



When Two *Become One*

The Unique Nature and Benefits of Marriage



When Two Become One: The Unique Nature and Benefits of Marriage
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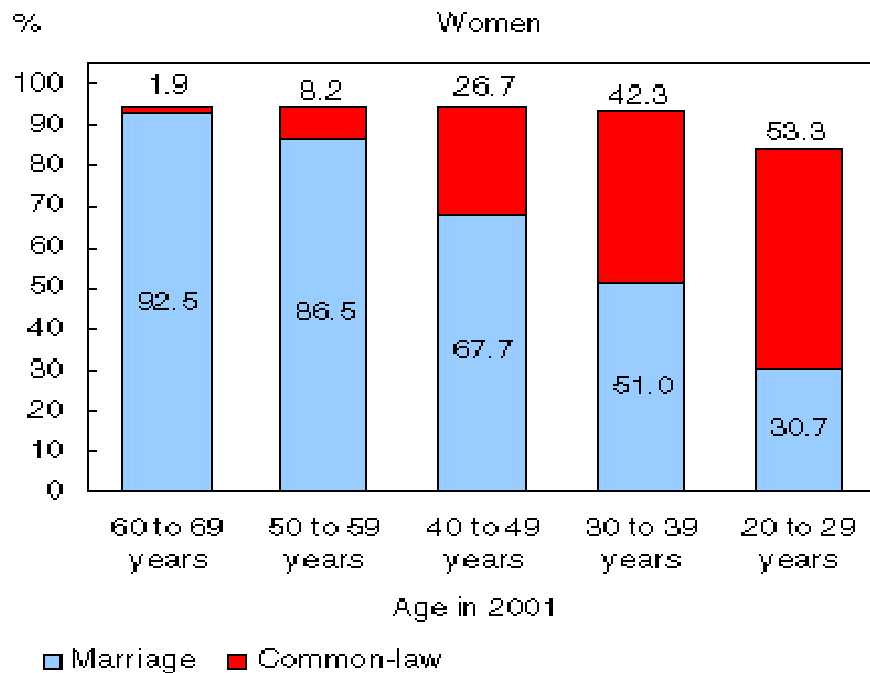
I. Introduction

Marriage is important to us — as Christians, as Canadians, young and old, married and single. While marriage is not the only loving and fulfilling relationship we can enter into, it does have a special place in our lives, in our faith and in our society.

Marriage is a gift from God and is one of the many ways He blesses us. God made man and woman in His image, and said that man would leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (Gen. 2:24). The Bible is filled with rich imagery of weddings and marriages. The wonders of wholesome sexual intimacy are celebrated in the Song of Solomon. The Bible speaks of marriage as symbolic of God’s relationship to His people and Jesus Christ’s relationship to His Church. Biblical teaching instructs us on how to keep our marriages in good repair. Marriage was born in the heart of God and He cherishes it.

Yet the relational landscape in Canada has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Everyone knows couples who live common-law or who have divorced, both within the Church and without. The patterns of relationship forming in Canada are changing, with 35 percent of Canadian women in their 20s getting married and 52 percent living common-law when they form their first conjugal union.¹ While there is some difference between Christians and non-Christians in attitudes toward marriage issues, the trends in society are echoed in the Church. Among Canadian teenagers, 86 percent approve of a couple living together outside marriage. When weekly attendance at a religious service is factored in, 57 percent of weekly attendees approve of common-law relationships compared to 94 percent of non-weekly attendees.² And in 2005 the government definition of marriage was changed to “between two persons” to include same-sex couples.³

A majority of young Canadians are choosing common-law as a first union



Turcotte, P. 2002. Changing Conjugal Life in Canada. *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, July 11. www.statscan.ca

Fidelity within relationships is being challenged. One in 10 Canadians admits to having had an extramarital affair, and 61 percent say they know a family member or friend who has had an affair.⁴ Media depictions of relationships commonly portray sexual promiscuity and marital infidelity as “the way life is.” And many Canadians are comfortable with that — an Angus Reid poll indicates that 50 percent of Canadians are comfortable with television programs that portray affairs as acceptable.⁵

The rate of relationship breakdown is high, although marriages tend to last longer than common-law relationships. Among 30 to 39-year-old women, 63 percent of those whose first relationship was common-law were expected to separate, compared to 33 percent whose first relationship was marriage.⁶ If the 2003 divorce rates continue, 38.3 percent of marriages will end in divorce within 30 years of marriage.⁷

*...an enduring marriage is a living,
breathing miracle.*

Mike Mason
The Mystery of Marriage

Infidelity, cohabitation and divorce are becoming so common that people may become disillusioned about marriage. Increasingly people ask, “Why bother getting married?”

In spite of the discouraging statistics, marriage is still an important institution in our society. A survey of Canadian teenagers indicates that 88 percent expect to get married and stay with the same partner for life, a three percent increase over a 1992 survey of teens.⁸ Among unmarried Canadians in their twenties, over three-quarters expect to get married.⁹ Seventy percent of families, or 5.9 million, are headed by married couples.¹⁰ There is a security and an intimacy in marriage that has broad appeal.

We know that marriage is not a utopian state. It demands much of its participants in terms of time, energy, communication and commitment.

We also know that marriage matters. It is different from other close relationships. Marriage is beneficial to couples, to children and to society as a whole. Our religious beliefs also speak to why marriage matters. Yet marriage requires legal and societal support in order to thrive. We need to work on strengthening marriages in our families, in our churches, and in our country.

This paper considers the definition and nature of marriage, its interplay with religion and its benefits for society. It outlines the legal status of marriage and current developments, as well as the stressors on marriage and ways we can support marriages. This paper sets out a Christian perspective on marriage as well as a rationale for government recognition of marriage as distinct from other relationships.



II. What is marriage?

Our answer to the question “what is marriage?” is grounded in the way we view the world and the philosophical assumptions we hold. According to David Orgon Coolidge: “The way in which one defines marriage is based on one’s answers to fundamental questions about life, love and sexuality.”¹¹ These fundamental questions are given shape by religious beliefs. In this section we will consider the interplay between marriage and religion, examine briefly three common understandings of marriage and then look more closely at what a biblical view of marriage entails.

A covenant of commitment and acceptance is a powerful secret to lifelong love.

James and Shirley
Dobson

A. Marriage and religion

Marriage is not a uniquely religious concept. David Hume, echoing ideas expressed by Aristotle, said, “Whoever considers the length and feebleness of human infancy, with the concern which both sexes naturally have for their offspring, will easily perceive, that there must be an union of male and female for the education of the young, and that this union must be of considerable duration.”¹²

What influence do you think faith has on marriage?

