

Freedom, the Family and the Market

*THE SOCIALIST ATTACK
ON THE FAMILY*

JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE

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Freedom, the Family and the Market

THE **SOCIALIST ATTACK**
ON THE FAMILY

JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE, Ph.D



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Many critics accuse capitalism of destroying the family. Industrialism drew fathers out of the home to earn a living, and a hundred years later, mothers followed them. But economic pressures on the family are incidental to the main structures of the market economy. By contrast, the Socialist attack on marriage has been central to Socialist ideology from the beginning, and continues right down to the present hour. We free market advocates sometimes view Socialism as principally an economic ideology, with the attacks on the family as a mere side-show. I believe it is more accurate to view the Socialist deconstruction of marriage as a second front in their attempt to centralize society under the control of the state.

In this booklet, I will make three points. First, I will show that Socialists are just as committed to abolishing the universal institution of marriage as they were to abolish the universal institution of private property. Second, I will show that the Socialist program of eliminating gender differences and abolishing marriage have serious consequences for economic and personal freedom. Finally, I will argue that Christianity offers more appealing solutions to the problems socialism claims to solve.

I Gender and Marriage in Socialist Thought

Looking at American sexual politics, one might conclude that absolute sexual equality in all areas of life is something desperate Socialists invented when they realized they could never win on purely economic issues. But Socialism has had marriage in its cross-hairs from the very

beginning. Frederick Engels equated the dominance of men over women with the dominance of capitalists over workers. He writes of an early, almost mythical period in which group marriage without concern for parentage, was the norm. According to Engels, the transition from group marriage to monogamy marked the beginning of the subordination of women:

*The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.*¹

“The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex.”

He argues further that the economic and legal status of women is intimately connected to the organization of the household. I ask your indulgence for an extensive quotation from Engels. I’m not, as they say, making this up.

The legal inequality of the two partners bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions is not the cause, but the effect of the economic oppression of women. In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to women of managing the household was as much a public, a socially necessary, industry as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participa-

¹ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, originally published 1884, edited, with an Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock, (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 120-121.

tion in social production...

Within the family, the husband is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat. ...The first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry. This in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished.²

This perspective of Engels helps explain why so many on the Left have been essentially undisturbed by the failure of the Soviet Union. Free market advocates didn't appreciate that the command economy was only one front on the war for a collective society. The collectivization of the family is the other and perhaps the more serious front.

The yearning for the mythic communal past of group marriage and group responsibility for childcare explains a number of the priorities of the Life-style Left. Women belong in market employment, not simply because they enjoy the work or need the money, but because working mothers require some form of childcare outside of the home. The Left is indifferent to the rise in unmarried child-bearing and the increase in the divorce rate because these "alternative family forms" reduce the dependence of women on their children's biological father.

² Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, originally published 1884, edited, with an Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock, (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 136-138.

II Fiscal and Freedom Consequences of Abolishing Gender and Marriage.

A. REGULATION OF THE LABOR AND EDUCATION MARKETS

I will now show that weakening marriage diminishes both economic and personal freedom. Many of us support the stated feminist objective of creating equal opportunities and incomes for men and women. But even this relatively innocuous goal gave the Left political entrée into regulating wages and working conditions that American society would never have accepted any other way. Full income equality requires equal behaviors not only in the market, but also at home. Men and women are so different that they are highly unlikely to volunteer to behave identically in all the ways that would be necessary to create identical incomes.³

So we not only have laws against wage discrimination. We have regulations for hiring, firing and promotion, rules about workplace behavior that might create a “hostile environment.” We have regulations of the schools to make sure women and girls feel welcome, so much so that women now outnumber men in most undergraduate programs. The federal government demands equality in college athletic programs, and some feminists advocate regulating the numbers of students in math, science and engineering programs. Socialist Spain even passed a law requiring hus-

³ For a summary of the evidence on gender differences, see *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, by Steven E. Rhoads, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004) and Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain*, (New York: Perseus Books, 2003).

bands to do half of all housework.⁴

B. DIVORCE AND THE ELIMINATION OF THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Because the Left considers monogamous marriage a central part of the capitalist system of private property, they put enormous energy into destabilizing marriage. Liberalizing divorce laws was one of the first actions of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917,⁵ and of the Socialist government in Spain in 2005.⁶

Family courts tell fathers how much money they have to spend on their children.

