

The **BOISI CENTER** *for*

RELIGION *and* AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

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**THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE AND THE
FAMILY**

“Marriage”

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BOISI CENTER
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FIRST THINGS

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

by Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass

November 1995

The authors of this essay on names have just identified themselves. Well, not quite. For the sake of full disclosure, they are willing to have it known that they have the same last name not by coincidence or consanguinity but because they are married to each other (and have been for over thirty-four years). Some will suspect that this biographical fact is responsible for the authors' attitudes toward names and naming. The authors respectfully submit that the reverse is closer to the truth, that their attitude toward names and naming-and the many things that they have slowly come to understand about what names imply-is responsible for this paramount biographical fact. This essay is a first attempt to articulate, not least for themselves, what they have tacitly understood.

I

Everybody has a name. Nearly everybody who has a name knows what it is. Our name is as familiar and as close to us as our own skin; indeed, we are more frequently aware of our name than we are of the unique living body that it identifies. We write it, speak it, answer to it-often, immediately, surely, unreflectively. We generally take our name for granted. But, for these reasons, in a deeper sense we may not really know our name-what it means, why we have it, how it should be regarded and used. Paradoxically, by dint of being so familiar, the manifest mystery of our named identity may have become invisible to us. We name ourselves and others, but do we really know what we are doing when we do so?

To name is to identify. But what this means depends on the meaning of names, the meaning of identity, and the relation between the name and the thing named. Most common names, unlike personal names, are

merely pointers, holding no deeper meanings for the named. A rose by any other name would surely smell as sweet. The lion were he called a lamb would still be king of beasts. And human beings, whether known as *anthropoi*, *virii*, *beney adam*, or *menschen*, remain unalterably rational, animal, and just as mortal. Like the names that Adam gave the animals, these names designate but do not determine the thing. They are merely conventional handles for grasping the beings handled, which, because they are already naturally distinct and distinctive, beg only to be recognized with names peculiarly their own. In naming beings distinctively we do little more than acknowledge the articulated and multiform character of the given world.

Not all acts of naming are so innocent. Sometimes they actually shape and form the things they name. Such creative naming is, for example, especially characteristic of the biblical God, Who, in the account of creation given in the first chapter of Genesis, names five things: light, darkness, the firmament, the dry land, and the gathered waters. As Robert Sacks observes,

We can best grasp the significance of naming by comparing the things God named with the names God gives them. Light was called day, darkness was called night. The firmament was called heaven, the dry place was called land, the water was called sea. Darkness is not light, water is not dry. What more does a name add? The Hebrew word translated “firmament” which God called heaven comes from the root meaning “to beat.” Workmen pound copper until it spreads out into a thin amorphous sheet, then form it and cut it and give it shape. Light and darkness, wet and dry, like the thinly pounded sheet of copper, seem to be an indefinite morass, each having its own quality, but each spreading out beyond the human imagination. But the day ends when night comes and the seas end at the shoreline, and the firmament becomes a whole when it becomes the sky. Without names, there would still be distinctions. There would be love and there would be hate, but bravery would shade off into foolhardiness, and we would lose the clarity of thought.

God’s naming clarifies, delimits, bounds, shapes, and makes intelligible. Like the creation itself, which proceeds by acts of speech (which are in turn always acts embodying and producing *separations*), these acts of naming bring order to chaos, the discrete to the continuous, definition to the indefinite, shapely and

recognizable form to the merely qualitative.

Human naming, though perforce an act of speech and hence of reason, is, however, frequently colored by human passions such as fear, pride, hope, and lust. The names Adam gave the animals may have been disinterested, but not so the names he gives to himself and to the woman when she is brought before him: "This now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; and this shall be called woman (*ishah*) because she was taken out of man (*ish*)." Previously called (by God and by the narrator) *adam*, human being (*adam* is not a personal name but a species name), the man now names himself "male human being," *ish*, in relation to "female human being," *ishah*. It is her (naked) appearance before him ("*before him*" both literally and lexically, in his quoted speech) that makes him feel his maleness; the carnal remark, "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh," strikes us as the verbalization of sexual desire; the man looks upon the woman as if she were his missing half, to which he now feels powerfully drawn in a desire for fusion. At the very least, one must admit that his delight in her leads him to exaggerate the degree to which she is "his own," more same than other, and to see her as an exteriorized portion of himself. This is not the voice of pure reason naming; and the name, born of his desire, has consequences for their relationship.

Later, a different passion will lead the man to rename the woman, this time without reference to himself. Hearing in God's grim prophecy of the dismal human future (sorrow, sweat, toil, and death) the only good news, namely, that the woman will bear children, he grasps at this straw of hope, renaming the woman Eve (*Chavah*) because she is the mother of all living (*chai*). From Adam's hopefulness Eve gets the first genuinely proper name given in the Bible.

What, then, is the case with our proper names, our personal names, the names we carry throughout our lives? Are they merely arbitrary and conventional handles that serve simply to designate and uniquely pick us out of a crowd? Or do our names, like those given by God, have power to shape our lives? Which passions do and should govern acts of naming: when we name, do we express desires for ourselves (*ishah*) or hopes for the future of others (*Chavah*)? Is it a matter of substantial indifference what we are called, what we call ourselves, or what we call others?

As we do not (generally) name ourselves, we normally do not encounter these questions in our daily lives. True, as Americans, sharing in the English common law of names, we have the right freely to change our

names, as often as we please, and not a few young people take advantage of this privilege. But it rarely even occurs to most of us that we could change our names; we accept without question what we have been given and we unthinkingly regard changing our given name as like violating a sacred order. But this seemingly “given” order of names is, in fact, the product of conscious human choice. Thus, all the questions about the meaning of naming clearly do confront us, at least implicitly, when we name our children.

The first gift of parents to a child, after the gift of life itself, is its name. Like the given life it names, the given name is a gift for a lifetime—indeed, for more than a lifetime; when we are gone, our name carved in stone and the memories it evokes will be, for nearly all of us, all that remains. Here is a gift that is not only permanent but possibly life-shaping. Here is a gift that cannot be refused; here is a gift that cannot easily be put aside; here is a gift that must be worn and that straightway not only marks but constitutes one’s identity.

On what basis does one select a gift, especially a gift of such importance? Generally speaking, one gives gifts that one thinks someone will like and appreciate, or one gives gifts that one thinks will be fitting and suitable, or one gives gifts that one thinks will be helpful and good. But in the gift of a name, even more than with other gifts to the newborn (as clothing or toys), one has no idea whatsoever which name will prove likable, which name will prove suitable, which name will be helpful to the human being who, at the time of naming, is virtually unknown and unknowable, and largely pure potentiality. The awesome mystery of individuated human life announces itself in this nameless and unknowable stranger, who must nonetheless be called by a proper name. Faced with our invincible ignorance, we parents are forced to consult our own thoughts and feelings, though, it is to be hoped, without in the least forgetting the future welfare of our child. Though we necessarily will be moved by what pleases or suits or inspires us, we do well when we remember that it is the child who must live with and live out the identity we thus confer upon him or her.

II

Some of the considerations that might reasonably enter into choosing a name are obvious. Parents will want a name that, in conjunction with the family name, is euphonic, or, at least will not sound bad (the authors rejected on this basis their first-choice name for a daughter, Rebekah Kass: too many “ka”s). Parents will avoid names that could easily become the object of ridicule (for example, the authors would never have

named a son Jack) or that would in other ways be likely to be burdensome to or resented by a typical child. Here parents will no doubt be guided both by their imaginations and by their own experience: they will surely remember the miseries inflicted by cruel or insensitive peers on one or another of their childhood acquaintances who had been saddled with a name too unusual, too pretentious, too quaint, too prissy, too foreign, or too stained by one of its disgraceful namesakes. Some parents, to avoid the dangers that befall those who stand out, especially among the conformist young, may well refrain from giving a name that is utterly without precedent—for it may not find in the child that gets it the strength to stand alone and apart. On the other hand, some parents, seeking to avoid the commonplace, may opt for something out of the ordinary, a name with charm or class or appealing novelty, implying thereby the wish to help the child gain distinction. In such matters, different parental choices will no doubt reflect reasonably differing parental attitudes toward the balance between standing out and standing within, between distinction and inclusion, between risk and safety.

Parents who give the matter some thought will try to choose a name that wears well not only during childhood but, even more, also during adulthood; for we bear our names much longer as adults than as children. Some names that are cute when worn in infancy or childhood seem ridiculous when attached to mature-or elderly-men and women. Connected with this matter of fitness are also considerations of likely nicknames and diminutives, both those to be given at home and those likely to be acquired at school or at play. One feels for the little fellow in postwar Shaker Heights whose pretentious, upwardly mobile Jewish parents named him Lancelot, and even more because they could not refrain from calling him by the affectionate (and standard) diminutive—which resounded through the streets when they called him in from play—"Lancelotkele." ("Latkele," gentle reader, is Yiddish for a small potato pancake, eaten traditionally at Hanukkah).

But these considerations are largely negative and serve mainly to prevent mistakes. They do not guide the positive choice. How then do we choose?

Whether we know it or not, the way we approach this serious, indeed awesome, task speaks volumes about our basic attitudes not only toward our children but also toward life. For we can name, just as we can live, in a spirit of self-indulgence and enjoyment, in a spirit of acquisition and appropriation, in a spirit of pride and domination, in a spirit of creativity, in a spirit of gratitude, in a spirit of blessing and dedication. Consider a

few of these possibilities.

One could give the child a name that pleases us. How could that be bad? You find your child a delight, so why not celebrate this fact with a name you find delightful? The wanted child is rewarded for being wanted by getting the wanted name, and now proves doubly pleasing to the parents. Granted, no parent who loves a child would choose for it a name he or she does not like. But is this sufficient? And what if the parent has strange tastes? A teacher of our acquaintance recently taught twin girls named—we do not jest—Lem”njello and Orangejello, after Lemon and Orange Jell-O, perhaps the mother’s favorite food. The flavors of the parents are visited upon the children. But, on this principle of pleasing the parental palate, who can criticize? *De gustibus non disputandum.*

One could also give the child a name that pleases us because it pleases others, that is, because it is fashionable or popular. American fashions in first names change dramatically, especially for naming little girls. Rarely does one encounter anymore a young woman named Prudence, Constance, Faith, Hope, or Charity—though biblical names have come somewhat back into vogue. No one we knew—or had even heard of—through our first thirty years was named Tiffany or Chelsea. Yet the ten most popular newly given girls’ names in New York City for 1992, as reported on records of new births, were (in order of popularity): Ashley, Stephanie, Jessica, Amanda, Samantha, Jennifer, Nicole, Michelle, Melissa, and Christina. (Challenge your friends who are over fifty, or who live in the sensible Midwest, to see if they can guess even three of the top ten.)

Curiously, the popular boys’ names continue to be traditional: New York’s top ten are Michael, Christopher, Jonathan, Anthony, Joseph, Daniel, David, Kevin, Matthew, and John. What this difference in boy-girl naming fashions means, especially in an age that purports at last to take women seriously, we leave for our readers to ponder.

Frivolity, self-indulgence, and love of fashion may not be the worst of attitudes. Other parents, more serious, will be moved by pride, not least by pride in the creation of a child. This may well be the paradigmatic natural attitude of parents, perhaps especially so with first-born children. Paternal pride in siring a chip off the old block leads fathers to name their first son after themselves, only Junior. But pride in childbirth is not the prerogative only of fathers. In the first (and, therefore, in our view probably prototypical) human birth

presented in Genesis, Eve proudly boasts of her creative power in the birth of Cain: “And she conceived and bore Cain (*kayin*), saying, ‘I have gotten (*kaniti*) a man [equally] with the Lord.’” (Most English translations have Eve say, piously, “with the help of the Lord,” but this is an interpolation. The context, in our view, favors this meaning: “God created a man, and now so have I.”) And, at first glance, why should she not be proud? She conceived, she carried, she labored, and she delivered, in short, she created a new life out of her own substance, a new life that is her own flesh and blood. Her pride in her creativity and “own-ership” of her son is celebrated in the name she gives him: *kayin*, from a root *kanah*, meaning to *possess*, perhaps also related to a root *koneh*, meaning to shape or make or create.