However, faith and religious traditions are integrally linked with marriage. Historically marriage has been closely linked to religion, and there remains a strong interplay between faith and marriage. This is evident in the number of Canadians seeking to be married by clergy. In 2001, 76.4 percent of Canadians were married by clergy, with virtually all marriages in Ontario (98.5 percent) conducted by clergy.¹³ Don Browning, director of the Religion, Culture and Family Project explains it this way:

Whether it is the deep metaphors of covenant as in Judaism, Islam and Reformed Protestantism; sacrament as in Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy; the yin and yang of Confucianism; the quasi-sacramentalism of Hinduism; or the mysticism often associated with allegedly modern romantic love, humans tend to find values in marriage that call them beyond the mundane and everyday.¹⁴

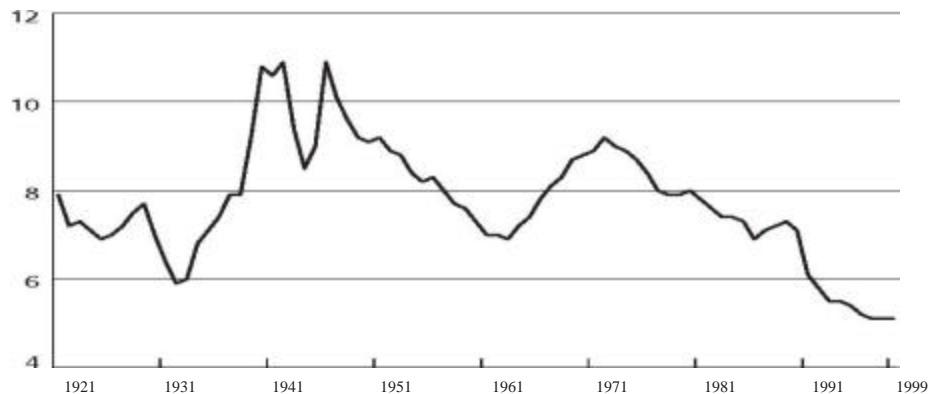
Within the Christian faith, marriage is understood as a sign and symbol of divine love. Marriage is not just a private matter but an accountable promise before God. Clergy encourage and support marriage by offering premarital and marriage counselling. Biblical teaching about the sanctity of marriage and prohibitions against adultery act as a barrier against divorce by reducing the likelihood of infidelity. As well, religious devotion has been associated with marital stability.¹⁵ Those who attend religious services place greater importance on lasting relationships and on being married. Statistics indicate that weekly attendees of religious services have happier, longer marriages.¹⁶ Faith unfolds an additional dimension of marriage.

All of the world’s major religions have an understanding of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Polygamy, which is practised in some cultures and by some religious groups, is understood as several two-person marriages, not as a group marriage. Marriage has had a particular form across cultures and throughout history.

A multi-faith group including Christians, Muslims and Sikhs, joined together to support an opposite-sex definition of marriage in Canadian courts.¹⁷ The Interfaith Coalition on Marriage argued that since marriage has evolved as a social and religious institution with legal recognition by the state, the continuing role of marriage must be informed by historical, philosophical and religious traditions and by the current religious beliefs and values of many faith communities. Ultimately, the courts ruled that marriage must, for civil purposes, be redefined to include same-sex couples.

Marriages in Canada (1921-1999)

Marriage Rate / 1000 population



Adapted from: Statistics Canada, "Historical Statistics of Canada", Cat. no. 11-516-XIE; "Marriages", Cat. no. 84-212-XMB; "A Portrait of Families in Canada", Cat. no. 89-523-XPE; *The Daily*, October 28, 1999; *The Daily*, November 15, 2001; "Marriages," CANSIM II Table 053-0001; "Marriages, 1997," Cat. no. 84F0212XPB.

B. Current models of marriage

David Orgon Coolidge suggests that three competing models of marriage are prevalent in North America today: the choice model, the commitment model and the complementarity model.

The choice model

This view of marriage is grounded in the belief that we are individual decision makers who create reality. In this model, marriage is a social construct with no intrinsic meaning, a contract entered into by two individuals. People can determine their own relationships, with no impact on society. These relationships are based on personal choice. Coolidge explains that the choice model maintains that "The law should leave individuals free to contractually create their own relationships, and restrict itself to enforcing agreements and addressing injuries."¹⁸ In this view, marriage is just a licensing regime to regulate contracts.

The commitment model

Coolidge describes this model succinctly: "[M]arriage is an intimate committed relationship. The purpose of a marriage law is therefore to recognize and encourage intimate, committed relationships."¹⁹ This view of marriage recognizes that society benefits from committed rather than promiscuous relationships, and therefore concludes that the law should encourage committed relationships. This kind of committed relationship should be open to everyone, regardless of whether the couple is same-sex or opposite-sex. In this model, marriage is considered a basic institution in society, one that is socially constructed.

The complementarity model

This view of marriage flows from the belief that the world has an order that is knowable. Coolidge explains that this model assumes that men and women complement each other. Marriage is the lifelong commitment of a man and a woman. It is understood to be a basic institution in society, which is more than the creation of contracting individuals or the state. This model of marriage is consistent with a Christian view of marriage.

*To affirm God's faithful commitment,
constant love and forgiveness is to
remind ourselves of the foundational
values in Christian marriage.*

Canadian Council of Churches
Commission on Faith and Witness
Together In Christ

C. Biblical view of marriage

We define marriage as a publicly recognized covenanting together for life between a woman and a man who live together in a relationship characterized by love and faithfulness, for the purpose of lifelong companionship, mutual interdependence and responsibility for each other, with the potential for procreation. Our definition of marriage is derived from Scripture.

Rooted in Creation

God has created the world as inherently ordered and purposeful. The account of Adam and Eve shows us the form that God intends for marriage, the union of one man and one woman. God created male and female in His image, different, yet complementary. God created Adam first, and found that it was not good for him to be alone and that he needed a suitable helper. Genesis 2 tells us that God created woman in response to man's need for companionship. Genesis 2:24 states: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." In Matthew 19:5, Jesus quotes this Genesis passage as what is normative for marriage. This union of man and woman in marriage is distinguished from other types of social interaction when it is described in Scripture as becoming "one flesh." This description highlights the uniquely intimate, biological and social union found in marriage. As the Christian British research and education organization CARE notes in *Public Policy Perspectives on Marriage*, "the marriage relationship is firmly rooted in the way that men and women have been made and it is therefore an institution natural to humanity. This means the Bible's teaching on it is relevant to everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike."²⁰

God's dogged faithfulness to his children in the Old Testament and Christ's tenacious love of his church in the New Testament give us the content for the vow of fidelity.

Richard Foster
Money, Sex & Power

After God created Adam and Eve, and blessed them, Genesis 1:28 tells us that He gave them a mandate: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." God created Eve as one who was suitable to help Adam fulfill this mandate. God created the husband-wife union with the potential to be fruitful in procreation. In creation, it is only the union of male and female that is capable of procreating children. And so we see that God established marriage for companionship, partnership in the task of procreation and in fulfilling the responsibility of stewardship of the earth.



Covenantal

Marriage is a covenant made before God. We see the covenantal nature of

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24
The Bible (NIV)

marriage in the description in Genesis 2:24, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5, which describes

the man leaving his father and mother, and uniting with the woman, and the two becoming one flesh. A covenant binds people together and sets up a framework of duties and rights. The marriage covenant is a publicly recognized pledge between a woman and a man to fulfill a lifelong commitment for the purposes of companionship and, potentially, partnership in procreation. A covenant is not just about rights and obligations. Richard Foster describes the committed and loving nature of marriage covenants :

A covenant is a promise — a pledge of love, loyalty and faithfulness. A covenant involves continuity — the sense of a common future to look forward to and a history to look back on together. A covenant means belonging — a commitment to a rich and growing relationship of love and care.²¹

We glimpse some of the fullness of the marriage covenant when we realize that God describes marriage as symbolic of His covenantal relationship with His people and of Christ's relationship with the Church. God's relationship with His people is characterized by love, sacrifice and faithfulness. As Lewis Smedes writes:

The Christian concept of fidelity is based on the model offered to us by the marriage between God and his people. . . . If we use this model, we will avoid the sterile, passive caricature of fidelity that is mere absence of adultery. We will have a picture of someone who makes a solemn vow to enduring partnership and whose fidelity is measured in terms of creative love for his [or her] partner.²²

The Bible teaches us how to keep our marriage covenants in good repair in its teachings on fidelity, love, honesty, forgiveness and sacrifice.

Other Relationships

While marriage is a gift from God, it is only one of the ways in which we live in community with one another. Not everyone will marry. God calls some to be married and others to be celibate. Paul reminds us of the importance of the calling to celibacy in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. While we celebrate the gift of marriage and consider its uniqueness, we must remember that marriage is one among the many meaningful and fulfilling relationships we can form.