Our American experience with no-fault divorce illustrates why the advocates of centralized state power are so interested in divorce. Presented to the public as a great expansion of personal liberty, no-fault divorce has led to an increase in the power of the government over individual private lives.

No-fault divorce frequently means unilateral divorce: one party wants a divorce against the wishes of the other, who wants to stay married. Therefore, the divorce has to be enforced. The coercive machinery of the state is wheeled into action to separate the reluctantly divorced party from the joint assets of the marriage, typically the home and the children.

Family courts tell fathers how much money they

4 "Housework looms for Spanish Men," BBC News, June 17, 2005.

5 Carl Anderson, "The Family Beyond Ideology," *Familia et Vita*, Anno XI, No. 3/2006-1/2007, (Vatican City State: Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia) Congresso Internazionale Teologico-Pastorale, Valencia July 4, 2006). The very first decree of the new Soviet government repealed the marriage laws. The Soviet Family Code of 1919 entirely rejected the religious character of marriage, by providing only for civil marriage. The Soviet Family Code of 1926 granted legal rights to civil marriages only.

6 "Spain's divorce rate soars after rules relaxed," *The UK Guardian*, November 17, 2007.

have to spend on their children, and how much time they get to spend with them. Courts tell mothers whether they can move away from their children's father. Courts rule on whether the father's attendance at a Little League game, a public event that anyone can attend, counts toward his visitation time. Courts rule on which parent gets to spend Christmas Day with the children, down to and including the precise time of day they must turn the child over to the other parent.

***The
break-up
of families
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Involving the family court in the minutiae of family life amounts to an unprecedented blurring of the boundaries between public and private life. People under the jurisdiction of the family courts can have virtually all of their private lives subject to its scrutiny.

If the courts are influenced by ideology such as feminism, that ideology reaches into every bedroom and kitchen in America.⁷

C. UNMARRIED CHILDBEARING AND EXPANSION OF STATE POWER.

At the same time, the break-up of families, or the failure to form families, leads to an expansion of state authority and expense. Children from disrupted families do worse than the children of intact married couple households in virtually every way.⁸ Children are more likely to

7 *Taken Into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage and the Family*, Stephen Baskerville, (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, 2007).

8 For useful summaries, see "Do Moms and Dads Matter? Evidence from the Social Sciences on Family Structure and the Best Interests of the Child," Maggie Gallagher and Joshua Baker, *Margins*, 4:161-180, 2004; "Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children and What Can We Do About It?" Kristen Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek and Carol Emig, *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002; *Smart Sex: Finding Life-long Love in a Hook-up World*, Jennifer

have physical and mental health problems. Even accounting for income, fatherless boys are more likely to be aggressive⁹ and to ultimately become incarcerated.¹⁰ A recent British study offers tantalizing hints about the possibility that the children of single mothers are more likely to become schizophrenic.¹¹ And an extensive study of family structure in Sweden took account of the mental illness history of the parents, as well as the family's socio-economic status. Yet even in the most generous welfare state in the world, with very accepting attitudes toward unmarried parenthood, the children of single parents were at significantly higher risk of psychiatric disease, suicide attempts, and substance abuse.¹²

All of these social pathologies are expensive to the taxpayer and painful to the individuals. Most people would consider this be a disadvantage of family break-down. But Marxists do not share this view. From their perspective, the family is a conservative tool for "privatizing" the care of the young, a responsibility that ought to be assumed by the state.

Consider this statement by a NYU "Queer Studies" professor:

Married-couple households might "relieve" the state of the expense of helping to support single-parent households, and of the cost of a wide range of social services, from childcare and

Roback Morse, (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing, 2005).