Cain, the pride of his mother’s bearing, bears the name of his mother’s pride, and tragically lives out the meaning of the name his mother gave him, the meaning, unbeknownst to her, of her tacit wish for him. He becomes a proud farmer, the sort of man who lays possessive claim to a portion of the earth, proud of his ability to bring forth fruit from the ground. He becomes a man who, his pride wounded, angrily kills his brother to reassert his place as number one. (When Eve, almost as an afterthought, had borne “his brother Abel,” there had been no celebration or boasting; she gave to him, unwittingly but prophetically, a name that means “breath that vanishes.”)

Eve, it seems, learns the folly of her naming ways. Chastened by the death of Abel and left bereft by the banishment of Cain, Eve renames her third son in a different, more humble, and grateful spirit: “And she *called* his name *Seth*, ‘for *God hath appointed* [*shath*] me another seed in *place* of Abel, whom Cain slew.’” (Emphasis added.) With death and the need for replacement now manifest before her, Eve this time enters upon the act of naming and parenthood in full awareness of the human condition, in full awareness that children are not human creations, in full self-consciousness of what it means to give a *name* (the word “name” and the phrase “called his name” were not used in the report of the births of Cain and Abel).

Despite their differences, naming as self-gratification, naming as appropriation, naming as expressing pride, and naming as creativity have this in common: they all take their meaning from and refer back to the activities of the parents. They do not centrally consider the independent being of the child, or the meaning of the child understood as one who must someday stand forth as the parents’ replacement. Considerations such as these at least tacitly inform the activity of naming for those parents who seek by means of the name to express, in full seriousness, their best hopes and wishes for the child. Such parents will choose a name

that imparts personal or human meaning. They may stress continuity of family line, by naming a son for the father, a daughter for a grandmother. They may memorialize some worthy friend or ancestor, whose fine qualities they hope to see replicated in the child. They may name after prophets or saints or other historical or literary figures, in the hope of promoting emulation or at least admiration through namesake identification. In these various ways, parents identify their children not with themselves but with what they look up to and respect. In such namings, parents, at the very least, express their fondest hopes-blessing, as it were, their children through names of blessed memory or elevated standing. At best, they thereby dedicate themselves to the work of making good the promise conveyed in the good name thus bestowed.

The solemnity of such naming, and its meaning as dedication, is, of course, evident when names are given within religious ceremonies. At a baptism, the newborn child is symbolically purified, sanctified, and received by name into the Christian community, obtaining his or her name in an act of christening or baptizing. The child is reborn by being named in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, an implicit promise by the parents to rear the child in the ways of the Lord. Among its other intentions, baptism denies the parents' natural tendency to think of the child as property or as an object of pride and power. During the ceremony, the parents ritually hand the child over to the minister or to godparents, representatives of the church and community, literally enacting the meaning of naming as dedication. The name given is understood to be eternal, inscribed in the Book of Life.

At a *brith milah*, the Jewish act of ritual circumcision, male children on the eighth day of life enter into the covenant between God and the seed of Abraham, obtaining at this time their given Hebrew name (here, too, the boy is handed over to the godfather for the ceremony); daughters are publicly named in the synagogue soon after birth. Often, the meaning of the name and the reasons for its choice are publicly discussed as the name is given. The prayer for both Jewish sons and daughters that accompanies their naming is for a life that embraces *Torah* (learning and observance), *Chuppah* (marriage and family), and *Maasim Tovim* (good deeds). Names given in such contexts are, at least implicitly, understood to be sanctifications and dedications.

It is, of course, not possible to gauge the spirit of the act of naming simply from the name given. The name of a beloved forebear may be perpetuated not because of what made him lovable but, say, because of benefits received by the namer or as a result of family expectation or as an expression of mere sentimentality. In a family we know, for example, a man named his son after his deceased father, a man of unrivaled goodness

and gentleness, admired and loved by everyone who knew him, without exception or qualification. As it happens, the boy not only carries the grandfather's name; because he is and will be the only male child of his generation, the entire family name resides now with him. But such thoughts are alien to, even resisted by, his father, who believes that the past must be happily buried. No attempt has been made to teach the son anything about the grandfather-about his life, his character, his beliefs. Not before the boy was thirteen did he get to see a photograph of the man for whom he was named, and then only by accident in another relative's house. The boy's father, a radical, preaches and encourages distrust of tradition and authority, and now finds the teenage chicken coming home to roost. Here we have the name, ringing hollow, without a grain of the legacy. The name, like the grandfather, was liked, not revered or even properly appreciated. The child, not surprisingly, has grasped and inherited the paternal principle: "the past is dead, follow your likes." Already separating himself from his own past, he sets out to create his own identity, making himself into whatever he wishes.

Parents should, however, be mindful of the gap between hope and fact, between promise and realization. Especially when the dream implicit in the name is great, there is a danger that the name will be to the child more a burden than an inspiration. On this ground, a prospective name for our son (never born), favored by one of us, Abraham Lincoln, was vetoed by the more sensible spouse. Nature may not be cooperative, native gifts may be missing, serious illness or accident may deform and limit, and, even in the most propitious circumstances, parental plans and aspirations-even modest ones-often go unrealized, not least because well-meaning and devoted parents sometimes fail to recognize sufficiently the radical individuality of each child. For this reason, one names best when one names not only with dedication but also with modesty and humility, mindful of the child's separate identity and ultimate independence. The identity given by means of the given name *de facto* recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of the life its bearer will live.

Naming a child thus anticipates exactly the central difficulty of child-rearing altogether: how to communicate unconditional love for the child-just-as-he-now-is, at the same time as one is doing all in one's power to encourage and to help him to become better (which is to say, more truly lovable). A name, likable here and now but also bearing hope and promise, fits the good-enough-but-potentially-much-better kind of being that is the human child (indeed, is the human being throughout life). Defining the child now but also for later, the given but independent name also looks forward to the time when-thanks to good rearing-he will be able to write his own named account in the Book of Life.

The given name, given seriously, thus provides identity and individuality but within family and community; recognizes continuity with lives of the past but bears hopes and promises for the new life in the future; embodies general aspiration but acknowledges individual distinction; reflects both present affection and desire for future improvement; acknowledges at least tacitly that one's child is to be one's replacement; celebrates the joyous wonder of the renewal of human possibility while accepting the awesome responsibility for helping that possibility to be realized; and pays homage to the mysterious source of human life and human individuality.

In all these ways, the naming of a child is, in fact, an emblem of the entire parent-child relation, in both its human generality and its radical particularity. Human children are born naked and nameless, like the animals; they become humanized only through rearing, the work not of nature but of acts of speech and symbolic deed, including praise and blame, reward and punishment, custom, habituation, and education. They become humanized, in the first instance, at the hands of parents, who, among other duties, try steadily to teach children how to call all things by their proper names and to show them how to acquire a good name for themselves.

III

Mention of calling things by their proper names prompts a digression on the proper usage of proper names, itself a central issue of propriety. In fact, it was observations on the prevalent use and misuse of given or first names that, long ago, aroused our interest in the subject of naming in the first place.

As amateur observers of the American social scene, we are struck by how much more of our public social life is nowadays conducted on a first-name basis. The open-faced waiter in the yuppie restaurant begins not with, "Good evening. Are you ready to order?" but with, "Hi, I'm Sherman. I'm your server this evening, and I'd like to tell you about our specials." The gynecologist and all members of his staff (including the barely post-adolescent receptionist) call all the patients by their first names, even on first encounter. In the home for the aged, venerable ladies and gentlemen are uniformly called Sadie or Annie, Herman or Mike, by people who will never know a tenth of what some of the elderly have forgotten. Small children are not

taught to call uncles and aunts Uncle Leon and Aunt Amy, but plain Leon and Amy. Children of all ages are generally allowed to call all grown-up guests in the home by their first names, even on first meeting. At social mixers, the typical tag is for first names only: "Hello, My Name is Steffie." Total strangers, soliciting for stock brokerages or the local police museum, call during dinner oozing familiarity, asking to speak to Leon or Amy (not knowing that they have thus completely blown their slim chance of success). Students introduce themselves to one another, to their teachers, or to the parents of their friends by first names only. Even some college professors and many members of the clergy prefer to be called by their first names, even when in class or in church and synagogue.

The motives for and reasons behind such increased familiarity are numerous and sometimes complex, and surely vary from case to case. A policy favoring forward but easy amiability, thought useful for putting everyone in a good mood and making them feel at home, is no doubt part of the waiter's conduct; but there is probably also calculation that guests will be more inclined to leave a larger tip for a named "acquaintance" than for a merely anonymous servant. The gynecologist may believe he is creating a homey atmosphere that will overcome his patient's anxieties and embarrassments; but he is culpably unaware that calling vulnerable strangers by their first names is patronizing, condescending, and unprofessional, that it contributes further to the indignity of being a patient, that most women receiving pelvic examinations will not be made more comfortable by a physician who makes himself improperly familiar, and that the patient's unavoidable exposure and shame are precisely what demands that every effort should be made to uphold the patient's dignity. Informality is thought to be a boon to equality and fellow-feeling; titles like Uncle and Aunt, or even Mr. or Ms., are distancing and hierarchical. They get in the way of easy sociability, made possible when everybody, regardless of age or station, is equally just plain Bill.

The change in usage, whatever one thinks of it, is symptomatic of a general breakdown of the boundaries between public and private life, between formal and familiar, between grown-up and childish, between high and low, refined and vulgar, sacred and profane. This leveling of boundaries is itself entirely American, which is to say, it is the result of the relentless march of the democratic spirit, under the twin banners of equality and individualism. But there is something novel and especially revealing-and also especially worrisome-in the self-identification of young students away from home at college.

When we were in college-at the University of Chicago in the 1950s and early 1960s-our teachers called us by

our last names, usually prefaced by Mr. or Miss; in class, we were taught to refer to our peers—even our friends—in the same formal way. This civil convention, by the way, applied equally to the faculty: no one was Professor or Doctor, everyone was Mr. or Mrs. or Miss. We did not then fully appreciate the profound good sense of these customs, but we liked them nonetheless. No longer patronized as we had been by our teachers in high school, we were being treated respectfully, like grown-ups; indeed, in name (at least) we were superficially the equals of our instructors. This was flattering, this was encouraging; this, accordingly, induced emulation and a higher level of speech and conduct in the classroom.

But the purpose of this formal nominal equality was not, in fact, to flatter the students but to mirror and encourage our shared human work. Though we were encouraged to think and speak for ourselves, speech was not personalized and the person of the speaker was not authoritative; what the teacher said, and what we ourselves said, was given weight not because of the rank of the one who said it—for we were nominally of the same rank—but only because of its truthfulness or reasonableness. Shared logos, and the joint effort to understand, made the classroom a community of fellow-learners, not just an aggregate of sometimes overlapping, sometimes clashing personal interests. Objections and criticisms of one another were muted and civil: the casual language of the street, “Leon, you dolt,” was replaced by “Mr. Kass, what is your evidence?” Familiarity, not to speak of intimacy, between teacher and student (or even between student and student) was neither assumed nor promised; like all real friendships, it had to be earned.

But though friendships with teachers occasionally developed, our eye was not on such personal matters. We were courting the greater self-respect that comes with adult accomplishment. To hear ourselves called after the manner of our parents (in the case of males, exactly as our fathers were called) dimly reminded us not only who we were and where we came from but also that we were stepping forward to prepare to take our parents' place.

Now, teachers at the University of Chicago, we still continue these practices; we are known as Mrs. Kass and Mr. Kass, we call our male students Mr. and our female students Miss, Mrs., or Ms. (as they wish), and we insist that the students in class refer to one another in the same way. Our students do not protest, nearly all acquire the habit, and some have even told us how much they appreciate the contribution such civility makes to the atmosphere of learning.

But we are a vanishing breed. And we have noticed in recent years, outside of classes, a marked decline in student use of last names. If we attend a dinner in the dorms, if unfamiliar students come to office hours, if we overhear them introducing themselves to one another, we hear them give only their first names: “Hello, I’m Susie.” To be sure, this is friendliness, this is informality, this is individuality. But this is also, we believe, in many cases, a tacit but quite definite denial of their origins, of their roots in families. “Hello, I’m Susie” implicitly means “I am Susie, short for *sui generis*.” Changing usages regarding last names reflect changing mores regarding the meaning of last names, which in turn reflect-and may also contribute to-the changing structure of marriage and family life.

IV

Last names or family names are of relatively recent origin in the West, becoming customary in England, for example, only toward the end of the sixteenth century. (In China, by contrast, an emperor already in 2852 B.C. decreed the universal adoption of hereditary family names.) Prior to that time, the given name, received usually at baptism, was *the* name of the person. To distinguish among persons who shared the same Christian name, surnames would be added, over and above the true name (*sur*, from *super*, “over” or “above”). Surnames had no standard meaning; they could be based on the father’s name (John’s son, O’Brien) or on one’s occupation (Weaver or Hunter), place of residence (Bristol, Lyons, At-Water), or an epithet capturing some striking personal trait or achievement (Little, Swift, Arm-Strong).