As well, we celebrate marriage knowing that sin has entered the world and brings division in all human relationships. "Communities, especially marriages and families, suffer in a particularly painful way from the brokenness and sin that inhabit our world,"²³ states the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Witness. As Christians we have the hope of reconciliation and new life in Christ, the hope of healing for brokenness and forgiveness for sin in all our relationships, including marriage.

In spite of our hopes and ideals we know that divorce is a reality in the Church. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus said that Moses allowed the Israelites to divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. Though there are differing doctrines on when divorce is biblically acceptable, the Church is called to minister to those who are suffering from the effects of sin and brokenness. We are called to bring compassion and the redemptive truth of the gospel to all people.



III. How is marriage unique?

There are many relationships that are similar to marriage in some of their functions and characteristics. These relationships may be caring, financially interdependent or produce children, but they are distinct from marriage in that they do not share all of the important, defining characteristics.

Cohabitation is not the same as marriage, although it does share some of its characteristics. Cohabitation is not necessarily planned, may not involve commitment and may not be intended to be long term. Cohabitation may be more like dating or courtship than marriage — the cohabitants may be undecided, unintentional or lacking commitment, and their relationships tend to be far less stable. The government imposes rights, benefits and obligations on cohabiting partners after a certain period of time, regardless of their level of commitment or desire for legal status.

The wedding is merely the beginning of a lifelong process of handing over absolutely everything, and not simply everything one owns but everything that one is.

Mike Mason
The Mystery of Marriage

There are many reasons why common-law relationships may involve less commitment. A couple may drift into cohabitation without being prompted to think seriously about their level of commitment or to evaluate whether they are ready for a long-term commitment to this relationship or this person. As Patricia Morgan writes in *Marriage-Lite*, “[T]he screening mechanisms employed in the search for a suitable match may be less vigorous for cohabitation compared to marriage, with couples quickly sliding into live-in relationships without evaluating whether they are really suited.”²⁴ In other words, people may be willing to cohabit with someone for an indefinite period of time when they would not be willing to marry that person. Because of the lower level of commitment, cohabiting couples are more likely to be independent rather than fully interdependent. They may feel the need to keep themselves emotionally reserved or to keep their finances separate to be ready for the ending of the relationship. Thus, they may never have the kind of fully interdependent relationship that may be more common among married couples.

Same-sex sexual relationships, which have the same legal status as heterosexual common-law relationships, are not the same as the union of a man and a woman. Biologically, these unions do not have the potential to produce children. In this way, they are more similar to close relationships between friends, siblings, or parents and adult children which are non-sexual and are not capable of procreating children. Socially, these are also different relationships. The companionship of a same-sex relationship is different from the complementarity of a heterosexual union. God made us male and female, and capable of entering into a complementary physical union with a member of the opposite sex.

Procreation and the rearing of children were major reasons for the initial establishment of benefits and regulation of marriage. As well, the history of economic inequality between men and women led to the provision of benefits. The benefits and obligations protected and provided for women who were economically vulnerable in part because they were raising children rather than entering the workforce.

The uniqueness of marriage is not recognized by all. A May 2000 Discussion Paper by the Law Commission of Canada (LCC) suggests that one option in recognizing close relationships is to collapse all relationships into marriage in order to provide equal treatment for all relationships. The Discussion Paper suggests that Parliament could

. . . extend existing concepts by legislative analogy. In seeking to implement policies dealing with close adult personal relationships Parliament could, adopting this technique, redefine the terms marriage and spouse so that all close personal relationships between adults — whether they involve same-sex couples, siblings, adult children and parents, friends supporting each other, and so on — would fall within the new definition.²⁵

Probability for Women to Separate, by Type of First Union, Quebec and Other Provinces, 2001

	Quebec		Other provinces	
	50-59 years	30-39 years	50-59 years	30-39 years
Probability for women to go through at least one separation	33.8	45.8	30.5	40.6
According to whether the first union was ...				
Marriage	30.6	26.8	30.2	30.7
Common-law	64.8	55.3	60.4	66.3

Source: General Social Survey.

However, without diminishing other relationships, they do not serve the purposes of marriage or have the same outcomes as marriage. It would be ludicrous to call a relationship of a parent and adult child “marriage” in order to identify it as a loving, interdependent relationship. Although marriage is a close, personal relationship, that is only one of its characteristics and functions.

It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Letters from Prison

While couples make many decisions that affect their relationships, entering into marriage, in and of itself, has an impact on their relationship. As the Marriage Movement’s Statement of Principles states,

Marriage does not simply certify existing loving relationships, but rather transforms the ways in which couples act toward one another, toward their children, and toward the future. Marriage also changes the way in which other individuals, groups, and institutions think about and act toward the couple.²⁶

Marriage is a relationship that is shaped by more than just two individuals — marriage exists within society and is shaped by society’s understanding of it. As Princeton University theologian Max Stackhouse puts it,

The channels by which people find and establish their relationships are often highly, if subtly, formed by longstanding and widespread social practice and governed by legal mandates and constraints that have become second nature to our view of family life. The result is a sexual, social, economic, and political unit in the context of a civil society.²⁷

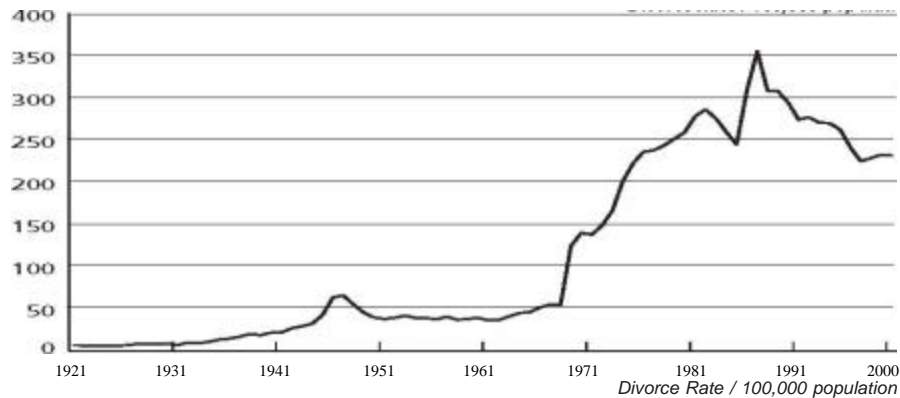
IV. What are the stressors on marriage?

High levels of divorce and remarriage in Canada give evidence of the stress on marriages. At the current divorce rate, the risk of divorce during the life of the marriage is high. Just over one in three, or 38.3 percent of couples, will divorce within 30 years of marriage if the 2003 divorce rates prevail.²⁸ The pressure on marriage comes from various sources, including financial and economic pressures on couples, longer hours at work, changes in legislation, current attitudes toward marriage and cultural trends toward individualism and autonomy.

A 1998 COMPAS poll found that an overwhelming majority of respondents say that families with children today experience more stress than families 50 years ago. This belief about family stress was shared irrespective of age, level of education, region or gender. Divorce and family breakdown topped the list of family stressors.²⁹ Many couples are struggling in their marriages and many marriages have broken down.

Financial and economic pressures are widely felt by Canadians and take their toll on marriage and family life. Almost half of Canadians (46 percent) feel they do not have enough free time, according to a 2001 Ipsos-Reid poll. The top negative effects of not having enough free time among this group were stress (27 percent), not having time for family and friends (26 percent) and fatigue or exhaustion (25 percent).³⁰ An earlier Ipsos-Reid poll found that more than 40 percent of Canadians feel more stress in their lives compared to five years before, with 45 percent of employed Canadians saying workplace stress has a negative impact on their home lives.³¹ Busyness, stress and fatigue can take a heavy toll on relationships.