9 "Household Family Structure and Children's Aggressive Behavior: A Longitudinal Study of Urban Elementary School Children," Nancy Vaden-Kiernan, Nicholas S. Ialongo, Jane Pearson and Sheppard Kellan, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 23(5) 553-568, (1995)

10 "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration," Cynthia C. Harper and Sara S. McLanahan, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 14(3) 369-397 (2004).

11 "Schizophrenia much more likely in children of single parents," Sarah Hall, *UK Guardian*, November 2, 2006.

12 "Mortality, severe morbidity and injury in children living with single parents in Sweden: a population-based study," Gunilla Ringback Weitof, Anders Hjern, Bengt Haglund, Mans Rosen, *The Lancet*, 361(9354) (January 25, 2003).

disability services to home nursing. Marriage thus becomes a privatization scheme: Individual married-couple households give women and children access to higher men's wages, and also "privately" provide many services once offered through social welfare agencies. More specifically, the unpaid labor of married women fills the gap created by government service cuts.¹³

In other words, the default position is that the state is responsible for the care of the mother and her child. No word from our professor about what fathers do with themselves after the state has relieved them of all responsibility for their children.

The latest Leftist strategy has been to insist that marriage should not be "privileged" as the normal context for child-rearing. The state should be "neutral" and not discriminate among family forms. To see that this demand is not as reasonable as it sometimes sounds, imagine someone making the comparable argument for free markets.

They might argue that government should be neutral between private property and collective property, between enforcing contracts or not. People who want contracts should pay to enforce them. They should not ask the government to subsidize their private, and possibly irrational preferences for private property and contracts.

No free market advocate could accept this claim that the state should be indifferent between a centrally-planned economy and a market-ordered economy. An economy built on the ideas in **The Communist Manifesto** will necessarily look quite different from an economy built on the ideas in **The Wealth of Nations**. The debate between socialism and capitalism is not a

13 "Holy Matrimony!" *The Nation*, March 2004, NY University Queer Studies Professor, Lisa Duggan.

debate over how to accommodate different opinions, but over how the economy actually works. Everything from the law of contracts to anti-trust law to commercial law will be a reflection of some basic understanding of how the economy works in fact.

Similarly, the debate over marriage is a debate about what marriage is and how it works in fact. I claim the sexual urge is a natural engine of sociability, which solidifies the relationship between spouses and brings children into being. Others claim that human sexuality is a private recreational good, with neither moral nor social significance. I claim that children have the best life chances when they are raised by married, biological parents.

Others believe children are so adaptable that having unmarried parents presents no significant problems. Some people believe that marriage is a special case of free association of individuals. I say the details of this particular form of free association are so distinctive as to make marriage a unique social institution that deserves to be defended on its own terms, and not as a special case of something else.

One side in this dispute is mistaken. There is enormous room for debate, but there ultimately is no room for compromise. The legal institutions, social expectations and cultural norms will all reflect some view or other about the meaning of marriage. Trying to build a free society without marriage is like trying to build a prosperous economy without property rights. It sounds good on the chalkboard, but in reality, it simply can't be done.

Many women, particularly lower income and less educated women, now raise children completely on their own.

D. UNMARRIED CHILDBEARING AND THE DESTRUCTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

But perhaps the most destructive result of the attack on marriage has been the destruction of the little civil society of the family. In most societies, in most times and places, the married couple is the most basic unit of social cooperation. A man and a woman come together spontaneously to create a child and then work together to raise that child. Marxists believe that this cooperation is a fiction, a mere cover for a relationship of male power and domination.¹⁴

In countries where this belief has been institutionalized, the combination of government taxes and benefits subsidizes unmarried motherhood. According to Patricia Morgan writing for the Institute for Economic Affairs in London, some British government officials hold that “the treatment of a married couple as a single financial unit... is to be discouraged, along with any predisposition in favor of the nuclear family.” The State is presumed responsible for the support of the children of unmarried parents. For all practical purposes, the married and the childless are taxes to pay for the children of the unmarried.

The results of this discrimination against marriage is that many women, particularly lower income and less educated women, now raise children completely on their own, with little or no assistance from the child’s father. The number of children being born to unmarried mothers has increased from 8% in 1970 to 42% in 2004, in the UK.¹⁵ In the US, 37% of children are now born to unmarried mothers. Among African Americans, over 70% of children are born to unmarried mothers.

