

Why we need a renewed culture of natural marriage

Dr Allan Carlson

Australia is a wonderful country, in many ways a blessed country. One recent blessing that you received was the 2004 agreement between your political leadership, left and right, to fix a solid definition of marriage within your nation's federal law. The *Marriage Amendment Act 2004* defines marriage as "the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life".

All the same, Australia has not been immune from other legal changes which have weakened marriage as an institution. These include:

- The elimination of legal distinctions between births in and out of wedlock.
- Abortion laws that ignore the claims of the husband/father.
- The acceptance of cohabitation as a legal status, providing benefits of marriage without corresponding duties.
- The elimination of "fault" in divorce, thus rewarding infidelity and weakening marriage preservation efforts.
- The levelling of gender roles specific to marriage and the rearing of children, which, while these systems were not perfect, did commonly reinforce the best interests of children.

And so, in the year 2010, marriage is left battered and bruised, and but a shadow of its former legal and cultural self.

It is important to remember that most of this change came well before "same-sex marriage" was an issue.

For the first time in human history, natural marriage has to justify itself in democratic countries before the court of public opinion. What has been obvious, over the centuries, is now "an issue". The main reason is the modern superstition that the past has nothing to teach us; that our ancestors were barbarians, full of prejudice and devoted to attacking human dignity. This arrogance of Presentism is the same reason that religions resting on inherited dogma stand particularly suspect.

There's an old comment about truth that observes: in the 17th century a political leader seeking to support an opinion would quote Holy Scripture; in the 18th century, he would quote Shakespeare; in the 19th century, perhaps a philosopher such as Kant, Hegel or Emerson; but in the 20th century, he would quote a sociologist.

I am not sure if this is progress.

Three years ago, when several same-sex couples argued that the state of Iowa's marriage law discriminated against them, the county asked me to serve as an expert

witness. I endured a day-long deposition by opposing attorneys looking for inconsistencies, contradictions and errors.

When the trial judge issued his bench ruling on the case the next year, he dismissed my testimony as irrelevant. He said that history - with its record of human triumphs and tragedies, follies and successes - had nothing to teach the law about the issue of "same-sex" marriage; only "number-crunching" sociology would be allowed.

Appealing to social science, he concluded that the evidence favoured same-sex marriage. Actually, the opposite is true.

So why do we need a renewed culture of natural marriage?

First, allow me to explain what I mean by "natural marriage". It doesn't take more than a fourth-grade education to know that men's and women's bodies in some sense "complement" each other and that this often leads to procreation. Natural marriage is between a man and a woman.

1) Natural marriage is for the good of the children.

First and foremost, natural marriage is for the good of the children.

Thousands of recent research projects in the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology and medicine all testify to one truth: children predictably do best when they are born into a married-couple home and raised by their two natural parents. This might be the most unassailable truth in all social science.

Why? According to a recent American Academy of Pediatrics panel, "marriage is beneficial in many ways" because "people behave differently when they are married. They have healthier lifestyles, eat better and mother each other's health." The panel stressed that this advantage is not found in step-family households nor in households headed by unmarried cohabitating parents. (*Pediatrics*, 2003).

Another research team found that the advantages given to children by intact marriages extend beyond the individual child: the existence of marriages also predicts the overall health of a school and a neighbourhood; that is, intact families are essential for creating "a social world [that] is ordered in ways that generally favour young persons". (*Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 2004).

This advantage of the natural parent, marriage-based home holds up when compared to sole-parent, step-parent, same-sex, cohabitating or communal households. Sometimes the advantage is extraordinary. Regarding child abuse, for example, data from Canada showed that preschool-age children living with their natural parents are *forty times* less likely to become abuse victims than are those living with a step-parent. (*Ethology and Sociobiology*, 1985).

Now, as a cautionary aside, I note such social science data, not to criticise step-parents - most of whom do wonderful jobs - but to underscore the "rational" societal interest behind encouraging "natural marriage" households.

The children from such homes are also much healthier, in both mind and body, than those growing up in any other setting. They achieve, on average, higher grades in school; indeed, family structure is superior to all other competing theoretical explanations for differences in child achievement. (*Journal of Early Adolescence*, 2000; *Social Problems*, 2000).

2) Natural marriage is good for adults.

- *Natural marriage gives life*. Researchers from Princeton University report that married men and women live longer.
- *Natural marriage gives health*. A French study found that married mothers with children at home enjoyed significant improvement in their health. Even in Sweden, where lone mothers enjoy generous welfare benefits, they experience important health disadvantages when compared to married mothers (*Social Science and Medicine*, 2000).

Indeed, single or lone mothers are three times more likely to have experienced "a major depressive disorder". (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1997).

- *Natural marriage creates greater wealth*. Married individuals, compared to the unmarried, gain nearly three times as much wealth over their lifetimes. (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2002 and 2003).
- *Natural marriage brings happiness*. "Deep depression" is rarest among the married. (*Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2002) A survey of 17 nations found married adults reporting significantly higher levels of personal happiness than their unmarried peers. Contrary to feminist claims that wedlock benefits only men, the study showed that "marriage protects females just as much from unhappiness as it protects males". (*Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1998).

3) Natural marriage is good for the commonwealth, or the state.

Research has also shown that:

- The children of natural marriage are less likely to become expenses for the state, be it through drug rehabilitation programs or as prisoners.
- Children issuing from natural marriage are more likely to do well in school, earn college degrees, be gainfully employed, and - in consequence - become taxpayers.

- Mothers who are married are much less likely to require welfare benefits. As with their children, they are a net plus, a fiscal boost, for all levels of government.

Well, I think you get the point. The children and the adults found in homes built on natural marriage are far more likely to be or become responsible citizens, wealth creators and taxpayers; and less likely to become dependants and a net drain on the public treasury. For this reason alone, the state has a compelling interest in natural, married-couple homes.

However, there is another - profound - reason for seeking to renew a culture of natural marriage. The telling reality is that every modern totalitarian movement - every enemy of a free society - has moved early and aggressively to disrupt or destroy the institution of natural marriage. It happened in the French Revolution, and in the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; the Nazis did this as well as the leaders of Communist China.

Why this common hostility by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes to natural marriage? This was well answered by the great English journalist G.K. Chesterton, who held that marriage stands for liberty. He said that it is "the only check on the state that is bound to renew itself as eternally as the state ... [and] is the only way in which truth can ever find refuge from public persecution, and the good man survive bad government". (*The Superstition of Divorce*, 1920).

Chesterton, as usual, was an optimist about the future of marriage. In the end, he held that the totalitarians - the social engineers - would always retreat before the inherent strength of the four-legged creature formed by natural marriage. And so it has been in the past: the French revolutionaries failed; so did the Communists in Russia, the German National Socialists and the Maoists in China. In their time, each seemed to be unstoppable; each represented the inevitable future. Yet in every case, they collapsed or retreated, because they violated human nature.

Those who seek to deconstruct marriage today are cleverer than their predecessors. Using what might be called "the Swedish model", their propaganda machine is much more effective. Their promises are more seductive. And they sometimes seem unstoppable. However, I am confident that they too will fail, in the end for the same reason: they misunderstand the nature of the human being.

So go forward with confidence as you work to rebuild a culture of natural marriage in Australia. Human nature, innate human longings, human biology and human history are *all* on your side.

Dr Allan Carlson, convenor and general-secretary of the World Congress of Families, visited Australia recently as part of the celebrations for National Marriage Day, August 13, 2010. This article is an edited extract of a speech he delivered in Sydney at the National Marriage Day Dinner on Thursday, August 12, 2010.