Divorces in Canada (1921-2000)



Adapted from: Statistics Canada, "Divorces", Cat. no. 84-213-XMB, Table 1; *The Daily*, May 18, 1999; "A Portrait of Families in Canada", Cat. no. 89-523-XPE; "Historical Statistics of Canada", Cat. no. 11-516-XIE; *The Daily*, September 28, 2000; *The Daily*, December 2, 2002

Family time and work time are increasingly overlapping for white-collar workers. An Ipsos-Reid survey found that respondents routinely take calls (81 percent), check their e-mail (65 percent) or check their voice mail (59 percent) outside of normal business hours. Twenty-one percent said their jobs required them to be available around the clock. Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed with this statement: "Sometimes my family or friends resent the number of hours I spend working."³² Technology allows people to be almost constantly available or "on call," which can cut into the time for marriage and family relationships. This busyness can distract or prevent couples from spending time strengthening their marriages. In a 2001 Ipsos-Reid survey on marital infidelity, loneliness is the main reason Canadians say they would have an affair.³³

What pressures do you see on marriages today? What are ways to alleviate the stresses on marriage?

Changes in the law also put pressure on marriage. All marriages require great amounts of effort and commitment from both husbands and wives. Divorce may seem like an easy way to end a relationship that is more work than one realized. No-fault divorce allows one partner to end a marriage unilaterally, against the wishes of the other. After the fault provisions were removed from the divorce law, the divorce rate increased significantly. One estimate calculates that no-fault divorce provisions permanently increased the divorce rate in the United States by six percent.³⁴

Redefining marriage to make it, in effect, genderless, also put pressure on marriage. The government has also commissioned studies about recognizing polygamous marriage. As noted above, there is even discussion about expanding "marriage" so that anyone living in an interdependent relationship can obtain the status and the benefits of marriage, including friends, siblings, same-sex couples, and parents and adult children.³⁵ Increasingly, government recognition of marriage is seen as discriminatory unless it can include any relationship. However, if marriage is so widely understood as to include any interdependent relationship, society's expectations of the level of commitment and intimacy in marriage will be reduced. As we have discussed earlier in this paper, marriage is influenced by society's understanding of it.



Others are questioning the relevance of marriage. Legally, the benefits and obligations of marriage are extended to other relationships. People are living common-law in increasing numbers rather than marrying. Yet we see that

marriage is more than “just a piece of paper” in the outcome of these relationships. In the next section of this paper we will see the benefits of marriage compared to cohabiting relationships.

The individualism and independence that are so important in our society also put pressure on marriage. Our culture promotes the belief in individual autonomy, that we are a law unto ourselves rather than under God’s creational law. Truth is self-made in our post-modern society. We believe that we construct reality, rather than looking to God-given norms or absolutes. Choice becomes the ultimate criterion in making decisions. This spirit of the age of our culture underlies the trend to view marriage as a mere contract or commitment. These beliefs challenge the biblical view of marriage as given by God with a particular structure or nature. For example, the Bible describes marriage as two becoming one. This is a yielding of self to another, and a merging of self with another, that flies in the face of individual autonomy.

While marriage is under pressure in Canada, the story does not end here. Marriage has many benefits for society, and there are ways we can act to strengthen marriage.

V. What are the benefits of marriage?

Social science bears evidence of the distinctiveness and benefits to society of marriage relationships. Marriage has benefits for couples as well as for their children and society as a whole. This discussion of marriage includes consideration of children because we do not live in a vacuum. The relationships we enter into and the course of those relationships affect the people around us, particularly children.

A. Benefits for participants

Marriages tend to be more stable and married people are generally happier, healthier, longer living, with better mental health, and lower rates of family violence than those living in common-law relationships.

Common-law relationships are generally not as long-lasting or as stable as married relationships. The Vanier Institute found that:

Of all the children born in 1983-84... the children least likely to see their parents separate are the ones whose parents are legally married with no cohabitation before marriage (14 percent). About one quarter of children whose parents lived together before legal marriage have seen their parents separate. The highest frequency of separation is for children whose parents lived common-law throughout; *over half* (emphasis ours) see their parents separate by the time they are 10 years old.³⁶

These statistics are corroborated by 2001 General Social Survey, which found that approximately 30 percent of marriages are expected to end in separation, and more than 60 percent of common-law relationships are expected to end in separation.³⁷

Younger Canadians, who are more likely to choose common-law relationships as their first conjugal union, are more likely to experience the breakdown of their relationship and to enter into another conjugal relationship. If current trends continue, three times as many women in their 30s (33 percent) will experience a second union compared to women in their 60s (11 percent). The second union is more likely to be a common-law relationship. Women in their 30s who first married are twice as likely to live common-law for their second union as they are to remarry. Women in their 30s who first cohabited are 14 times as likely to enter into a common-law relationship for their second union.³⁸

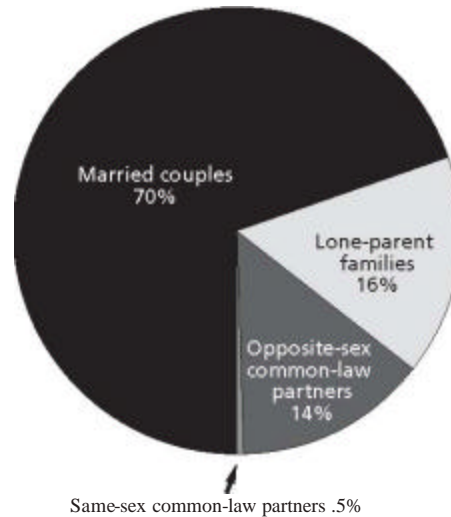
Second unions tend to be less stable, particularly if there are children from previous relationships. A Québec study on child development found that by the time a child was 2½ years old, 9 percent had experienced their parents’ separation when it was both parents’ first union, compared to 19 percent when both parents had been married to or living with a previous partner. The parents were more than twice as likely to separate when both had been in a previous union and at least one parent had a child from a previous union.³⁹

A study on mothers' well-being found that significant differences exist across family types and that marriage is generally associated with higher maternal well-being. The study considered indicators such as happiness, depression and self-esteem, and controlled for variables such as socioeconomic status, race, age and employment.⁴⁰ American research comparing the well-being of married and single young adults found that young adults who get and stay married have higher levels of well-being than those who remain single.⁴¹ The study found that married men report less depression and married women report fewer alcohol problems. The study included controls for premarital rates of mental health.

The risk of spousal violence for women is much higher among those who are separated or living in common-law unions than among those who are married. According to Statistics Canada, people who were aged 15 to 24 were more than twice as likely to be victims of spousal violence as those 35 and older. Rates were three times higher in relationships of three years or less than relationships that were more than ten years in duration. Data also showed that rates of spousal violence were three times more likely in common-law relationships than marital unions.⁴²

Married adults live longer.⁴³ Canadian research on mortality rates indicates that married persons have a lower death rate than single, widowed and divorced persons.⁴⁴ A Swedish study has found an excess mortality among those who are remarried and cohabiting, and has evidence for a causal relationship between marriage dissolution and mortality. The study concludes, "On the whole, however, marriage protects both men and women from the higher mortality rates experienced by unmarried groups."⁴⁵

Distribution of families by family structure



Adapted from: 2001 Census, Statistics Canada Note: According to the definitions used in compiling the data, married couple families and common-law couple families may or may not include children.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher in *The Case for Marriage* examine research that indicates married couples have more satisfying sexual relationships than singles or cohabiting couples.⁴⁶

B. Benefits for children

As we stated above, the relationships we enter into affect the people around us, particularly children. Parents in every family form love their children and work hard to take care of them. They all benefit from encouragement and societal support as they raise their children. However, all family forms are not equal in their outcomes for children.