14 For a detailed and sophisticated treatment of this theme, see Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

15 *The War Between the State and the Family: How Government Divides and Impoverishes*, by Patricia Morgan, (London: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007)

It is instructive to look at the country most influenced by Marxist ideas: Russia. The old Soviet Union implemented all the main Socialist ideas: the family and civil society were destroyed along with the economy. The result is one of the most unstable and unhealthy situations in the world.

Because the Soviets discouraged marriage and wrecked the economy, Russia is in the bottom 5% of fertility rates in the world. At 1.27 babies per woman, the Russian population will be nearly halved every generation.¹⁶ Russia's average age is now 43.4, compared with a US average age of 35.8 and a Japanese average age of 42.¹⁷

Because people were expected to spy on each other for the last two generations, no one trusts anyone else. This further weakens the economy and reduces the propensity to marry and have children. The net result is that the Russian worker who is expected to support a rapidly aging population will be less healthy and less productive than virtually any other in the developed world.¹⁸

Marriage is the proper context for both sexual activity and for child-rearing.

16 Data from 2005, *The World Factbook*, US Central Intelligence Agency

17 "Growing Old the Hard Way: China, Russia and India," Nicholas Eberstadt, *Policy Review*, April/May 2006.

18 Between the mid-1960s and the start of the twenty-first century, the country's age-standardized death rates climbed by over 15 percent for women and by a shocking 40 percent for men. This upswing in mortality was especially concentrated among the group of "working age," where the upsurges in death rates were breathtaking. (Between 1970–71 and 2003, for example, every female cohort between the ages of 25 and 59 suffered at least a 40 percent increase in death rates; for men between the ages of 30 and 64, the corresponding figures uniformly exceeded 50 percent, and some cases exceeded 80 percent. Demographers and public health specialists do not fully understand the reasons for these gruesome results. Diet, smoking, sedentary lifestyles, and health care (or the lack of it) all play their part. Russia's romance with the vodka bottle is also deeply implicated here. Part of the mystery of the ongoing Russian health disaster, however, is that the problem looks to be worse than the sum of its parts: that is to say, death

E. NO EQUALITY FOR THE WEAK

While the Left has made an idol out of equality between men and women, it has become clear that many people are necessarily excluded from its concern with equality. The physically weak, the incapacitated, and the disabled can never be made the equal of the strong.¹⁹ Under the influence of Leftist ideas, many countries exclude these people from the most basic protections of law. The infant in the womb has been excluded in many secularized countries from any legal protections whatsoever. Euthanasia is often described as “mercy killing.” But it has become clear that it is really Killing for Convenience.²⁰

It is not simply that the infirm are not useful, as one might expect from a purely utilitarian approach so typical of the market place. The infirm are an affront to the ideals of equality. The child in the womb is not the equal of an adult. The person at the end of his life can never again be the equal of the young and the fit. The disabled person, no matter how many resources are directed toward him, can never be made the equal of a person without disabilities. So they become non-persons. It is certainly the political Left, throughout the world, that has promoted these policies, and has offered the most elaborate justifications for them.

rates are significantly higher than one would predict on the basis of observed risk factors alone. “Growing Old the Hard Way: China, Russia and India,” Nicholas Eberstadt, *Policy Review*, April/May 2006.

19 I made this argument in my article, “Making Room in the Inn: Why the Modern World Needs the Needy,” in *Wealth, Poverty and Human Destiny*, Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler, eds. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002)

20 See *The Party of Death: The Democrats, the Media, the Courts, and the Disregard for Human Life*, by Ramesh Ponnuru, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2006), especially Chapter 10, entitled, “The Doctor Will Kill You Now.”

III The More Appealing Vision of Christianity

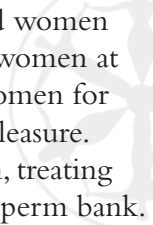
Fortunately, the Christian Church proposes an alternative vision of life, and of what is truly valuable and worth pursuing. Christianity insists that we “defend the weak,” which is a very different ethical mandate from “create equality.” Defending the weak includes the right to life from conception until natural death. Our enemies worldwide are primarily from the left end of the political spectrum, who demand equality for every other group in every other circumstance, other than the life-threatening ones.