Only gradually, starting in the early medieval period, were many of these surnames turned into hereditary family names, beginning apparently in aristocratic families and in the big cities. A big impetus toward hereditary family names came after the Council of Trent (1563) decreed that every Catholic parish keep complete registers of baptisms, including the names of the parents and grandparents along with the name of the child. When Protestant parishes soon followed suit, this practice made nearly universal the spread and use of family names. It was not law but widespread similar custom which had it that a woman upon marriage would take the last name of her husband and that their children would then automatically bear the family name.

Despite many variations from country to country-about the order of family and given names, about middle

names, about the incorporation of maiden names into a woman's married name, etc.-it is now nearly universally the case that one's personal name includes (at least) one's given or individual name and one's family name. The former, a matter of parental choice, marks one's individuated identity within the larger family and signifies one's path toward one's own unique life trajectory; the latter, a matter of heritable custom, gives one a familial identity in relation to the larger social world and expresses one's ties to and the influences of a shared ancestral past. Human individuation is contextualized within families, both families of origin and families of perpetuation. Last names are ever-present reminders that we were begotten and that we belong, and, later, that we belong in order to beget.

That a family name is centrally a sign of our connected and dignified humanity we see when such names are withheld-for example, in the practice of naming slaves in the ante-bellum South. Slaves were given only first names; if they had to receive a surname to distinguish one from another, it was John's *boy*, never John's *son*. The first name individuates, but separated from a last name, it is demeaning, even meaningless. By making one everywhere familiar, the practice of using only first names makes impossible both genuine public and genuine private life; as the slaveholders understood perfectly, it makes the childish station permanent.

Well before there were surnames as family names, the ties of blood and lineage were given expression in the form of patronymics. In their classical or heroic form, the patronym was even more important than the given name, with the son being under lifelong obligation to make himself worthy of his father and thus to earn, as it were, the title to his own name.

Homer, in beginning the *Iliad*, asks the goddess to sing the wrath of *Peleus' son* Achilles, who is first of interest precisely because he is the son of Peleus, himself the son of Aiakos, himself the son of Zeus. (On his mother's side, Achilles is even closer to the immortals; the goddess Thetis is his mother.) With lesser parents, in Homer's world of heroes, Achilles would have been a nonentity, one from whom nothing much would be expected. But given his pedigree, he is under strenuous obligation to live up to his name, thereby winning great glory also for his father. When Hektor, bouncing his infant son Astyanax, wishes for him that he will become an even greater warrior than his father, this wish must be heard as narcissistic: the son's greatness will pile further glory upon his sire. Homer makes us feel immediately the tragic character of such paternal wishes for one's sons; the reader knows that young Astyanax's literal future is right here being sacrificed for his father's present thirst for glory, as Hektor refuses his wife Andromache's plea, in the name

of family, not to return to the fighting. In these heroic cultures, the past casts a long shadow over the present and future; and most men die failing to match the recounted successes of illustrious ancestors. The patronym (or its equivalent family name), and through it the past, continued to exercise hegemony, albeit in somewhat muted form, in European aristocratic societies even into the present century.

We liberal democrats have mercifully escaped from this state of affairs. Our American society and its founding thought begin from the radical equality of each individual, including his inalienable right to practice happiness as he himself defines it. What counts for us is not birth or station, but one's own accomplishments, not who one's parents were but what one has made (and proposes to make) of oneself. Yet bourgeois democratic family life, with its naming practices, has preserved us, at least until recently, from the rootlessness and isolation to which such individuality might lead. The conventional identity of given name plus inherited family name, in the bourgeois family, represented a sensible mean between the heroic and the anonymous, between the aristocratic tyranny of the past (Peleus' son) and the servile because rootless denial of a dignified adult future (Jim NoName).

Times have changed. Both as a culture and as individuals, we today care even less about where we come from, and also less and less about where we are going, but more and more only about the here and now. The ways of the fathers and mothers are not our ways. The ways of our children are unimaginable. Full individualists, and proud of it, we increasingly look solely to ourselves, as Tocqueville remarked over 150 years ago, as the sole source and reason for things. In the present generation, such individualistic thinking is showing its power against the institution of the family and customs of the family name.

Some time ago, the *New York Times* (January 21, 1993) featured an article by Janice L. Kaplan entitled "Creativity Is Often the Name of This Family Game." In the article, Ms. Kaplan cites numerous examples of novel naming practices to illustrate her thesis that "for more and more of today's parents, choosing a child's last name is a matter of personal decision, a chance to be creative, even an opportunity to make a statement." A few of her examples provide the flavor of them all.

When Elyse Goldstein, a rabbi, married Baruch Browns, a calligrapher and school administrator, they discussed what name they would "pass on" to their offspring. Both "absolutely wanted a family name" but one different from their own respective birth names, "a creative alternative to passing on only the father's

surname.” The solution: “They took the gold from Goldstein, the brown from Browns, mixed them together and created Sienna, the legal last name of their children.” As Mr. Browns explained, “Ocher, or those other muddy yellow colors, didn’t seem like nice names.”

Dean Skylar and Chris Ledbetter faced a similar dilemma, but not until the birth of their son. Opposed to “the whole patriarchal tradition,” they too wanted a new name for the child, different from their own names but one that would “symbolize [their] relationship.” Being residents of the state of Florida, which required parents to pass on the father’s surname, it took a court battle to legitimize their choice, but they eventually prevailed: they combined Ledbetter and Skylar to form Skybetter, the name of their two children, now ages ten and five. “All of our names are in the phone book,” said Ms. Ledbetter. “That handles most any problem that comes up.”

Ms. Van Horn, a commercial photographer and clinical hypnotherapist, and Ms. Hershey, owner of a design and marketing concern, were the first lesbians in Los Angeles County to be granted joint custody of a child. They gave their adopted son both their last names: hence, Ryan Christopher Hershey-Van Horn. As Ms. Van Horn explained, “We’re both his parents. We’re both women with careers. And we both have definite identities. It’s important that Christopher be real clear about his identity as well.”

Whether they make up an entirely new name for their children (Sienna), or creatively combine their names (Skybetter), or hyphenate their names (Hershey-Van Horn), all these parents reveal the same fundamental belief: a child’s last name is a matter of free, parental choice, no less than is its first name. Having liberated themselves from the “patriarchal tradition” of women giving up their names—none of the women interviewed took the man’s last name—all of these parents feel perfectly free to “liberate” their children as well. For what they have creatively managed to “pass on” is a name with no past; and the so-called “family” name is in no case the name of the entire family, but of the children only. The children are thus, already from birth, nominally (in the literal sense of the word) emancipated from all links to their parents, nominally identified as being unrelated to *either* parent, let alone to a married couple whose common name would symbolize the couple’s union in a new estate and its potential to be a unified family with offspring. These children have, in fact, been given two first names.

Ms. Kaplan observes that “sometimes, say experts and the children involved, the parents’ choices, *if not*

clearly explained, can result in confusion and identity problems.” But the worries that are mentioned are superficial: children who can’t fit their names on a page or on SAT forms, children who can’t spell their last names, children at risk of teasing or ridicule by peers. For the “experts,” who want only that the child “develop an appropriate and healthy identity,” identity is entirely a subjective matter, but somehow one that yields to “rational understanding”; if the *origin* of the surname is “clearly explained” to the child (to be sure, “more than once”), there need be no confusion of identity.

But identity is not just a state of mind. All the explanations in the world cannot alter what the child’s name loudly declares: my parents and I belong to different families. Because this is how the child is named and known, his lack of a true family name is now central to his identity, whatever he may feel about it. That these creative parents sometimes justify their practice by pointing out that children of divorced and remarried parents or children of “live-in relationships” also don’t share the parental name, only proves the point: taking broken or unmarried homes as a suitable nominal norm, and insisting on their own radically individuated identity, they start their children off in life with a broken family identity. It is almost as if they are preparing their children not only for the liberated life they have chosen for themselves, but also for the family fragmentation that now takes its toll of so many of America’s children.

These “creative” parents are, we suspect, still a very small minority. Far more common are families in which the children carry the name of the father, even though the mother has kept her maiden name. Here, too, the confusion of identity is obvious: it is not nominally clear who belongs to whom. A friend of ours, a mother of a highly popular first-grader, recently attended her first PTA meeting. Eager to meet the parents of the many frequent visitors to her home, she carefully scanned the name tags of all the people in the room. But on that night the room happened to be full of mothers only, *none* of whom bore the same last name as her child. Today, it is a wise child who knows its mother.

What’s wrong with all of this? Leaving aside, for now, the rightness or wrongness of the old so-called patriarchal conventions whereby the wife necessarily takes and the children automatically acquire the husband’s name, one can advance powerful arguments why, for reasons of truth and identity, a child’s family name should be the same as that of both his parents. The common name identifies the child securely within its nest of origin and rearing, and symbolically points to the ties of parental affection and responsibility that are needed for its healthy growth and well-being. Given that the mother-child bond is the (most) natural

foundation of all familial attachments and parental care, it seems especially absurd that mothers should be willing not to have the same last name as their children-unless, of course, motherhood is understood to be nothing more than a surrogate “social womb,” unconnected with nature, the “mother” looking after the children simply as a job or as a form of *self-fulfillment*.

Responsibility for the child, who did not himself ask to be born, is accepted and announced by family naming: the child, freely individuated from birth (as marked in his *given* name), also *belongs* necessarily from birth to his parents, not as a possession to be used but as a precious life to be nurtured. Couples may choose whether to have a child, but they may not morally choose to deny familial responsibility for his care. A shared and transmittable family name, given and accepted rather than invented or chosen, stands perfectly for this shared and transmittable moral reality.

The common name of parent-and-child stands not only for parental responsibilities, but also for the child's security, filial regard, family loyalty, gratitude, and personal pride. We children are not *sui generis*, neither self-made nor self-reared; we begin as dependents, dependent upon the unmerited attention and care lavished on us by our parents. To carry the family name is a constant reminder of what we owe and to whom-and of the fact that what we owe can never be repaid (except, indirectly, by doing the same for our own children). Thus, it is, at least symbolically, a special kind of blindness-not to say ingratitude-that our college students hold themselves familially innominate (“Just Susie”) precisely when Mom and Dad are shelling out \$20

,000 a year to enable them to become educated and independent.

But this backward-looking identification with our family of origin cannot be the whole story. On the contrary, life is forward-going and regenerative; in most cases, we children must leave our fathers and mothers and cleave to our spouses, in order to do as our fathers and mothers did before. The given family of origin gives way (not wholly but in very large part) to the chosen family of perpetuation, prepared for and legally sanctioned by the act of marriage. How should this new estate and new identity be reflected in our names? When we marry what surname or surnames shall we adopt?

Whether we like it or not, choosing surnames at marriage is in today's America almost as much a matter of

choice as the giving of first names at childbirth, a reflection (and perhaps also a cause) of novel conceptions of marriage, an institution the meaning of which is itself increasingly regarded as a matter of choice. The traditional bourgeois way—the husband gives and the wife accepts the husband's family name—customary for at least four hundred years in the English-speaking world, is no longer secure as customary; “because that's the way we've always done it” is, for young American ears, a losing reason. Besides, the true reasons for the old custom having been forgotten, the practitioners of the custom are impotent to defend it against charges of “patriarchy,” “male hegemonism,” “sexism,” and the like. Thus, with no certain cultural guidance, the present generation (in fact, each couple independently) is being allowed—or should we say compelled, willy-nilly?—to think this through for itself.

We, the authors, accept the challenge, as a thought experiment, imagining ourselves as having to do it over again, but with the benefit of our now longer views of marriage and of life, and on the following additional condition: to think not on the basis of what *pleases us*, but on the basis of what we believe is appropriate to the meaning of marriage and hence, in principle, universalizable.

If marriage is, as we believe, a new estate, in fact changing the identities of both partners, there is good reason to have this changed identity reflected in some change of surname, one that reflects and announces this fact. If marriage, though entered into voluntarily, is in its inner meaning more than a contract between interested parties but rather a union made in expectation of permanence and a union open (as no simple contract of individuals can be) to the possibility of procreation, there is good reason to have the commitment to lifelong union reflected and announced in a common name that symbolizes and celebrates its special meaning.

