Fifth, the percentage of children living with their own married parents.

The composite score is quite revealing. In 1970 the score totaled 76.2; by 2008 it had dropped to 60.3. In 1970, almost 90% of children were born to parents who were married. By 2008, the

percent dropped to 60%. Of adults between the age of 20 and 54, 78.6% were married in 1970, compared with 57.2% in 2008. The portion of first marriages that remained intact dropped from 77.4% in 1970 to 61.2% in 2008.

Blankenhorn states that this investigation is important, because marriage has such a significant impact on children. He points out a number of statistics that reveal that children who grow up in homes where their parents are married to each other are on the average, less likely to live in poverty, less likely to have emotional or behavioral problems, less likely to engage in premature sexual activity, and less likely to use drugs or commit suicide.⁸ Blankenhorn states:

Every single pathology, problem, or difficulty a child can experience, every single one -- growing up outside of a married couple home elevates the risk.⁹

It was his hope that such a study would help to galvanize concern and support for the institution of marriage. He continued, "It is impossible really to make progress unless you have some shared understanding."

He stated:

There's no disagreement among us about high rates of unemployment -- nobody runs around saying it's fine to have 20% of us unemployed. But we really are not at that level in agreement about marriage.¹⁰

Research done by Patrick Fagan at the Heritage Foundation also gives us reason to uphold the traditional understanding of marriage, particularly regarding the absence of fathers in the home.¹¹ Due to divorce and out of wedlock births, four out of ten children go to bed in

⁸Ellen McCarthy, *The Washington Post*, reprinted in *The Winchester Star*, November 14, 2009. See also David Blankenhorn, "Marriage Index," publication from *The Institute of American Values* (New York: Institute for American Values and the National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting, 2009.)

¹⁰Ibid.

United States in a home without their fathers. In an examination of our prisons, we find that 60% of rapists, 72% of adolescent murderers, and 70% of prison inmates do not have a father in their home. Daughters in single-parent homes are 160% more likely to have a baby out of wedlock than homes with two parents, 111% more likely to have children as teens, and 92% more likely to dissolve their own marriages.

Here we can see that the key statistics, which are readily available to the general public, reveal clearly the importance of traditional understanding of marriage as the union in which a man and woman bind themselves together for life and is directed *per se* to the propagation and education of children.

This absence of fathers in the home whether physically or emotionally was noted by John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, paragraph 25, which states:

Above all where social and cultural conditions so easily encourage a father to be less concerned with his family . . . efforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance.

One of the great problems which we are having today is confusion and the failure to understand and emphasize the male role of headship. The old nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill seems to be appropriately applied here:

Jack and Jill went up a hill to fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

As a general principle, when Jack falls, Jill will come tumbling after.

The failure of male headship within the family has not only affected the male identity but obviously has also deeply affected women as well.

¹¹ Patrick Fagan, statistics on fatherless homes from www.heritage.org.

We do live in an age in which it is important for us to again begin restating the obvious. It is very clear that parental presence of mother and father in the home is essential for the child's emotional health, self-esteem, educational attainment, and to foster virtuous behavior. It is interesting to note also that new issues are being raised in the secular press in the field of biotechnology, which tragically all too often involves the manipulation and degradation of human life. In an article in the *Washington Post* by Katrina Clark, entitled "Who's Your Daddy?", Clark reveals the fact that her father was an anonymous sperm donor, and that this was something that angered her and set her out to try to locate her father:

I was angry at the idea that where donor conception is concerned, everyone focuses on the "parents" -- the adults who can make choices about their own lives. The recipient gets sympathy for wanting to have a child. The donor gets a guarantee of anonymity and absolution from any responsibility for the offspring of his "donation." As long as these adults are happy, then the donor conception is a success, right? Not so. The children born of these transactions are people, too. Those of us in the first documented generation of donor babies -- -- conceived in the late 1980's and early 90's, when sperm banks became more common and donor insemination began to flourish -- -- are coming of age, and we have something to say. I'm here to tell you that emotionally, many of us are not keeping up. We didn't ask to be born into this situation, with its limitations and confusion. It's hypocritical of parents and medical professionals to assume that biological roots won't matter to the "products" of the cyrobanks' service, when the longing for a biological relationship is what brings customers to the banks in the first place. We offspring are recognizing the right that was stripped from us at birth -- the right to know who both our parents are, and we're ready to reclaim it.