It is time to weave the life of the family into this vision of free and virtuous market participants.

Christianity also offers a different vision of gender, which embraces the differences between men and women as part of the divine plan for teaching love, and drawing us out of our natural self-centeredness. Marriage is inherently a gender-based institution, because it helps men and women to bridge the natural differences between them. Marriage is the school and household of love. Within the household, men and women learn to help each other, to cooperate with each other and to understand each other.²¹

This is very different from the Socialist image of husbands and wives at each other's throats, in competition for dominance and power inside their own homes. Socialists insist that love, sex and reproduction be separated from each

²¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, made this point eloquently in “The Collaboration of Women and Men in the Church and in the World.”



other, for the sake of making men and women equal. But this view places men and women at odds with each other. Men exploit women for sex, seeing them as objects that give pleasure. Women exploit men for reproduction, treating them as a combination of wallet and sperm bank.

The Christian vision insists that marriage is the proper context for both sexual activity and for child-rearing. The man's sexual desire for woman turns him toward love for her. Christianity insists that his love for her be connected with love for the children she bears. The woman's desire for children turns her heart toward the man who will be the father of her children. Christianity insists that she love her husband, rather than use him and discard him. Love, sex and child-bearing are all integrated with each other under the umbrella of marriage.

Christianity, combined with free market thinking, offers a different solution to economic inequality between men and women than does Socialism. Marxist-inspired feminism insisted on identical incomes for men and women, at every point in their lives. This misguided concept of justice has shaped forty years worth of public and corporate policy. But traditional male career trajectories demand the most intense investment early in life. By the time women have accomplished enough in their careers to feel financially prepared for motherhood, their peak fertility is behind them.

Women would be better off if we accepted the reality that our fertility peaks during our twenties. Go to college for a liberal, not a vocational, education. Get married. Have kids. Let your husband support you. Maybe go back to school for an advanced degree. Go to work. Help support the kids' college, and your joint retirement. And, since women live longer than men, we could be working longer and let our husbands relax a bit.

Of course, this vision of the workplace also involves an alternative vision of marriage and family. Marriage is a life-long institution for mutual cooperation and support, rather than the unenforceable non-contract it has become. I need not say that cooperation between spouses would be far better for children. Nor need I say that this is the exact opposite of the feminist vision, which replaced marital stability with employment stability.



Conclusion: the Christian Vision of a Civilization of Love

Catholic social teaching joins with the Dutch Reformed tradition of sphere sovereignty in defending the family as a social institution independent of the state, that has claims against the state. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul reiterates this point, originally made by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*. “He (Leo XIII) frequently insists on necessary limits to the State’s intervention and on its instrumental character, inasmuch as the family and society are prior to the State, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them.”²²

Freedom and virtue work together in a symbiotic relationship. The free economy allows individuals to use their talents for the good of the community. The market needs the leavening of the Gospel to moderate its excesses and to provide the virtuous participants who are the foundation of the market’s genius.

It is time to weave the life of the family into this

²² “*Centesimus Annus*,” para. 11.

vision of free and virtuous market participants. The market can not float on its own bottom, but needs the other institutions of civil society. Just as the market needs religion to cultivate virtue, the market also needs the family to socialize children, to teach cooperation and to move society forward into the next generation. The Christian social vision focuses on the human person and his capacity for love. Christianity respects the family as the great pre-political social institution, and marriage as the most basic unit of social cooperation. The family shapes the next generation and transmits the culture's values to them. The family truly is the cradle of any civilization, especially the civilization of freedom and of love.





The Ruth Institute promotes lifelong married love to college students by creating an intellectual and social climate favorable to marriage.

Ruth's Core Values

- * Marriage as the proper context for sex and childrearing
- * Respect for the contributions of men to the family
- * Marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman
- * Lifelong spousal cooperation as a solution to women's aspirations for career and family
- * Cooperation, not competition, between men and women

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