Whether they intend it or not, individuals who individualistically keep their original names when entering a marriage are symbolically holding themselves back from the full meaning of the union. Fearing “loss of identity” in change of name, they implicitly deny that to live now toward and for one's beloved, as soul mate, is rather to gain a new identity, a new meaning of living a life, one toward which eros itself has pointed us. Often failing to anticipate the future likelihood of having their own children, and, more generally, unable or unwilling to see the institution of marriage as directed toward or even connected with its central *generational* *raison d'être*, they create in advance a confused identity for their unborn children.

The irony is that the clear personal identity to which they selfishly cling (in tacit denial of their new social identity) is in fact an identity they possess only because their parents were willing and able to create that singular family identity for them. We are, of course, aware that massive numbers of our youth stem from parents who divorce or remarry, and that the insecurity of identity already reflected in their having different names from their birth parents may lead them to cling tenaciously to their very own surnames, lest they lose the little, painfully acquired identity they have left; yet if they truly understood their plight, they would be eager to try to prevent such misfortunes from befalling their own children, and would symbolically identify themselves in advance as their (unborn) children's lifelong parents.

It is ironic that the same young people who, in their social arrangements, live only on a first name basis, forgetful at least symbolically of where they come from, should at the time of forward-looking marriage turn backward to cling to the name of their family of origin. Faced with the "threat" of "losing themselves" in marriage, they reassert themselves as independent selves, now claiming and treating the original surname as if it were—just like their given *first* name—a chosen mark of their autonomy and individuality.

The human family, unlike some animal families, is exogamous, not incestuous; it is exogamous not by nature but by the wisest of customs. The near-universal taboo against incest embodies the insight that family means a forward-looking series of generations rather than an inward-turning merging and togetherness. It keeps lineage clear-in order, among other reasons, to distinguish spouses from progeny in the service of tranquil relations, clear identity, and sound rearing—above all, to accomplish the family's primary human work of perpetuation and cultural transmission. The legal sanctification and support of marriage, a further expression of the insights embedded in the incest taboo, makes sense only on this view of family; were sex not generative and families not generational, no one would much care with whom one wished to merge.

Thus, when entering a marriage, the partners are willy-nilly bravely stepping forward, unprotected by the family of origin, into the full meaning of human adulthood: they are saying good-bye to father and mother and cleaving to their spouse. They are, tacitly, accepting the death of their parents, and even more, their own mortality, as they embark on the road to the next generation. They express not only their love of one another but also their readiness to discover, by repeating the practice, how their own family identity and nurtured humanity was the product of deliberate human choice that affirmed and elevated the natural

necessity of renewal. A common name deliberately taken at the time of marriage-like the family of perpetuation that the marriage anticipates and establishes-affirms the special union of natural necessity and human choice which the exogamous family itself embodies.

This is, perhaps, an appropriate place to observe that we are well aware that family or social identity is not the whole of our identity, that professional or “career” identity is both psychically and socially important (as are civic and religious identity). The loving-and-generative aspects of our nature are far from being the whole human story. Yet the familial is foundational, and it cannot without grave danger be subordinated or assimilated to the professional. Our arguments for a common social name for the married couple is, however, perfectly compatible with having one partner or the other-or both-keeping a distinct professional name. Some have argued that in today’s world of rampant mobility and weakened family ties, and with both husband and wife in the work place, much is lost and little is gained if professional identity is submerged in a common family name. But precisely to affirm and protect the precious realm of private life from the distorting intrusion of public or purely economic preoccupations, a common social name makes eminent sense-one might say *especially* under present conditions.

The argument advanced so far does not, of course, yet reach to the customary pattern of the bride taking the groom’s name. If anything, it might even call into question the wisdom of allowing either partner to keep the surname of origin. To provide the same and new last name for the married couple, a name that proclaims their social unity and that will immediately confer social identity to their children, they could devise a hyphenated compound that both partners then adopt or they could jointly invent a totally new surname that leaves no trace of either family of origin. But these alternatives are both defective. The first is simply impractical beyond one or at most two generations; because of the exponential growth of life, one would have an exponential increase in names-to-be-hyphenated-in-new-marriages-and-in-newer-marriages-and-so-on-and-on-ad-infinitum. The structure of life itself makes impossible the universalizing of one’s maxim to add-and-hyphenate.

The second alternative, in our view, too starkly severs the new social ties from the familial past (quite apart from what it means to the public individual identities of each of the partners) and to still living and remembered grandparents. It would be to further accentuate the unraveling of intergenerational connections, symbolizing instead each little family’s atomistic belief in its ability to go it alone. In contrast, a

family name that ties the new family of perpetuation to one old family of origin reflects more faithfully the truth about family as a series of generations and the moral and psychological meaning of lineage and attachment.

This leaves only the hard question: shall it be his family name or hers? A little reflection will show why, as a general rule, it should be his. Although we know from modern biology the equal contributions both parents make to the genetic identity of a child, it is still true to say that the mother is the “more natural” parent, that is, the parent *by birth*. A woman can give up a child for adoption or, thanks to modern reproductive technologies, can even bear a child not genetically her own. But there is no way to deny out of whose body the new life sprung, whose substance it fed on, who labored to produce it, who wondrously bore it forth. The father’s role in all this is minuscule and invisible; in contrast to the mother, there is no *naturally* manifest way to demonstrate his responsibility.

The father is thus a parent more by choice and agreement than by nature (and not only because he cannot know with absolute certainty that the woman’s child is indeed his own). One can thus explain the giving of the paternal surname in the following way: the father symbolically announces “his choice” that the child is his, fully and freely accepting responsibility for its conception and, more importantly, for its protection and support, and answering in advance the question which only wise children are said to be able to answer correctly: Who’s my Dad?

The husband who gives his name to his bride in marriage is thus not just keeping his own; he is owning up to what it means to have been given a family and a family name by his own father—he is living out his destiny to be a father by saying yes to it in advance. And the wife does not so much surrender her name as she accepts the gift of his, given and received as a pledge of (among other things) loyal and responsible fatherhood for her children. A woman who refuses this gift is, whether she knows it or not, tacitly refusing the promised devotion or, worse, expressing her suspicions about her groom’s trustworthiness as a husband and prospective father.

Patrilineal surnames are, in truth, less a sign of paternal prerogative than of paternal duty and professed commitment, reinforced psychologically by gratifying the father’s vanity in the perpetuation of his name and by offering this nominal incentive to do his duty both to mother and child. Such human speech and

naming enables the father explicitly to choose to become the parent-by-choice that he, more than the mother, must necessarily be.

Fathers who will not own up to their paternity, who will not “legitimize” their offspring, and who will not name themselves responsible for child-rearing by giving their children their name are, paradoxically, not real fathers at all, and their wives and especially their children suffer. The former stigmatization of bastardy was, in fact, meant to protect women and children from such irresponsible behavior of self-indulgent men (behavior probably naturally rooted in mammalian male psychosexual tendencies), men who would take their sexual pleasures and walk away from their consequences. The removal of the stigma, prompted by a humane concern not to penalize innocent children by calling them “illegitimate,” has, paradoxically but absolutely predictably, contributed mightily to an increase in such fatherless children.

The advantage a woman and her children gain from the commitment of the man to take responsibility and to stay the course-the commitment implied in his embracing the woman and her prospective children with his family name, now newly understood-is by itself sufficient reason why it is in a woman’s interest as a married-woman-and-mother-to-be to readily take the bridegroom’s name.

But there is a deeper reason why this makes sense. The change of the woman’s name, from family of origin to family of perpetuation, is the perfect emblem for the desired exogamy of human sexuality and generation. The woman in marriage not only expresses her humanity in love (as does the man); she also embraces the meaning of marriage by accepting the meaning of her *womanly* nature as generative. In shedding the name of her family of origin, she tacitly affirms that children of her womb can be legitimated only exogamously. Her children will not bear the same name as-will not “belong to”-her father; moreover, her new name allows also her father to recognize formally the mature woman his daughter has become. Whereas the man needs convention to make up-by expansion-for his natural deficiency, the woman needs convention to humanize-by restriction-the result of her natural prowess. By anticipating necessity and by thus choosing to accept the gift of her husband’s name, the woman affirms the meaning of her own humanity by saying yes to customizing her given nature.

V

Almost none of what they now believe they understand about the meanings and uses of names did the authors know when, following custom, they first joined their lives together under the bridegroom's family name. They had, at best, only tacit and partial knowledge when they deliberately gave their children biblical names. Had they been left, in their youth, to invent their own practices of naming, it is doubtful that they would have gotten it right. In place of their own knowledge, they were guided by the blessed example of the strong, enduring, and admirable marriages and home-life of their parents, itself sustained by teachings silently conveyed through custom and ritual. Wisdom in these matters, for individual thinkers, comes slowly if at all. But custom, once wisely established, more than makes up for our deficiencies. It makes possible the full flourishing of our humanity.

William Butler Yeats said it best, in "A Prayer for My Daughter":

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

The authors are respectively, Senior Lecturer in the Humanities Collegiate Division and Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and the Committee on Social Thought, The University of Chicago. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a meeting on the Ethics of Everyday Life, sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Public Life and supported by the Lilly Endowment. The authors wish to thank their colleagues for helpful criticisms and suggestions.

[PREV ARTICLE](#)

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THE CLIQUE

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THE
SUBVERSIVE
FAMILY

An Alternative History of Love and Marriage



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points. If the hypothesis of primitive promiscuity cannot be supported, therefore, it is all the more important for Marxism as a whole that Engels should be shown to be right about his great transition from the extended to the nuclear family.

4

THE MYTH OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY

The damage to Engels's doctrine could be limited if it were possible to show that its weaknesses were confined to the earlier stages. Unfortunately, there are equally boggy patches in the middle of his historical scheme, in the area surrounding 'the patriarchal family'. Engels quotes examples of the patriarchal family among the Southern Slavs and here and there in other parts of the world. But in North-Western Europe, the evidence for this kind of extended family, where several generations of brothers and sisters and their spouses live under the same roof, is coming more and more to be questioned. In one way or another, G. P. Murdock, Peter Laslett, Alan Macfarlane, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and many other scholars have cast considerable doubt on whether these extended families were ever the norm in those parts of the world where the Industrial Revolution started – which are precisely the parts which must have gone through the extended-family stage if the Marx-Engels scheme is valid.

The sceptics make two points: first, the nuclear family is *universal*. Wherever more complicated forms exist, the nuclear family is always present as well. Second, in England and North-Western Europe, the nuclear family was the *standard* situation – a simple family living in its own house.

In *Household and Family in Past Time* (1972), one of the most crushing and total refutations of any orthodox wisdom in recent history, Laslett writes:

The Myths

In England and elsewhere in Northern and Western Europe the standard situation was one where each domestic group consisted of a simple family living in its own house, so that the conjugal family unit was identical with the household . . . in spite of the important differences which comparison reveals . . . this standard situation seems to have obtained to a remarkable extent everywhere else.¹

Earlier scholars on both sides of the Atlantic had come to the same conclusion. G. P. Murdock: 'The nuclear family is a universal human grouping.' Marion Levy: 'Most of humanity must always have lived in small families.' But it is the statistical studies of household size pioneered by Dr Laslett and his colleagues at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure which have finally demonstrated conclusively that the nuclear family was always the normal family. According to Marion Levy, 'The general outlines and nature of the *actual* family structure have been virtually identical in certain strategic respects (size, age, sex and generational composition) in all known societies in world history for well over 50 per cent of the members of these societies.'²

Sentiment or tradition or official morality might prescribe other types of household. For example, there might exist a tradition that married couples with children ought also to look after their parents by taking them into their homes as honoured guests; but in most societies, this was a tradition more honoured in the breach than the observance, for the simple reason that most married couples in traditional society could not afford to feed their parents. Most old people died alone, in the workhouse or in wretched poverty.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, it is only *since* the Industrial Revolution and pre-eminently in industrial towns that married couples have started living with their parents in any great numbers. The extended family, in Western Europe at least, is a *modern* development in as much as it exists at all. Michael Anderson in his studies of industrial Lancashire, the heartland of the Industrial Revolution, suggests that this startling increase in parents and grandparents living together occurred for strictly economic reasons. For the first time, parents who both worked at the mill were earning enough to feed the grandparents; in return, the grandparents could act as baby-sitters for them or their neighbours and perhaps perform a few odd jobs as well. Moreover, the children could remain at home longer than they

The Myth of the Extended Family

had in rural pre-industrial England because their earnings would contribute towards the household expenses – whereas in the country, there would be enough work on the farm for only a small minority to stay at home until they married. Despite its barbarities and deprivations, one thing that the Industrial Revolution did *not* do was break up families.³

The rate of illegitimacy is one of the indicators most frequently taken by historians to show the quality of family life. In particular, the proportion of children born illegitimate is supposed to demonstrate how living in cities and working in factories tend to corrupt the morals of the young, destroy parental control and lead to a general sense of aimlessness and lawlessness, or 'anomie', which can only result in sexual licence.