According to the Vanier Institute for the Family,

People's perception of how happy they were as children varies considerably depending on how many marital changes occurred in their families as they were growing up. Overall, about 9 out of 10 adults aged 15 and over say that they had a 'very happy' childhood. For those who had no changes in parental structures, about 92 per cent say they had a 'very happy' childhood. This declines to one-in-four for those who had one change in parental structure to only one-in-two for those who experienced three or more changes⁴⁷

Married couples are more likely to have children than common-law couples. In 2001, 68 percent of children 14 years and under lived in married-couple families, compared to 13 percent living in common-law couple families and 18 percent living in lone-parent families. Of Canada's 4.6 million children, approximately 2,850 or .06 percent live with parents in same-sex relationships.⁴⁸

i) Relationship stability

In his publication *A Survey of Canadian Hopes and Dreams*, Reginald Bibby notes that:

About 3 out of 10 individuals who are *cohabitating* have had marriages end, compared to about 1 in 10 people who are *currently married* or *widowed*. *Cohabitants also are more likely than others to have had parents who divorced or separated.*⁴⁹

Eighteen percent of children from divorced families never visit their fathers.

In the book *The Case for Marriage*, the authors argue that married parents create stronger bonds with their children than divorced or single parents due to more frequent parental contact afforded by the traditional nuclear family.⁵⁰ "When asked to rate their relationship with their parents, adult children raised by married parents describe their current relationships with both their mothers and fathers more positively than do children raised in unwed or divorced families."⁵¹

ii) Financial effects

The stability and longevity of their parents' relationship affects children in many ways. One of the most obvious immediate effects on the children is financial. Statistics Canada notes that changes in family composition are far more likely than changes in a parent's job to move a child into or out of low income.⁵² Two adults combining their funds are able to enjoy a higher standard of living than if they live separately. Separation and divorce often entail a sudden drop in the standard of living for the parent who has custody of the child(ren), usually the mother. A Statistics Canada research paper exploring why children move into and out of low income found that a divorce or marriage has a tremendous influence on whether the child will enter or exit low income. The researchers found that "At the level of the individual, changes in family composition (when they occur) are more important than changes in jobs held by parents."⁵³ Canadians living in lone-parent families are almost seven times more likely to live with low-income continuously than the overall population.⁵⁴

iii) Social and behavioural effects

Family disruption not only includes the emotional upheaval of a break-up, but also the loss of one parent in the home. Often the end of the parents' relationship means that the child will spend far less time with the non-resident parent. The level of visitation and support after a relationship break-up also varies according to the type of relationship. The children of separated married parents saw their non-resident fathers almost twice as often as the children of divorced married parents and more than three times as often as the children of dissolved common-law unions. The same study found that 18 percent of the children of divorced parents never visited their fathers, and 22 percent of the children of dissolved common-law unions never visited their fathers.⁵⁵

Statistics show that children who live with one parent rather than two experience many difficulties. Being the child of a lone mother is strongly associated with psychiatric, educational or social problems, even when income is taken into account. In research published in the 1998 Statistics Canada book *Labour Markets, Social*

Institutions and the Future of Canada's Children, one study concludes,

[L]one-mother status is strongly associated with virtually all of our [poor] outcomes. The coefficient estimates for this variable are both robust . . . and they imply sizeable quantitative effects on the predicted probability of a disorder or problem.

For example, lone motherhood is associated with a 14 percent higher probability of the child having one or more of the disorders/problems we study.⁵⁶

Data from the National Longitudinal Study on Children and Youth confirms that children who live with one parent are more likely to display conduct disorders, with one-third of children living with a lone parent demonstrating aggressive behaviour compared to less than one-fifth of those living with both parents. The same study finds that, after holding all other factors constant, children in lone-parent families are twice as likely to exhibit delinquent behaviour as children in two-parent families.⁵⁷

Children from intact families are more likely to get married and stay married.

iv) Dual-gender influence and role models

Children who grow up with both mother and father in the home have close interaction with role models of both sexes. A stable setting for interaction with their mothers and fathers affects the way these children learn to interact with members of the opposite sex. Christian psychologist Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen points out that little boys who grow up in the virtual absence of their fathers may conclude that being a man means being as unlike a woman as possible. They may become misogynistic, at worst, and distance themselves from “women’s work” and the nurture of their own children, at best.⁵⁸ Van Leeuwen notes that the benefits for boys of a father’s presence and care include a check on boys’ aggressiveness as they grow older and, more importantly, the assurance that they are masculine. She quotes psychologist Frank Pittman:

Most boys nowadays are growing up with fathers who spend little, if any, time with them. Ironically, when the boy most needs to practice being a man, his father is off somewhere playing at being a boy . . . Boys who don’t have fathers they know and love don’t know how much masculinity is enough.

Fathers have the authority to let boys relax the requirements of the masculine model. If our fathers accept us, then that declares us masculine enough to join the company of men.⁵⁹

Girls also benefit from having intact families and the role model of both mother and father. One study found that girls who grow up with both mother and father in the home related more naturally and confidently to males, while girls whose fathers had died were shy with males, and girls from divorced families acted seductively with males.⁶⁰ Female role models are also very important, but mothers receive custody of the children in the majority of cases after the breakdown of the relationship. Fathers often remarry and may have a second or even third set of children. According to a study by researchers at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, 70 percent of men remarry within five years of a divorce. Half of all divorced fathers have ties to a second set of children and 24 percent have ties to at least three sets of children.⁶¹

v) Effects on family formation

In fact, divorce has a greater effect on children than the death of a parent. A 1999 Statistics Canada study compared the long-term effects of parental loss through bereavement and divorce on children’s incomes and social behaviour as adults. The study found that divorce had a significant effect on marital instability and that bereavement did not. The study concluded:

Not only do children whose parents divorced put off marriage relative to children from intact families, but once married they are more likely to suffer separation or divorce. Children from bereaved families, on the other hand, are no different in their marital behaviour than the intact group. It is reasonable to suggest that at least for this set of outcomes experiencing parental loss through divorce and through bereavement are not the

same thing. In particular, attitudes to familial life and the importance of marriage may not be changed by the loss of a parent through death, while witnessing the divorce of one's parents may lead children to think of marriage as a much more riskier living arrangement.⁶²

This study on bereavement and divorce also considered whether the liberalization of divorce law changed the long-term effects of divorce by making divorce proceedings less adversarial. The study analyzed children whose parents divorced before and after the law changed, but found that the change in divorce law did not reduce the chances that the children would experience marital instability.⁶³

Data from the General Social Survey also indicates that the marital status of parents affects the way in which children start their life as couples and parents. Children who saw their parents separate or divorce are more likely to cohabit than to marry. Those who do marry are more likely to separate or divorce themselves. Married women from this group are 1.7 times more likely to have their unions dissolve and married men are three times as likely to have their unions dissolve. Women who experienced their parents' separation or divorce are 1.5 times as likely to have a child before the age of 20, and 1.9 times as likely to have a child outside of a union.⁶⁴

Children of married parents are more likely to graduate from high school.

vi) Effects of blended families

As noted above, parents' relationships are far less stable when at least one parent has a child from a previous relationship.⁶⁵ Children whose parents form new relationships also have difficulty in many areas. Children aged 10 and 11 living in stepfamilies were more likely to say they lack emotional support from their parents, received erratic punishment and had difficulty getting along with parents and siblings.⁶⁶ According to Statistics Canada General Social Survey, Canadians who lived in blended or stepparent families at age 15 later reported a 70 percent high school graduation rate, compared to 71 percent of those in lone-parent families and 80 percent of those who lived with both biological parents.⁶⁷