Growing up, it didn't matter that I didn't have a dad -- or at least that's what I told myself. Just sometimes, when I was small, I would daydream about a tall, lean man picking me up and swinging me around in the front yard, a manly man melting at a touch from his little girl. I wouldn't have minded if he weren't around all the time, as long as I could have the sweet moments of reuniting with his strong arms and hearty laugh. My daydreams always ended abruptly; I knew I would never have a dad. As a coping mechanism, I used to think that he was dead. That made it easier.¹²

This story speaks for itself.

It is interesting to note that those in the 60's, 70's, and 80's who spoke out so positively about the sexual revolution and the glory of free love, frequently condemned and opposed

¹² Katrina Clark, "Who's Your Daddy?", in *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2006.

marriage as enslaving, but have no problem now affirming the great value of *homosexual* marriage. This is in spite of the fact that they have not renounced any of the additional tenants of the sexual revolution.

This hypocritical position is now more clearly seen, as a number of studies reveal that supposed gay marriages are not monogamous at all. In San Francisco, The Gay Couples Study followed 556 male couples for three years and found that 50% of those surveyed had sex outside their relationship with the knowledge and approval of their partners. Colleen Hoff, the study's principal investigator, commented that “with straight people it is called affairs or cheating, but with gay people it does not have such negative connotations.”¹³ The study also found that open gay couples were just as happy in their relationships as pairs in sexually exclusive unions, although evidently this is not really news within the gay community. Few, however, will speak about it publicly as it does not fit in with their fight for so-called homosexual marriage.

Right now in the United States as in many other places, we are seeing the exaltation of *eros* as the great unbridled god of freedom, with devastating effects on our young people, who have embraced it and have become what is now coldly called the “hookup” generation. How we have fallen in such a short time.

Our modern world clearly understands cause, effect, and even more importantly, design. The eye is made for seeing, the ear for hearing, but society rejects in its blind ideology the idea that there is a design in human sexuality. We must acknowledge that we as a Church, as a Christian people, in our failure to live in such a way as to be witnesses to the beauty and sanctity of marriage, bear much of the blame. With our rejections of the Church's teaching on contraception, with easy divorce, and with the annulment scandal in the United States, all of this has prevented a clear and beautiful witness to the sacrament of Christian marriage.

¹³See Scott James, *New York Times*, January 29, 2010.

The so-called “same-sex marriage” is viewed by many as possible in the name of tolerance and sexual freedom. For these reasons, it is even called a good. This is viewed as possible because we as a society, as odd as this sounds, have forgotten the purpose of sexual intercourse -- as the one flesh union of a man and woman whereby, in the proper circumstances, children enter into the world. Our modern society can clearly see throughout our world the reality of cause and effect. It can see the reality of design and purpose. However, it willfully ignores and turns a blind eye to what is clearly seen even by the most primitive of peoples. We now to perform the act require foams, jellies, drugs, pills, and manuals. Our crisis of faith has now become a crisis of reason.

We must again have confidence in God’s word and courageously proclaim the fullness of the Church's teaching as found in *Familiaris Consortio*, presenting joyfully its beauty. We must also proclaim joyfully, yes, and prophetically, the Church’s teaching concerning the beauty and goodness of fatherhood, motherhood, and children, and the evil of contraception, which destroys this sacred bond. We can do this by again revealing the beauty of life and witnessing to it in the flowering of lives in our own families. A new evangelization of “heart speaking to heart.”

In many instances, we in the Church have become like the disciples of our Lord mentioned in chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel who, when hearing a difficult and untrendy teaching, say: “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?”¹⁴ with the result that we walk with Him no more. Once again we must turn our eyes to Christ and the gift of His Heart, the teaching of His Church, and believe again in the power and truth of God’s word. And, we must unite our voices with our Lord’s Vicar on earth, to St. Peter who cried out: “Lord to whom shall we go? Thou

¹⁴John 6:61.

hast the words of eternal life, and we have come to believe and to know that thou art the Christ, the Son of God.”¹⁵

¹⁵John 6:69-70.