Unfortunately, as Peter Laslett points out, 'It is simply not true, in fact, that living in towns or cities, or migrating to such population centres, has always been directly and positively correlated with illegitimacy, during the so-called sexual revolution, or at any other time.'⁴

In Scotland, Germany and England at least, the rate of illegitimacy was always higher *in the country* – most remarkably so in some parts of rural Scotland, where the strict morality of the kirk seems to have gone almost unheeded. And in many other European countries – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland – the rate of illegitimacy actually fell, often quite sharply, throughout the period of maximum industrialisation, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1845, when bastardy in England and Wales was at its highest point before the twentieth century, most London districts were among the least bastard-prone in the land; the highest rates of illegitimacy were often to be found in the remotest parts of Cumberland and Wales. Even the new industrial cities, so notorious in Victorian fiction for the looseness of moral behaviour, cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle, were well down the Registrar-General's list. Whitechapel and Bethnal Green, the direst of the East End's slums, were below the national average for illegitimacy throughout the nineteenth century. Up to 1930, rural districts had far higher bastardy rates than the cities. Thereafter the loss of rural population and the growth of suburbia make the comparisons less valuable.⁵

The Myths

Here at least there is no evidence for assuming that moving to industrial cities weakened family life or sexual morality, contrary to the automatic assumptions of novelists such as Dickens and Disraeli and sociologists such as Marx and Engels. Marx may have had a child by his maid, Engels may have seduced the girls in his father's mill, but the great majority of urban courtships and pregnancies ended in marriage between young people of equal social station.

By contrast, in pre-industrial society, the classic case of the unmarried mother was of the girl in domestic service, living away from home, made pregnant by the young farmhand, also living away from home in service, the couple being prevented from marrying by poverty and perhaps also by their conditions of service. Wage labour in the factory, whatever its other horrors, did not suffer from those constraints.

The freedom to marry was a genuine freedom and one which came to many young people only after moving to the city. It was this new freedom which contemporary moralists, though not the most acute observers such as Mrs Gaskell, were all too ready to confuse with immorality, suffering as they did from the naive illusion of the well-to-do that physical squalor is bound to breed moral squalor.

In reality, it would be truer to say that such records as we have of life in Lancashire mill-towns and the like bear witness to a moral tenacity in face of continuous hardship which is as poignant as any record of heroism in war or captivity.⁶ And the principal object of that tenacity was to keep the family together through thick and thin.

One of the deepest myths about the past is that there was a time when we were all part of one harmonious community and, because we were all one, we were entirely open to and with each other. There was no privacy in this golden age. The wish to be private was then regarded as bad, anti-social.

Sometimes this golden age is located in the South Seas, sometimes in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. We are invited to look back to the way our ancestors lived together in one great smoky room, and slept in the same bed and saw each other perform all the bodily functions without shame or embarrassment. This myth survives partly by the pretence that everyone lived in the great halls of the nobility. In fact, in most Western countries, the average family dwelling has been the cottage or hovel. Moreover, even where dwellings were closely huddled together or were actually part of the same

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structure – the Mexican ziggurat, the modern apartment block – we must not assume that the sense of privacy was any less sharp. Law in past time – the common law of England, the German 'Mirrors' of Justice, the Roman private law – is permeated by a strongly marked sense of private territory.

What are all these disputes about hedges and walls, about wayleaves and easements, about drains and overhanging trees, even about ancient lights, if they do not show a ferocious sense that the full possession of property included the right to be private, secluded – so much so that even the air and the light above your garden were your own inalienable possession?

Modern law, far from entrenching and intensifying this privacy, is often weaker and vaguer on these subjects. The mediaeval English law against eavesdropping was in fact recently repealed without any serious effort to replace it by some provision which would deter the modern methods of bugging and photocopying.

I do not wish to swing to the opposite extreme and try to argue that modern life is in most respects far *less* private than life 500 or 1,000 years ago. But it is true that many of the supposed instances of the public, social world we have lost are somewhat shaky.

The family wedding, for example. It is almost a cliché to compare a modern wedding in a registry office attended 'only' by the immediate family with the huge cluster of neighbours and relations which was supposed to attend almost every happening in the mediaeval village. Yet such hard evidence as there is continually prompts the opposite comparison. Marriage in the Middle Ages, as we shall see, was still popularly regarded as a *private* ceremony, to the despair of the Church authorities. Poverty and poor communications meant that mediaeval families saw far less of their cousins and kinsfolk. Economic factors dictated that a great proportion of the population, in some countries the majority, lived not in large bustling villages but scattered settlements or in isolated farms and cottages. Of course, in all rural societies up to and including the present, we can find examples of village festivals, of village solidarity and of village moral and social pressure upon young people; picturesque ceremonies such as the charivari and dancing round the maypole delight folklorists and anthropologists. But to represent these ceremonies, important though they might be in the life of the village, as either essential to or the most important thing in the life of the *individual* is mere fancy.

And even in those societies in which the family appears to be more extended and the community more all-embracing, we should be wary of assuming that the basic family unit was a large one lacking any sense of privacy. Often the African village may be more like a friendly apartment block than the warm tribal community in which people live, eat and sleep together with no separation between families. Professor Goody warns:

We have to be very careful about contrasting a so-called *zadruga* type of unit, which consists of, say, a fortress of 100 persons, with an 'extended family' that comprises a small farm, a conjugal family and a few attached relatives . . . the former is likely to be a multi-celled version of the latter, the cells coming together for protection, for administrative convenience, or simply because that was the way the house had been built in the first place; permanent stone dwellings structure family composition in much more radical ways than mud huts and bamboo shelters, for the latter constantly change their shape according to the number and nature of those who live there.⁷

These *zadrugas* were Balkan villages which seemed intensely tribal to the outsider and captured the imagination of Victorian anthropologists – and indeed of Engels – as representing the kind of intimate community which the modern 'isolated nuclear family' had lost, at great expense of happiness and psychic health. Modern research into these *zadrugas*⁸ suggests that life inside them was more carefully and subtly compartmentalised than nostalgic outsiders had grasped and moreover that the *zadruga* was not and is not in decline, as nostalgia had suggested, but on the contrary cheerfully persists even in modern Yugoslavia. Professor Goody concludes that:

It is not only for England that we need to abandon the myth of the 'extended family' – as the term is often understood. In one form or another this myth has haunted historical and comparative studies since the time of Maine and Fustel de Coulanges, whether the work has been undertaken by historians, sociologists or anthropologists. Whatever the shape of the kin groups of earlier societies, none were undifferentiated communes of the kind beloved by nineteenth century theorists, Marxist and non-Marxist alike. Units of production were everywhere relatively small, kin-based units.⁹

Rodney Hilton, in *Bondmen Made Free*, says that it is the inescapable conclusion from the examination of the abundant manorial documents of the thirteenth century that:

By the thirteenth century, or even earlier, the normal family in most parts of western Europe was not the extended family consisting of all the descendants of common great-grandparents – or beyond – with their wives and children living together. Instead, we often find grandparents, the married eldest son and heir with his wife and children, together with the unmarried members of the second generation. If the grandfather were active he might run the holding; or he might have made way for the heir, but still live on the holding. On the death of the grandparents, the family would become a two-generation nuclear family until the pattern repeated itself with the maturity and marriage of the heir.¹⁰

Hilton does say that extended families may have existed in earlier times, as the older school of mediaeval historians, most notably Marc Bloch, used to believe: 'In the badly documented era from the sixth to the tenth or eleventh century some peasant households might have been much bigger and more cohesive than they were in the central middle ages.'¹¹ 'Some' and 'might' are the crucial words, alas, in view of the documentation; Hilton quotes a ninth-century French family consisting of two brothers and their wives, two sisters and fourteen children, but he also says that the document from which this example comes suggests a predominance of nuclear families on the estate among the tenants.

It always seems to be the case that the more that historians know about a period in the history of Western Europe, the more they discover that the nuclear family is the normal way of living. Then and now, of course, there are all sorts of exceptions and variations, involving adult brothers and sisters and grandparents; some of these variants may have arisen because the farmhouse happened to be large, or because there was no other dwelling available, or because the family was unusually close-knit and affectionate, or for agricultural or financial reasons, or for protection or because someone was old or bedridden. But 'the family' then seems to have been little different from the family now as far as numbers and residence go.

Laslett argues that:

The wish to believe in the large and extended household as the ordinary institution of an earlier England and an earlier Europe, or as a standard feature of an earlier non-industrial world, is indeed a matter of ideology. The ideology in question, it is suggested, is not to any extent a system of norms and ideals present in the minds of the men and women of the past who actually made the decisions giving their domestic group structures their characteristic forms.¹²

Why have so many historians, sociologists and ideologues succumbed to this myth over the past hundred years? During most of that time, there was after all very little evidence either way. Let us try to offer a few reasons for the myth. Some will be technical, concerned with the type of evidence that *was* available and the treatment historians gave it. Others, however, will be emotional, concerned not only with attitudes to the past but with perceptions of the present, feelings of nostalgia, malaise or resentment; these are less easy to establish. Let us start with the more concrete technical reasons.

Historians who still talk in terms of 'the evolution of the family from the (to us) impersonal, economically bonded and precarious extended family group of the sixteenth century to the smaller, affectively bonded nuclear unit that had appeared by the end of the eighteenth century'¹³ usually turn out to be talking about the *upper classes* only. Indeed, Lawrence Stone says as much in the introduction to the abridged Pelican version of *The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800*:

The nature of the surviving evidence inexorably biases the book towards a study of a small minority group, namely the literate and articulate classes, and has relatively little to say about the great majority of Englishmen, the rural and urban smallholders, artisans, labourers and poor. But the consequences are mitigated by the fact that everything suggests that the former were the pacemakers of cultural change.¹⁴

But how can we know that the upper classes were the pacemakers when we know so little about the rest? Again, Professor Stone himself says: 'When dealing with the sexual behaviour of the lower orders, the historian is forced to abandon any attempt to probe attitudes and feelings, since direct evidence does not exist.'¹⁵ Besides, coming nearer our own time, the layman is tempted to infer that it was the

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other way about; has not upper-class marriage become more openly affectionate and less dynastic and property-oriented, in other words, more like working-class marriage?

At all events, this scarcity of evidence does not seem even to slow up Professor Stone. In no time at all, he is deducing that:

Social relations from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries tended to be cool, even unfriendly . . . at all levels men and women were extremely short-tempered . . . familial emotive ties were so weak that they did not generate the passions which lead to intra-familial murder and mayhem . . . What is being postulated for the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is a society in which a majority of the individuals who composed it found it very difficult to establish close emotional ties to any person.¹⁶

In which case, the audience at the Globe must have been alternately bored stiff and bewildered by *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra*. 'At all levels'? 'A majority of the individuals'? How could he know?

Social relations cool? Familial emotive ties so weak that they did not generate the passions which lead to mayhem? Let us pluck from 1527-8, near the very beginning of Professor Stone's period, just one of the famous series of letters from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn:

Mine own sweetheart, this shall be to advertise you of the great elengeness [loneliness] that I find here since your departing; for I ensure you methinketh the time longer since your departing now last than I was wont to do a whole fortnight. I think your kindness and my fervency of love causeth it; for otherwise I would not have thought it possible that for so little a while it should have grieved me. But now that I am coming towards you, methinketh my pains be half released, and also I am right well comforted in so much that my book maketh substantially for my matter; in looking whereof I have spent about four hours this day, which caused me now to write the shorter letter to you at this time, because of some pain in my head; wishing myself (specially an evening) in my sweetheart's arms, whose pretty dukkys [breasts] I trust shortly to cusse [kiss].