While the negative effects of divorce for children are real and costly, the children of divorce will not necessarily experience all the negative effects. They are at a greater risk of developing problems but the majority do not experience these problems.

vii) Family violence

Children living with their two married biological parents are less likely to experience neglect or abuse, or to witness violence in the home. In a recent Statistics Canada report on family violence, almost one-half (44%) of child maltreatment cases involved children living in lone-parent families, although lone-parent families made up less than 20 percent of families. Among the remaining child maltreatment cases, 28 percent involved children living with their biological parents and 19 percent involved children living in a two-parent blended family where one parent was a step-parent or common-law partner but not the biological parent of at least one of the children in the family.⁶⁸ Higher percentages of children witnessed physical fights if they were living in blended/step parent (14.7 per cent) or single parent (10.3 per cent) homes as compared to biological or adoptive two-parent families (7.4 per cent). Children were also more likely to witness physical fights in the home if their family structure had undergone change over the previous period, either from two parents to one (13.6 per cent), or from one parent to two (14.4 per cent).⁶⁹

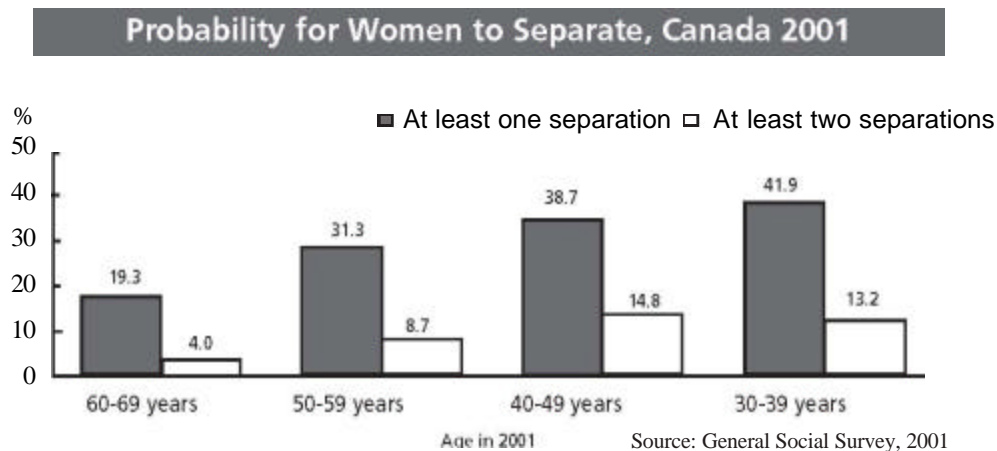
C. Benefits of marriage for society

Marriage is a more stable relationship, in which most children are born and the majority of caregiving takes place. When marriages fail, there is a cost to society. As a report on the costs of family breakdown in the United Kingdom states,

The whole of society is affected by the social consequences of family breakdown. It impairs the health of the nation, reduces the educational achievement of its children, increases the crime rate, places a burden on the national economy and a strain on social relationships at all levels.⁷⁰

i) Stability

Society benefits from stable relationships. As the studies cited above indicate, marriage is a more stable relationship. This stability benefits the children of the relationship, decreasing the chances of social and emotional disorders, and increasing the chances of educational attainment and of attaining marital stability when they form relationships as adults. Society benefits when children do well.



Relationship instability brings other costs to society, beyond the effects on children. Families that dissolve are more likely to move into the low-income bracket and to require social assistance from the government.⁷¹ The Australian House of Representatives' Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee studied the effects and costs of marital breakdown and concluded, "Marriage and relationship breakdown costs the Australian nation at least \$3 billion each year. When all the indirect costs are included, the figure is possibly double. When the personal and emotional trauma involved is added to these figures, the cost to our nation is enormous."⁷²

ii) Fertility

Women who are married are more likely to have children than those who are cohabiting. Statistics Canada notes that between 1985 and 1994, women who were married for their entire fertile lives had twice as many children as women who lived common-law for their entire fertile lives, with an average of 2.87 children for married women, compared to 1.44 children for cohabiting women.⁷³

iii) Caregiving

Married couples tend to receive more household and financial support from their spouses, which allows them to care for others. An article on caregivers in Canadian Social Trends found the majority of caregivers were married with children.⁷⁴

British Home Office Minister Paul Boateng stated that more should be done to support marriage as the foundation of family stability. "We know that cohabitation is less likely to inculcate stability in a family than marriage," he said. "But that is not making a moral judgment. It is just a fact."⁷⁵

VI. What does the law say?

While the law distinguishes between marriage and other relationships, over the last several years, the courts have been narrowing those distinctions. Challenges under section 15 of the Charter have required governments to treat common law relationships the same as marriage, and now same-sex couples the same as opposite sex.

Although “marriage and divorce” are under federal jurisdiction in Canada under section 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, marriage was not defined in federal legislation until the government passed the *Civil Marriage Act* in 2005 to define marriage as being “between two persons.” Provincial governments have the power to legislate in relation to solemnization of marriage under section 92 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. This means that only provincial governments can legislate to protect religious freedom in relation to the solemnization of marriage.

A. Marriage in Canada

For more than a millennium in the West it has been understood that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. There have been changes in the understanding and legal treatment of marriage in Canada, within this norm of marriage as heterosexual. From the mid-19th century, Canadian law has been steadily changing, both through the common law and by way of legislation, from a view of the dependence of married women to the equal partnership of spouses. Divorce was rare and difficult to obtain before no-fault provisions were introduced in 1969. These no-fault divorce provisions reflected a move toward a different understanding of marriage, a move toward the choice or contract model of marriage discussed above. At that time, it was thought to be beneficial to allow easy divorce, although social science has since proven otherwise.

[M]arriage has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition.
Justice La Forest
Egan v. Canada

Benefits and obligations were attached to marriage originally to remedy injustice resulting from the breakdown of the family. Women and children were economically dependent on the husband/father. The “man of the house” held all the property and was often the only employed person in the household. On desertion or marital breakdown, the consequence for the dependents was poverty, or social assistance when it was established. There is now, in most family legislation, a presumption that married parties have entered into an economic partnership and therefore, any economic advantages and disadvantages that attach to or flow from the relationship are shared equally between the spouses.

Another change in the law over the past number of years has been the legal recognition of the relationships of heterosexual and homosexual common-law couples. Cohabitants are two people living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage that is marriage-like in some or all of the following respects: child rearing, provision of emotional support and/or financial interdependence.

In 2000, gay and lesbian activists challenged the heterosexual definition of marriage in courts in British Columbia, Ontario and Québec. Eventually, these challenges spread to most of the remaining provinces and territories. In June 2003, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the definition of marriage was changed to “between two persons” effective immediately. The federal government did not challenge this decision. Instead, it published “draft legislation” to redefine marriage and sent a series of reference questions to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Court gave its opinion in December 2004 stating that the federal government has the ability to change the definition of marriage but it refused to rule that it was required to do so.