Written with the hand of him that was, is, and shall be yours by his will,

H.R.¹⁷

Even amongst the upper classes, social relations were not always tepid. We may step three hundred years further back, to the account by Berthold the Chaplain of the life of St Elizabeth of Hungary who married Ludwig IV of Thuringia in the 1220s. 'They loved one another with an astonishing passion,' we are told; 'she kissed him a thousand times upon the mouth.' When he was away visiting his far-flung estates, she founded a soup kitchen and a hospital. When he died in 1227, just after he had joined the crusaders assembling in Southern Italy, she ran through the castle utterly crazed with grief, crying, 'Dead, now is the whole world dead to me.' The point of the story is not merely that we are expected to admire her for all her good works and for having remained faithful and loving, but that we are expected to admire him too for getting angry with his courtiers who urged him to take mistresses during his long absences from home and telling them: 'I have a wife and I keep troth with her.'¹⁸

It does not matter how much historical accuracy there is in Berthold's lives of St Elizabeth and Ludwig. For our purposes, what matters are the emotional attitudes which are depicted for our edification and admiration. And we are clearly instructed that at the beginning of the thirteenth century love within marriage, fully articulated, passionate sexual love, was a familiar and admired phenomenon in the nobility. Similarly, Henry's passionate letters to Anne Boleyn show that at the beginning of the sixteenth century an educated prince was far from reluctant to express his love on paper in terms both intensely erotic and sentimental. There is nothing frozen, tepid or mechanical about the tone.

Professor Stone seems to be in no way unusual among historians of the family. Edward Shorter, a breezy American historian, prefaces his book *The Making of the Modern Family* (1977) by saying:

I want to convey to the reader a massive modesty about its contents. We are talking here about the private lives of anonymous, ordinary people. Many were scarcely able to read. None wrote books about what they did or felt. Reconstructing the record of their family experience is bound to be a chancy business. Very little is certain, and the evidence, far from anchoring indisputably my proposition about sentiment and affection, trembles feebly in the wind.¹⁹

Quite so. Time and again, Professor Shorter confesses endearingly that he only has evidence from one or two countries (usually France),

and from a period rather too late for his purposes (usually the nineteenth century). Quite often he cheerfully skates over the evidence presented in books which he has actually read. For instance, in defiance of almost all recent research, he continues to insist that 'Households in traditional Europe were somewhat larger and certainly more complex – in the sense of sheltering more than the simple, conjugal unit – than are modern households.' Well, to the best of our knowledge, they were not.

Yet Professor Shorter is even less impeded by the dearth of evidence than Professor Stone. He discovers not one, but two 'sexual revolutions'. And off he goes: 'Popular marriage in former centuries was usually affectionless, held together by considerations of property and lineage.'²⁰ 'The great surge of sentiment begins earlier in the cities than in the countryside, and sooner among the middle classes than the lower, but before this secular unfolding commences, relations between men and women in the household seem to have been affectionless everywhere in France.'²¹ 'In traditional society, mothers viewed the development and happiness of children younger than two with indifference . . . Nor did these mothers often (some say "never") see their infants as human beings with the same capacities for joy and pain as they themselves.'²² The 'massive modesty' seems to have evaporated.

I refer to these well-known works by highly esteemed scholars not so much to pick holes in their conclusions as to draw attention to their remarkable *impatience*. They cannot wait to draw out from the scanty material the most emphatic demonstration of a great transition from the 'extended family' of 'traditional society', with its loveless and grasping attitudes, to the 'nuclear family' of today based on affection – and, crucially, on to a further transition to a freer, floating type of relationship, in fact, to the end of marriage as we know it.

It is not as if there were anything novel or original about this theory. Professor Stone and his publishers refer to the evolution of *the* family in the terms quoted earlier, and his publishers claim that 'this is a work that challenges all conventional views hitherto held about English society at that period'. On the contrary, it *restates* the conventional views of those who wish to keep the family in its place as an historical accident.

The truly unconventional and subversive view would be to argue that the nuclear family is older than Jesus and Plato and Marx and

Engels, let alone older than the Industrial Revolution, and that the nuclear family – with all its drawbacks, difficulties and dangers – is a biologically derived way of living which comes naturally to us and which generates an emotional force of enduring and unquenchable power.

5

MATCHMAKING AND LOVEMAKING

‘A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!’ Almost everyone remembers Jane Austen’s Mrs Bennet, desperate to marry off her daughters to the richest men who can be found, and her delight when a new prospect, Mr Bingley, takes the neighbouring estate of Netherfield. Most of us have at the back of our minds a general picture of the typical marriage in times past as an alliance arranged by the parents. The notions of marrying for love and of betrothal as an act of free choice between the betrothed seem essentially modern. The further back we go in history, the more we expect to find young people married off without their wishes being consulted, often against their will and sometimes as children too young to know their own minds.

In tracing the development of the modern attitude, we have to ask: *when* did the idea that it was right to marry for love begin to creep in? Obviously the old attitude must have sunk deep into the way people spoke and thought about marriage, so that it should not be too difficult to establish when the new idea – so central to modern notions of freedom, individuality and happiness – began to gain ground.

Clearly, in Jane Austen’s day the new idea was already full-blown. Mrs Bennet is a silly woman, worldly, feather-headed, unable to understand the real best interests of her daughters; the attitude which Jane Austen expects readers of *Pride and Prejudice* to share with her heroine Elizabeth is that, while you must behave prudently and

Divided we stand: committed couples who live apart

An increasing number of couples in long-term relationships are choosing to live apart



Matthew and Philippa Field with their daughter, Sophie, in Bournemouth Photo: Victoria Birkinshaw

By Angela Neustatter

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Matthew Field, 32, talks touchingly of the love and commitment that he and his wife, Philippa, 29, share. She tells me how happy she is. Yet the Fields have not lived together since their 14-month-old daughter, Sophie, was born, choosing instead to base themselves in separate homes – she in Bournemouth, he in Crouch End, north London. Weekends are together time.

Emerging from the kitchen of the house they recently bought in Bournemouth, Sophie tucked cosily against his shoulder, Matthew talks of how his daughter will grow up with the beach and the New Forest close by. Although they say they may consider living together in London when Sophie is grown up and independent, this 'controlled absence' is, the Fields agree, a permanent arrangement.

Choosing separate homes is generally seen as an eccentricity of the rich and famous. Think of Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Burton, Margaret Drabble and Michael Holroyd, Clive James and Prue Shaw, and, of course, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre.

But one in 10 people in Britain today has made what is seen as a growing, and increasingly acceptable, lifestyle choice, a phenomenon that has been identified as LAT ('living apart together'), whereby couples who regard themselves as firmly committed have separate homes through choice or circumstance. This trend is echoed throughout Western Europe, America and Australasia.

At a time when nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and long-term co-habitees, often with children, are at least as likely to separate, isn't it encouraging to see people trying different ways of arranging their emotional and domestic lives?

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) regarded the trend as important enough for it to have funded a substantial piece of research into whether LAT can offer a way of sustaining intimate relationships in the 21st century. The report, *Living Apart Together*, which will be published tomorrow (April 23), analyses who Britain's 10 per cent of LATs are, why they live this way, how they organise it, and how intimacy is affected. The results were drawn from a representative national survey of 572 people who don't live with their partners, including 50 face-to-face interviews and 16 in-depth case studies.

The survey shows that LATs are predominantly young – of the 572, 61 per cent were under 35, 28 per cent were between 36 and 55, and 11 per cent were older (although some, such as Wendy Hollway, 63, and Tony Jefferson, 67, may have been LAT from a younger age). Only five per cent were married couples, and Simon Duncan, a lead researcher for ESRC, makes the point that 'up to a quarter of people documented as "single" in fact have a partner living elsewhere, which is important for social care policies such as child care and care for the elderly.'

Those surveyed spanned the social scale, with 85 per cent white and 14 per cent of ethnic origin, similar to the general population. The same was true for occupation, with managerial and professional jobs accounting for 29 per cent, and 33 per cent blue-collar workers, for example.



Couples who saw themselves as being together for the long haul were divided into categories by the researchers. Thirty per cent were LATs from choice ('preference'), where both or one partner wanted to live apart; 19 per cent cited 'constraint', meaning they might have liked to share a home, but circumstances made it impossible or extremely difficult (perhaps the accommodation was unsuitable); 12 per cent were 'situational', regarding their lifestyle choice as the best they could make in their circumstances, and eight per cent were unclassifiable. The remainder were those who, the researchers found, cited a combination of reasons for the choice. For example, although their situation has led Matthew and Philippa to live separately, Matthew says he sees it as a preference in that he needs quiet time in the evenings, after work, to write his books, and suspects that he would feel guilty if they lived together and his long working hours meant he was not there to help with child care. In Bournemouth Sophie's grandparents are delighted to help.

Lucy, 40, explained to the researchers that she would like to share a home with George, her partner of six

years, who is seen by her children from a previous relationship as a father figure. Both Lucy and George live in social housing, and George is disabled. Lucy's home does not have wheelchair access, and his adapted house is too small for her family to live in. But because the council does not regard them as a couple, it will not rehouse them. For now, she stays with George at weekends.

Some couples, while believing their relationship to be enduring, simply felt safer with separate homes, having had previous bad experiences. Michelle, a single mother, had split up with a violent partner who had stripped the flat and left her in debt.

Many of the LATs surveyed were young and hoped to live together (31 per cent). The researchers acknowledge that young people have always dated before moving in together, but Duncan explains that because the survey aimed to present a complete picture of committed couples who decide to live apart, these were included. Also among them were those who do not live together before marriage for religious or cultural reasons.

Nicola, 45, was representative of those previously married or cohabiting. For two and a half years she and her partner have lived a 15-minute drive apart, meeting five times a week. 'I am content with things as they are,' she said. 'We are in love and committed. We both want to be very sure, but I see us as living together eventually.'

Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson, both retired academics, have been together for 20 years, each living in their own family home 50 miles apart in Yorkshire. They are clear it is a good way for them to sustain and nurture a strong, loving bond. Each had been in a long-term relationship that had ended painfully. They met through work and began a relationship, with Tony most often travelling to Wendy's converted barn in Hebden Bridge for weekends. It is here that we sit around the table, with huge windows showcasing the rolling hills and wind-battered winter trees outside. They talk thoughtfully about how they have made their relationship work. They see autonomy and individuality at the heart, while wanting intimacy and commitment.

Wendy says, 'Tony enjoyed having time on his own, and I appreciated that. I had been in a relationship with a man who became stickily attached, and I couldn't bear it.' Both had been single for a long time and both enjoy their own company. Furthermore, there are 'profound differences' in their tastes. Wendy loves country life, Tony has urban tastes. They acknowledge they are 'privileged' to have, as Wendy says, 'been able to live a lifestyle with two sets of bills and the cost of travel to see each other'. Neither has any

interest in marriage. 'I didn't envisage Wendy and me living together full-time,' Tony says.

And while Wendy in the 'first flush of love' might have liked this, it was clear that her then eight-year-old daughter, still insecure after her parents' separation, would not have been happy. 'She was absolutely my priority,' Wendy tells me. They agree that there are losses: someone there to greet you when you get home, to chat about the day, but this is more than offset by always being pleased and stimulated when they meet, Tony says.

Miv Watts, 65, is twice divorced and has two grown-up children, Naomi and Ben. She has been with Mike Gurney, 66, for 17 years, and both see their relationship as a lifelong commitment. They tried living together full-time for two years, but it didn't suit them. Miv is wry. 'Mike is a fishmonger and does a lot of smoking fish at home. I am a stylist working with beautiful fabrics, and the two things are not compatible,' she says. 'Also, he is a homebody, and I like a bigger world.' She moved into a cottage close to Mike's Norfolk home but wanted sunshine. 'So I bought a house in France, and Mike comes to visit four or five days a month,' she says. 'If I am in the UK for business, I stay with him. We also have a house in Australia, where we live very compatibly for several months a year. We both see the way things have evolved as cutting out the negatives and keeping the positives.'

Philippa and Matthew Field had lived together for 10 years in London when she became pregnant, and although they wanted children, the baby was unplanned. 'It was quite a stressful time working out how we could manage in our one-bedroom flat,' he tells me. 'I always said if we had a family I would want them in Bournemouth,' Philippa adds. 'Both our parents are there, I have old friends, it's where I grew up. On top of which I knew the grandparents would be happy to help with child care.' 'We had to look very hard at what that would mean,' Matthew says. 'My hours working in film marketing and PR are very long and unpredictable, and commuting to Bournemouth would add four hours to my day. I value my career, and I couldn't have got a comparable job in Bournemouth, which would probably have left me frustrated and not good for my family.'

The decision to become LATs – Matthew and Philippa have not lived together since Sophie was born – was made easier because Philippa neither expected nor wanted Matthew to give up his work in London. 'I am happy because he is happy,' she says. 'He is a very creative person, and I recognise how important his work is to him, so although I miss him, the arrangement is a good one.'



The couple recently bought a three-bedroom house in Bournemouth. Matthew moved out of the London flat they had done up together, and into a shared rented one. 'I couldn't afford the mortgage on two places, but nor do we want to sell the London flat – so I rent that out and pay the mortgage and my rent from this.' Philippa sees that having time to live in her own rhythm and get domestic chores done leaves weekends for pure 'fun family time', and Matthew is grateful. 'I love being in London, the stimulus of it, and I need completely peaceful time, and Philippa allows me to have that.'

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, LATs are often viewed critically by outsiders. Matthew has been told sharply by some of his colleagues that he should have his wife and child with him, and he knows some male friends assume he is revelling in his freedom as a lad about town. Tony and Wendy have fielded the odd comment, but she says she loves the fact her mother refers to Tony as her 'son-in-sin'. Very few in the study saw their choice of LAT as consciously building an alternative lifestyle, although some clearly felt that it was the best way for them. For those who identified themselves strongly as a couple, sexual

exclusivity was important, with 89 per cent thinking a transgression would be 'always or mostly wrong'.

Tony and Wendy have discussed the 'emotional shape' of their relationship from the start. Monogamy became particularly significant when, six years ago, work took Tony to New York for a year. 'I said to Tony that we needed to start the conversation several months before he actually went,' Wendy says. 'We did that,' Tony adds, 'and got through in a way that did not destabilise our relationship.'

Matthew and Philippa, who speak three times a day on the telephone, see honest communication as essential. Monogamy is an assumption, and Matthew says if one of them strayed, it would be the end of their relationship. So how lucky, he says, smiling, that 'living this way has made our time together very special and sex more exciting.' Missing daily contact and cuddles were cited as a price of LAT in the survey, but overall there was a high level of satisfaction and a feeling of relationships being strengthened, of absence making the heart grow fonder, of a willingness to put in the emotional work necessary to protect love.

When it came to caring for children either from their previous relationships or from their own partnership, some wanted to be very involved, others chose not to be. Wendy and Tony came up against this after she had assumed, early in their relationship, that Tony 'might take on some child care', but quickly learnt he 'had no intention of being a surrogate parent', having brought up three children of his own. Yet he has forged a very warm friendship with Wendy's daughter.

When it is a question of whom to turn to with a problem such as illness, relationships, money or work, 34 per cent of LATs would go to their partner; 34 per cent to a family member, and 27 per cent to a friend or neighbour. For many of us, not feeling able to turn first to our life partner in a crisis would seem to be a serious flaw in LAT, but for the couples surveyed it was simply how it had to be.

The researchers recognised that a key question was how far LATs would care for each other if one of them were ill. The majority of LATs did not assume they would be cared for by each other if, for example, they became bedridden. A little more than half said a family member would take care of them, close to a quarter suggested a friend or neighbour, and only 20 per cent said their partner would step in. This compares with the 92 per cent of married or cohabiting couples who assume that their partner will care for them, according to a 2001 survey.

Wendy and Tony see themselves as being together when they reach 'zimmer frames and beyond', Tony says, and the tenderness between them is evident as they talk of assuming they will live in the same home

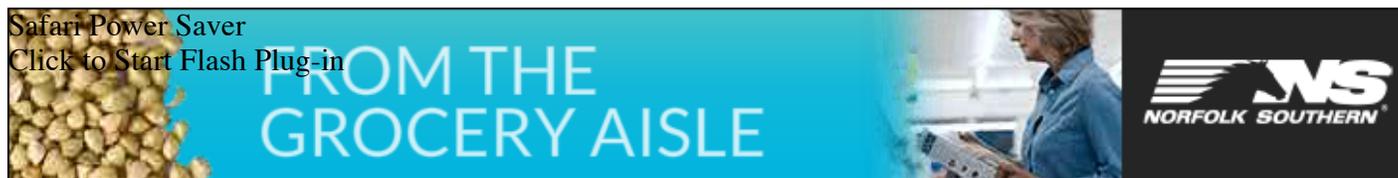
and care for each other if that becomes necessary. 'When you have lived without rituals you have to recognise that things have added up to a significant state of affairs,' Wendy says. 'We would not desert each other.'

So might LAT become a lifestyle we see more frequently? Prof Sasha Roseneil, a lead researcher on the study, believes that increasingly we will choose LAT during the 21st century, pointing to declining cultural pressure on people to marry, and women's increased economic and social independence, as two factors. 'Living apart is not always straightforward,' Roseneil says, 'but it is appealing to many people because of the flexibility and the possibility of autonomy it gives.'

The Living Apart Together study was conducted by Birkbeck University of London, University of Bradford and the National Centre for Social Research. Angela Neustatter is the author of A Home for the Heart – Home as the Key to Happiness (Gibson Square)

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Wonkblog

People who marry young are happier, but those who marry later earn more



By **Dylan Matthews** April 4, 2013 [Follow @dylanmatt](#)

What marriage looks like these days. (NBC)

Julia Shaw hit traffic pay dirt earlier this week when she took to Slate to [argue](#) that twenty-somethings should follow her lead and get married now. Shaw got married at 23, and it seems to have worked out well for her. Amanda Marcotte responded by [throwing some cold hard data](#) on that argument, noting that women who marry later are less likely to get divorced and earn more, on average, than their earlier-marrying counterparts.

So should you wait to tie the knot? As tends to be the case

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in thorny areas like this, the evidence is decidedly mixed. In what should come as a shock to no one, the answer to when you should get married depends a lot on what you want out of a marriage, your career and life in general.

First, some throat-clearing. None of the data we have on marriage are definitively causal. That's a good thing. To have rock-solid evidence that marriage causes anything, we'd need to randomly require some people to marry at one age and others to marry at another age and then compare the results (and even that study design would have plenty of problems). Human Subjects Committees generally consider such studies unethical and don't let them happen.

So what we have are associations, or simple correlations between variables (say, age-at-marriage and income, or divorce, likelihood). That necessarily limits what you can say. "The kind of people who are going to marry younger are going to be somewhat different than those who marry older," says UVA sociologist Brad Wilcox, who runs the National Marriage Project and was a co-author of its ["Knot Yet" report](#). People who marry younger tend to be poorer and less educated to start out with, Wilcox adds, as well as more religious.

So the finding that women who wait to get married make more money doesn't mean that a particular woman would earn more if she got married at 29 rather than 23. It could be that there's no effect of her age-at-marriage on income,

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and that the earnings differential between the groups just reflects other differences between their members.

But [you go to war with the data you have](#), not the data you wish you had. So here's what the admittedly limited information we have on the effects of marriage tells us.

Earnings -- Women

As Marcotte says, the evidence is pretty persuasive that waiting to get married actually causes women's earnings to go up. For one thing, the difference holds up if you control for education level, as this chart from "Knot Yet" that Ezra [posted](#) indicates:

The asterisks and circumflexes indicate varying levels of statistical significance, but generally, the differences are statistically significant for high school graduates, those with some college, and college graduates. But they aren't for high school dropouts. There, you don't see any significant difference in earnings based on age at time of marriage.

What's more, the magnitudes involved are a bit smaller for high school graduates and those with only some college than for college graduates. That suggests that the benefits to waiting increase the more educated you are. And again, we don't have any evidence suggesting that

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waiting actually causes these differentials, and when they're as small as they are for the high school graduate and some college cohort, it could just be a quirk of demography. So it's not as simple as just "waiting makes you earn more." That seems to be true for college graduates, but the farther you go down the education ladder, the less clear the relationship looks.

The effects also decline the longer one waits. Getting married at 25 rather than 19 makes a big difference. At 30 rather than 25? Less so.

Earnings -- Men

But what we do know is that there is no such relationship for men:

No matter their education level, men who wait until they're 30 or older to marry earn a statistically smaller amount than men who marry earlier. This is interesting in light of research from the Urban Institute's [Robert Lerman](#), among others, suggesting that men earn a "marriage premium." Lerman and his co-author, Avner Ahituv, [found](#) that marriage increases men's earnings by about 20 percent. But as Wilcox tells me, there's less evidence of a premium among women. Some studies [find one](#), while others actually find a [penalty](#), and there's a

[pretty consistent wage penalty](#) for women who have children vs. those who don't.

That might partly explain the results you see in the above chart. If men make more money because they get married, then speeding up marriage could reap some economic dividends, enough to offset the disadvantages in terms of reduced flexibility when it comes to place and type of work.

So does waiting to get married increase your earnings? Probably, if you're a college-educated woman. For everyone else, it's less clear.

Happiness

Measuring happiness is a tricky business, and we've known for a while now that although life satisfaction constantly increases with income, its effect slows as one climbs the income ladder. Going from \$100,000 to \$120,000 a year creates a lot less happiness than going from \$20,000 a year to \$40,000 a year. Combine that with the murky economic data seen above, and you've got one messy picture.

"Knot Yet", the study Wilcox helped lead, has some interesting findings in this regard. He finds that self-reported happiness with one's marriage is highest for those who marry in their mid-20s, compared to those who do it in their late teens or early 20s or who wait until their

late 20s or early 30s:

And it's not just feelings about the marriage. Among 24- to 29-year-olds, those who got married are less likely to get drunk frequently and to report that they're "highly depressed." Among 20- to 28-year-olds, married people are likelier to say they're "highly satisfied" with their lives:

Getting married earlier might also be better for your sex life, believe it or not. Dana Rotz at Mathematica Policy Research [found](#) that "a four year increase in age at marriage is associated with a couple having sex about one time less per month." In other words: the later you get married, the less sex you have.

Again, it could just be that happy people tend to get married earlier. When I noted the data showing that young married people are happier to Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins and author of "[The Marriage Go-Round](#)," he replied: "I bet they are, because they've found good partners. That doesn't mean that if you found people who are less well-matched to you, you should just marry them." The drinking and sex numbers in particular probably reflect the greater religiosity of early-married

people as much as any happiness effects bestowed by marriage itself. Obviously you're going to be having more sex after getting married if you're religiously opposed to sex before marriage.

But the differences are still striking. It's uncontroversial at this point that marriage, in general, makes you happier, due to the work of Dartmouth's [David Blanchflower](#). It seems that's true with twenty-somethings, too. That provides some evidence that you might want to get in on the fun sooner rather than later, if you have a good partner.

Conclusion

Marriage. It's what brings us together today. (20th Century Fox)

So it's complicated. As a wise man once [said](#): "Everyone is different. No two people are not on fire." The best take-away to glean from this is probably that, all else being equal, being married makes you happier than you'd otherwise be, but it does so presumably because it involves spending a lot of your time with someone whom you love and who's a good match for you. "If you can find a marriage option that's going to work and you're in your early twenties, take it," Cherlin says. "The trouble is people are not finding those."

Holding partner quality equal, Wilcox argues, it still

depends. "If your goal is to maximize your professional and financial accomplishment, then there's no question that getting married later is the answer for you," he says. "But if you have a more traditional orientation in terms of having kids or being religious, then getting married and having kids in your 20s is a good bet."

SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

Poor people value marriage as much as the middle class and rich, study shows

The battle over the value of marriage "has been won," UCLA psychologists report

Stuart Wolpert | July 16, 2012

Poor people hold more traditional values toward marriage and divorce than people with moderate and higher incomes, UCLA psychologists report in the current issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

The findings are based on a large survey about marriage, relationships and values, analyzed across income groups. They raise questions about how effectively some \$1 billion in government spending to promote the value of marriage among the poor is being spent.

"A lot of government policy is based on the assumption that low-income people hold less traditional views about marriage," said Benjamin Karney, a UCLA professor of psychology and senior author of the study.

"However, the different income groups do not hold dramatically different views about marriage and divorce — and when the views are different, they are different in the opposite direction from what is commonly assumed. People of low income hold values that are at least as traditional toward marriage and divorce, if not more so."

Karney, who is co-director of the Relationship Institute at UCLA, added: "The United States is spending money teaching people about the value of marriage and family, and we are saying, congratulations, the battle has been won."

The study consisted of 6,012 people, 29.4 percent of low income, 26 percent of moderate income and 34.7 percent of high income. In the sample, 4,508 people lived in Florida, 500 in California, 502 in New York and 502 in Texas. The results from the four states were very comparable. The research was based on phone surveys that lasted an average of 27 minutes each. The participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements.