B. Court cases

In applying the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the courts have collapsed same-sex relationships into common-law relationships, then collapsed common-law relationships into marriage.

i) Hyde v. Hyde and Woodmansee (heterosexual definition)

Until 2003, our legal definition of marriage came from a decision of the Matrimonial Court of England in 1866. In that case the judge was evaluating whether a marriage contracted in a country that recognized polygamy, by a couple whose faith allowed polygamy, constituted a valid marriage under the laws of England. He defined marriage as “the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others.”⁷⁶

ii) North v. Matheson (same-sex marriage)

Two men attempted to become married in 1974, having the banns of marriage declared and a ceremony conducted by an authorized person in the presence of witnesses. They submitted their documents to the Registrar of Manitoba to have their marriage registered. The Registrar refused to register the marriage. The County Court of Winnipeg upheld the Registrar’s ability to determine that a marriage did not exist. The court cited the common-law definition of marriage found in *Hyde v. Hyde*, “the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman,” and found that no marriage had taken place.

iii) Pettkus v. Becker (common law recognized)

A heterosexual couple cohabited for a number of years, working together in a jointly developed bee-keeping business. The business as well as the property was in the name of Mr. Pettkus. After the breakdown of the relationship, Miss Becker was left destitute. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1980 that Miss Becker had contributed finances and labour to the bee-keeping business and should be granted a one-half share of it. This was the first decision recognizing legal entitlement for common-law couples.

iv) Layland v. Ontario (same-sex marriage)

A city clerk refused to issue a marriage licence to two homosexual men on the grounds that marriage of a same-sex couple was illegal. The two men applied for a judicial review under the *Marriage Act*. In 1993, the Ontario Divisional Court ruled 2:1 that the common law prohibits same-sex marriage and that this prohibition of same-sex marriage does not constitute discrimination under section 15 of the *Charter*.

v) Miron v. Trudel (common law)

The male partner in a common-law relationship, M, was injured in a car accident. The car and the driver of the vehicle transporting M were not insured. M made a claim for accident benefits for loss of income and damages against his partner, V’s, insurance policy, which extended accident benefits to the “spouse” of the policyholder, defined as husband or wife. In a 1995 decision, a majority of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the definition of spouse in the *Insurance Act* violated the *Charter* because it discriminated against common-law couples on the basis of marital status. The court “read in” a new definition of spouse that included heterosexual couples who have cohabited for three years or who have lived in a permanent relationship with a child.

vi) Egan v. Canada (same-sex relationships)

Two men who had been cohabiting for a number of years argued that the opposite-sex definition of spouse in the *Old Age Security Act* was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court of Canada upheld the opposite-sex



definition of spouse in a 5:4 decision in 1995. While a majority found that sexual orientation should be protected by section 15 of the *Charter*, a different majority found that the opposite-sex definition of spouse was justified in this legislation.

vii) *M v. H (same-sex relationships)*

One partner in a lesbian couple applied for spousal support under Ontario's *Family Law Act* after the breakdown of the relationship. She argued that the definition of spouse in the *Family Law Act* should include same-sex partners. In 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it was discriminatory that those living common law were required to pay spousal support on breakdown of the relationship but those in same-sex relationships did not have the benefit of legally required support. The court did not rule that the term spouse must be redefined, but that the benefit of the law had to be extended to same-sex relationships. The court clearly stated that its decision in this case did not concern marriage.

viii) *Trociuk v. British Columbia (does marriage matter?)*

The result of rights, benefits and obligations being extended to other relationships is that marriage no longer has special status in law. Writing for the majority, B.C. Court of Appeal Justice Mary Southin reviewed changes to family law over the past century and stated, "The Legislature of British Columbia no longer considers that marriage . . . is a social institution of paramount or, indeed, any importance."⁷⁷ In this 2001 case a father challenged B.C.'s *Vital Statistics Act* that grants a mother the sole right to name her children. The B.C. Court of Appeal upheld the *Vital Statistics Act*.

ix) *Nova Scotia v. Walsh (common law relationships)*

Under provincial family law, only married spouses divide property equally when the relationship ends. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in *Nova Scotia v. Walsh* in December 2002 that this is not a violation of the equality guarantee in section 15 of the *Charter*. Walsh and Bona lived together for 10 years. When their relationship ended, Ms. Walsh challenged the law because common law "spouses" did not divide their assets equally: each was presumed to take from the relationship their own assets. Ms. Walsh argued that the different treatment for common law "spouses" was discriminatory under the *Charter*.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that those who are married have chosen to enter into a particular legal regime. But those who do not marry must be presumed to have chosen not to. It is not discriminatory to allow people choices with respect to their family form. The Court has affirmed that there is a difference between married and common law relationships and that it is not unconstitutional to have different legal treatment for the two.

x) *The Road to Redefinition*

The cases that ultimately determined that the heterosexual definition of marriage is discriminatory started in 2000 in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The first decision was that of Justice Pitfield of the B.C. Supreme Court. He ruled in October 2001 that marriage was by its nature between a man and a woman and that the *Charter* cannot be used to challenge that definition.

On July 12, 2002, however, the Ontario Division Court overruled its 1993 decision upholding the heterosexual definition of marriage. It ruled instead that the restriction that marriage be between a man and a woman was discriminatory against gays and lesbians and gave the federal government 24 months to pass legislation to remedy the discrimination. The B.C. Court of Appeal made a similar ruling on May 1, 2003.



The major change to marriage, however, was the Ontario Court of Appeal decision on June 10, 2003 which redefined marriage to “between two persons” effective immediately. The federal government decided not to appeal this ruling so this became the law in Ontario. As cases came up in other provinces, the courts ruled that because this decision had not been appealed and applies to an area of federal law, it must be considered the law in all provinces.

C. Parliamentary action

In June 1999, Members of Parliament voted overwhelmingly to support the existing definition of marriage. The following motion on marriage was passed in a 216-55 vote: “That, in the opinion of this House, it is necessary, in light of public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.”

In November 2002, Justice Minister Martin Cauchon referred the legal recognition of same-sex unions to the Justice Committee. The following April, the committee held cross-country hearings on marriage and the recognition of same-sex unions, with the intention of reporting back to Parliament. Two months later, the committee voted by a margin of one to recommend to the federal government that it not appeal the Ontario Court of Appeal ruling, rendering the committee’s work irrelevant and any report to Parliament on the subject redundant. In the same month, the government made a three-question reference to the Supreme Court. Justice Minister Irwin Cotler added a fourth question in January of 2004.

The Supreme Court of Canada in December 2004 gave an opinion in the Marriage Reference that Parliament may redefine marriage; however it did not rule that the government must redefine it. The Court also said the *Charter* would protect clergy from being forced to perform or participate in marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples.

In June 2005, the House of Commons passed Bill C-38, *The Civil Marriage Act*, which redefines marriage to include same-sex couples, and in July, the Senate approved the bill. On June 20, 2005, Bill C-38 received royal assent as became law.

VII. What does this all mean?

For the past number of decades, the government has introduced significant changes to social policy without undertaking a thorough review of the impact these policies have had on marriages and family. The changed definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage may have unintended consequences for Canadian society.

Most Canadians know through personal experience, or of the experiences of those close to them, how no-fault divorce has impacted the overall rate of divorce in Canada. Similarly, the legal recognition of common-law relationships has contributed to a decrease in the rate of marriage and has dramatically increased the average age people are getting married.

Redefining marriage, by removing the link between marriage and procreation, will not help the downward trend in Canada’s fertility rate.⁷⁸ Commentators indicate that our low birthrate has led to what is called a “demographic winter”: as more of our population grows older, there is an increasingly smaller workforce to support their cost of living. The government is already projecting that soon, 14.2 per cent of workers’ incomes will be needed to support the CPP alone.⁷⁹

In addition, government tax policies may be creating disincentives to marry. It is cheaper, in some instances, for people to live together, but not claim their relationship.⁸⁰

It is good social policy for a government to support marriage and the raising of children. As Patricia Morgan

of the Institute for the Study of Civil Society, London states,

Like a corporation, or private property, marriage has to be publicly supported by law and culture in order to exist. Law and social policy embody, impose and reinforce moral values; these are not self-sustaining and disintegrate without support.⁸¹

Now that our government has opened the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples it has potentially opened a floodgate of calls for greater recognition of a plurality of relationships such as polygamy, or the abandonment of the marriage institution all together. For the good of Canada, our laws must support the historical definition of family. Where government refuses to do this, churches and individual Christians must be ever more intentional about living out, in their own lives, God's desire for marriage and family.