Lower income people held slightly more traditional values on the following statements than people with higher

income:

"Divorce can be a reasonable solution to an unhappy marriage."

"When there are children in the family, parents should stay married even if they no longer love each other."

"It's better for a family if the man earns a living and the woman takes care of the family."

"A husband and wife should be of the same race or ethnic group."

The values among all groups were equally traditional on the following statements:

"A happy, healthy marriage is one of the most important things in life."

"Children do better when their parents are married."

"People who have children together should be married."

Low-income people hold much more traditional attitudes about divorce and are less likely to see divorce as a reasonable solution to an unhappy marriage, Karney said. One area where low-income groups are less traditional, he said, is on the acceptability of single parenting.

These findings raise an obvious question: If poor people hold traditional values about marriage and divorce, why are their marriage rates lower and their out-of-wedlock births much higher than those of higher incomes? The answer, Karney said, is that values often do not predict behavior, and they don't in these areas. He noted that most people do not consider lying to be a good value, yet large numbers of people lie nevertheless.

"Why are low-income women postponing marriage but having babies?" Karney asked. "Because they don't want to get divorced. They think if they marry their current partner, they are likely to get divorced — and couples that have financial strain are much more likely to have marital difficulties. It's like these women have been reading the scientific journals about marriage; their intuition is absolutely correct.

He said many of these low-income women have no models for a successful marriage, and the marriages they see are in trouble. Also, they do not trust their financial and family future with the men they know. "However, they know they can raise a child," he said. "They may have been raised by a single mother, and people all around them were raised by single mothers. They see single-parent families that succeed, and they see the role of mother is valued."

Karney said that an affluent 18-year-old girl does not want to get pregnant because that would interfere with her plans for college, her career and a future husband. A poor 18-year-old looks at what awaits her; she doesn't see herself becoming a lawyer or even a college graduate. "But if she becomes a mother, she gets respect, purpose and someone to love her — and she doesn't need to be married to do that," he said. "She knows she can be a mom; she doesn't know if she can be married forever."

Why are low-income women willing to have babies before they are willing to get married?

"It's not because they don't care about marriage," Karney said. "They care about marriage so much that they are unwilling to do it the wrong way. In their communities, motherhood and marriage are two separate things. Girls who think they have somewhere to go in life don't get pregnant; girls who think they have nowhere to go are less careful about contraception."

Thomas Trail, UCLA postdoctoral fellow in psychology and lead author of the study said that lower income partners are no more likely to struggle with relationship issues than are higher income partners. "They have no more problems with communication, sex, parental roles or division of household chores than do higher income couples," he said.

Do low-income people have unrealistically high standards toward marriage? Karney and Trail found no evidence of that.

"They're more realistic," Karney said.

Sustaining a marriage or long-term relationship depends on how well you are able to manage the daily tasks of life, he noted.

"For some people, those tasks are more challenging because of what they have to contend with," Karney said. "A marriage is part and parcel with the rest of your life. Your values turn out to be a pretty small factor in the success of a marriage. Even if you love marriage and are deeply committed to the institution of marriage, practical issues that are making your life difficult matter more."

"Low-income couples are practical and realistic in their views on marriage. We should listen to what they are telling us, rather than imposing 'solutions' that do not match what they really need."

The best way to lower teen pregnancy rates, he said, is to increase social mobility. Government money would be better spent helping low-income people with the day-to-day challenges in their lives, he said.

"There is a lot you can do with a billion dollars to promote marriage, including helping people with child care and transportation; that is not where the money has been spent," Karney said. "Almost all of that money has been spent on educational curricula, which is a narrow approach, based on false assumptions. Communication and emotional connection are the same among low-income people as in more affluent group. Their unique needs are not about relationship education. None of the data support the current policy of teaching relationships values and skills. Low-income people have concrete, practical problems making ends meet."

The study, titled "What's (Not) Wrong With Low-Income Marriages," is based on data collected in 2003, after the federal government (under President George W. Bush) began a "healthy marriage initiative" that still exists. The data predate the recession, but Karney suspects the findings would apply to an even larger extent today than when he collected the data.

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Media Contact

Stuart Wolpert

310-206-0511

swolpert@support.ucla.edu



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LIFE & STYLE

Why Economics Can't Explain Our Cultural Divide

Even during upturns, blue-collar Americans are marrying and working less, writes Charles Murray

By CHARLES MURRAY

March 16, 2012 6:25 p.m. ET

Some reviewers of "Coming Apart," my new book about the growing cultural divide between America's upper and lower classes, have faulted me for ignoring the role of the labor market in undermining once widely shared values involving marriage and hard work.

As these critics see it, the loss of our common culture is a result not of cultural changes but of shifts in policy and the economy. Over the past four decades, they argue, the U.S. has shipped high-paying manufacturing jobs overseas and undermined the labor unions that could protect workers' pay and benefits. Working-class earnings fell more than 20% from their high point in 1973, men were no longer able to support families, and marriage eroded accordingly. Demoralized workers fell out of the labor force. The problems of the new lower class would fade away, they suggest, if only we would use public policy to generate working-class jobs at good wages.



Two construction workers work on the roof of a steel

There are two problems with this line of argument: The purported causes don't explain the effects, and whether they really were the causes doesn't make much difference anyway.

Start with the prevalent belief that the labor market affected marriage because of the disappearance of the "family wage" that enabled a working-class man to support a family in my base line year of 1960.

It is true that unionized jobs at the major manufacturers provided generous wages in 1960. But they didn't drive the overall wage level in the working class. In the 1960 census, the mean annual earnings of white males ages 30

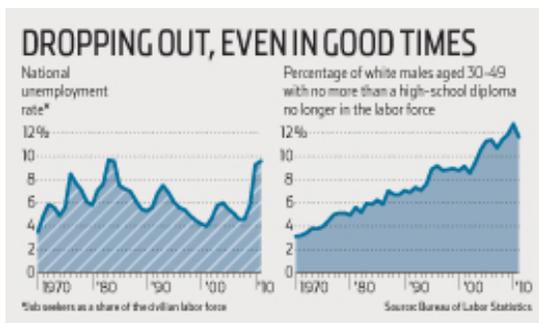
building. *Getty Images*

to 49 who were in working-class occupations (expressed in 2010 dollars) was \$33,302. In 2010, the parallel figure from the Current Population Survey was \$36,966—more than \$3,000 higher than the 1960 mean, using the identical definition of working-class occupations.

This occurred despite the decline of private-sector unions, globalization, and all the other changes in the labor market. What's more, this figure doesn't include additional income from the Earned Income Tax Credit, a benefit now enjoyed by those making the low end of working-class wages.

If the pay level in 1960 represented a family wage, there was still a family wage in 2010. And yet, just 48% of working-class whites ages 30 to 49 were married in 2010, down from 84% in 1960.

What about the rising number of dropouts from the labor force? For seven of the 13 years from 1995 through 2007, the national unemployment rate was under 5% and went as high as 6% only once, in 2003. Working-class jobs were plentiful, and not at the minimum wage. During those years, the mean wage of white males ages 30 to 49 in working-class occupations was more than \$18 an hour. Only 10% earned less than \$10 an hour.



If changes in the availability of well-paying jobs determined dropout rates over the entire half-century from 1960 to 2010, we should have seen a reduction in dropouts during that long stretch of good years. But instead we saw an increase, from 8.9% of white males ages 30 to 49 in 1994 to 11.9% as of March 2008, before the financial meltdown.

If changes in the labor market don't explain the development of the new lower class, what does? My own explanation is no secret. In my 1984 book "Losing

Ground," I put the blame on our growing welfare state and the perverse incentives that it created. I also have argued that the increasing economic independence of women, who flooded into the labor market in the 1970s and 1980s, played an important role.

Simplifying somewhat, here's my reading of the relevant causes: Whether because of support from the state or earned income, women became much better able to support a child without a husband over the period of 1960 to 2010. As women needed men less, the social status that working-class men enjoyed if they supported families began to disappear. The sexual revolution exacerbated the situation, making it easy for men to get sex without bothering to get married. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that male fecklessness bloomed, especially in the working class.

I barely mentioned these causes in describing our new class divide because they don't make much of a difference any more. They have long since been overtaken by transformations in cultural norms. That is why the prolonged tight job market from 1995 to 2007 didn't stop working-class males from dropping out of the labor force, and it is why welfare reform in 1996 has failed to increase marriage rates among working-class females. No reform from the left or right that could be passed by today's Congress would

turn these problems around.

The prerequisite for any eventual policy solution consists of a simple cultural change: It must once again be taken for granted that a male in the prime of life who isn't even looking for work is behaving badly. There can be exceptions for those who are genuinely unable to work or are house husbands. But reasonably healthy working-age males who aren't working or even looking for work, who live off their girlfriends, families or the state, must once again be openly regarded by their fellow citizens as lazy, irresponsible and unmanly. Whatever their social class, they are, for want of a better word, bums.

To bring about this cultural change, we must change the language that we use whenever the topic of feckless men comes up. Don't call them "demoralized." Call them whatever derogatory word you prefer. Equally important: Start treating the men who aren't feckless with respect. Recognize that the guy who works on your lawn every week is morally superior in this regard to your neighbor's college-educated son who won't take a "demeaning" job. Be willing to say so.

This shouldn't be such a hard thing to do. Most of us already believe that one of life's central moral obligations is to be a productive adult. The cultural shift that I advocate doesn't demand that we change our minds about anything; we just need to drop our nonjudgmentalism.

It is condescending to treat people who have less education or money as less morally accountable than we are. We should stop making excuses for them that we wouldn't make for ourselves. Respect those who deserve respect, and look down on those who deserve looking down on.

—Mr. Murray is the author of "Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010" and the W.H. Brady Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

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EUROPE | NYT NOW

In Weddings, Pope Francis Looks Past Tradition

By ELISABETTA POVOLEDO SEPT. 14, 2014

ROME — Cautioning that marriage is “not a television show” but a symbol of “real life” with “joys and difficulties,” Pope Francis married 20 couples from the Diocese of Rome on Sunday, some of them less than paragons of traditional Catholic values.

While the Roman Catholic Church considers sex out of marriage a sin, some of the couples married by the pope had already lived together and one had a grown child. Some couples had been previously married. But in Francis’s new, more forgiving church, these otherwise familiar domestic arrangements were not considered an impediment.

Being married by the pope had seemed “such an impossible thing that then — when we discovered that it was happening, that it wasn’t a dream — well, it transformed us,” Guido Tassaro, who married Gabriella Improta on Sunday, said in an interview on Vatican Radio. The report described them as an “older couple” with children.

Ms. Improta said she was living “a dream beyond my expectations.” The pope, she said, “is a man of conversion, a man of peace.”

He is also, it would seem, a pragmatist. The couples selected by Rome’s parishes for Sunday’s ceremony reflected an increasingly secular Italian society in which marriages — especially church weddings — have been declining even as separations and divorces are rising.

In 2012, the most recent year that figures were available, about 122,000 of the country’s 207,000 weddings were religious ceremonies, according to Italy’s national statistics agency.

Vatican watchers said the public marriages, the first by a pope since 2000, were meant to send a message, something Francis has done previously to soften

the church's image on social issues. During his return trip from World Youth Day in Brazil in July 2013, for example, the pope said he would not condemn — or judge — priests because of their sexual orientation.

“Cohabitation is a big issue, and how it is dealt with at the parish level is a big concern, so the pope is sending a signal,” said John Thavis, a veteran Vatican reporter.

He said that the couples chosen for the ceremony “seem to be normal people and not necessarily handpicked. It's one more indication that the pope looks at things the way they really are; he's a realist.

“It's a pope willing to say that if you want to be married in the church, we'll find a way to do it. It's the ‘who am I to judge?’ pope, who doesn't want to turn people away and instead wants to find a way to bring people in,” Mr. Thavis said.

In defending the sacrament of marriage, the pope acknowledged that it could become a challenge, that spouses could stray, or become discouraged and “daily life becomes burdensome, even nauseating.”

“The path is not always a smooth one, free of disagreements, otherwise it would not be human. It is a demanding journey, at times difficult, and at times turbulent, but such is life,” Francis said.

Francis is not the first pope to celebrate a public wedding, but Sunday's ceremony “assumes particular significance, coming ahead of the Synod of Bishops on the family,” Bishop Filippo Iannone, vice regent of the Diocese of Rome, said in a statement on the diocesan website.

Many Catholics hope the synod will address issues like allowing divorced members who remarry to receive Communion.

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