VIII. How can we respond?

Marriage is not the only loving, fulfilling relationship in society. However, marriage is hard work and requires our support. Many marriages are struggling and breaking down. Without neglecting those who are single or fostering unrealistic expectations of perfect marriage relationships, we can work to support marriage in many of our roles.

Serious efforts to improve a marriage are tasks as sacred as Bible study or prayer.
Richard Foster
Money, Sex & Power

As individuals

- Pray for the marriages of the people you know.
- Evaluate television programs, movies and music for their views on marriage. Seek out programs, movies and music that encourage faithful marriage. Avoid those that disparage marriage, or that celebrate adultery and sexual intimacy outside marriage.
- Avoid sexually explicit magazines, television programs, movies and advertisements. Pornography can foster and intensify lust and dissatisfaction with one's spouse.

As singles

- Pray for God's direction in your life to be clear, whether it leads to celibacy or marriage.
- Be wise in your dating life. Seek God's will and set limits on physical intimacy.
- Enter into the interdependent and fulfilling relationships that exist alongside marriage.
- Recognize that marriage requires much work, and find ways to encourage and support the people you know in their marriages.

As engaged couples

- Pray for your fiancé or fiancée.
- Seek out premarital counselling programs. Comprehensive premarital inventories, such as the PREPARE inventory, can be very helpful. (*See Appendix A for further resources.*)
- Study biblical teaching on marriage and seek out Christian resources, such as books and magazines.
- Ask a mature married couple to be your mentors.

As married couples

- Pray for your husband or wife.
- Deepen your commitment to your marriage.
- Consider marriage enrichment programs or retreats.
- Regularly set aside time to spend alone with your husband or wife. Go on dates.
- Study biblical teaching on marriage and seek out Christian resources, such as books and magazines. As we love God more, we love our husband or wife more.
- Talk together about ways to affair-proof your marriage, such as limiting or avoiding time alone with the opposite sex.
- Avoid sexually explicit magazines, television shows, movies and ads. Pornography fosters

- dissatisfaction with your spouse.
- Seek counselling early. In most marriages that break down, one spouse has been considering separation for over one year. One study has found that 86 percent of unhappily married people who did not divorce were able to turn their marriages around. Five years later, nearly three-fifths of those who had been unhappy described the same marriage as “very happy” or “quite happy.”⁸²

As citizens

- Communicate your concerns about marriage to your Member of Parliament and provincial representative and urge them to:
 - define marriage as “the union of one man and one woman for life”,
 - consider the effects on marriage of all new government initiatives,
 - ensure that those who believe that marriage is between a man and a woman do not face discrimination.

As parents

- Model a marriage relationship to your children that is characterized by love and affection, forgiveness, honesty and faithfulness.
- Teach your children about appropriate sexual expression.

As consumers

- Contact the advertisers or sponsors of programs or commercials that weaken or make light of marriage and communicate your disapproval.

As churches

- Affirm and support single adults as well as married couples. Include singles in the life of the church.
- Pray for marriages in your services, small groups and devotional times.
- Develop and emphasize pre-marital counselling and marriage enrichment programs. Discuss the hard work and blessings of marriage in your congregation.
- Address sexual purity for the married and the unmarried in Sunday school, small groups and sermons.
- Arrange free babysitting evenings to give parents the opportunity to spend time alone.
- Set up accountability groups for those who are interested; many Christians struggle with an addiction to pornography. Pornography can foster and intensify lust and dissatisfaction with one’s spouse.
- Set up mentoring programs, matching dating couples or newlyweds with more mature married couples.
- Require premarital counselling for couples married in the church.
- Begin marriage preparation and education with youth and children.



IX. Conclusion

Marriage was born in the heart of God and He cherishes it. As Christians, our faith unfolds an additional dimension of marriage, and God gives us the resources we need to be married — the love, forgiveness and grace we need to truly become one with our spouses.

Marriage is under pressure in Canadian society, but it is still a vibrant institution. Our response to this pressure must be to encourage and strengthen marriage, both as individual relationships between men and women we know and on a society-wide, institutional level.

Our society benefits from marriage in many ways, particularly in its role as the best environment for raising children. Marriage is a unique relationship that is deserving of government recognition and support.

Appendix A

Canadian Organizations to Contact for Further Resources on Marriage

Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada, has a FamilyLife division which offers resources and marriage conferences across the country with the goal of helping couples have meaningful marriages with a Christian foundation.

FamilyLife Canada, 20385 64 Ave, Langley, BC V2Y 1N5 Ph: 1-800-247-3180, Fax: 604-514-2124, www.familylifecanada.com

Covenant Marriage Canada is an internet resource listing resources and events to strengthen marriage as a covenantal relationship. www.covenantmarriage.ca

Enrich Canada provides tools for premarital and marital counselling. The program is intended to help the couple recognize the strengths and growth areas in their relationship, learn to resolve conflict, help with financial planning and budgeting, and focus on goals.

Enrich Canada, Inc., Postal Bag 2042, St. Albert, Alberta T8N 2G3 Ph: 1-888-973-3850, Fax: 780-973-3850, www.prepareenrichcanada.com

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada provides information and analysis on issues of concern to the family, such as the uniqueness and benefits of marriage, family taxation and the care of children.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, ON L3R 0Y4 Ph: 905-479-5885, Fax: 905-479-4742, www.evangelicalfellowship.ca

Focus on the Family Canada has resources such as magazines, books, videos, seminars and radio and television broadcasts on marriage and family concerns. The goal of Focus on the Family is to support, encourage and strengthen the family through education and resources.

Focus on the Family Canada, PO Box 9800, Stn. Terminal, Vancouver, BC V6B 4G3 Ph: 604-539-7900, Fax: 604-539-7999, www.fotf.ca

Marriage Encounter is a marriage enrichment weekend during which a couple is guided in new techniques of communication and sharing with one another. Worldwide Marriage Encounter office is in San Bernardino, California, *ph: 909-863-9963*. For denominational affiliates in Canada, see their website www.wwme.org.

Marriage Ministries International is intended to help couples improve their marriages through classes, seminars, tapes and books. MMI runs Married for Life groups, a 13 week course which teaches how to apply Scriptural principles to marriage.

MMI Canadian Directors, P.O. Box 4525, Stn Main, Regina, SK S4P 3W7 Ph: 306-545-5500, www.mmi.ca

Retrouvaille offers a program to help heal and renew troubled marriages. Retrouvaille is open to couples who are thinking of separation or divorce, or who have already separated. Retrouvaille is a Catholic program which welcomes couples of other faith expressions. Retrouvaille began as a weekend for hurting couples in Québec in 1977, and has grown internationally since 1982. Retrouvaille has locations in various provinces. See website for more details: www.retrouvaille.org

Endnotes

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A Christian Affirmation of Marriage

(for use by couples, groups and congregations)

We Believe...

- Ⓢ **That God's intention for marriage is established throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments;**
- Ⓢ **That God ordained marriage as a voluntary union for life of one man and one woman;**
- Ⓢ **That sexual intimacy is legitimate only within the bounds of marriage;**
- Ⓢ **That Christian marriage is not simply a contract between two persons, but is a covenant ratified in the presence of God;**
- Ⓢ **That in Christian marriages, the Church acts as an agent of God's blessing, as a primary witness and as a supportive community; and**
- Ⓢ **That a healthy marriage is the best foundation for families and the raising of children.**