

## **BreakPoint and THE CHRISTIAN POST**

### **The Price of Family Fragmentation Costly Substitutes**

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Thu, Apr. 17 2008 06:48 PM ET

The Institute for American Values and the Georgia Family Council have just released a sobering study titled “The Taxpayer Cost of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing.” The study notes that while the debate on marriage usually focuses on its social, moral, and religious qualities, marriage is also an “economic institution.” It is a “powerful creator of human and social capital.”



In other words, healthy marriages produce the kind of people who are better able to take care of themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, as the report documents, there are fewer healthy marriages in America now than there were 25 years ago. Between 1970 and 2005, the percentage of children being raised in two-parent families dropped from 85 to 68 percent.

The principal causes of this drop were the high divorce rate and the increase in the number of out-of-wedlock births. While the number of divorces has declined slightly in recent years, the percentage of children born to unmarried mothers has continued to grow.

As I said earlier, the costs of this family fragmentation are not limited to the children. As one expert wrote, “Divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs, paid by taxpayers.”

How much? A minimum of \$112 billion a year. That is more than a \$1 trillion a decade in “increased taxpayer expenditures for antipoverty, criminal justice . . . education programs,” and lost tax revenues.

What is more, the “human and social capital” lost from family fragmentation has an economic impact that goes far beyond government expenditures.

Even if you set aside the social, cultural, and moral dimensions of marriage, it is clear that government has a vital interest in promoting healthy marriages. Even modest increases in the number of “stable marriages” could save taxpayers a lot of money.

Thus, the report recommends increased spending on “marriage-strengthening” programs, like the marriage-skills classes offered by the state of Oklahoma.

The release of the report coincides with Pope Benedict’s visit to Washington and his meeting with President Bush. The subject of marriage in America is expected to be on their agenda.

I will not presume to speak for the Pope or the president, but I think that they would agree that the most important thing government can do to fight family fragmentation is to stop promoting marriage substitutes.

What I told “BreakPoint” listeners about Britain yesterday is also true of the United States. In both instances, a decline in marriage and an increase in family fragmentation coincided with the introduction of legally sanctioned substitutes for traditional marriage (like civil unions and, now, same-sex marriages).

The Pope has called these substitutes “dangerous and counterproductive as they inevitably weaken and destabilize the legitimate family based on matrimony.”

Even the best “marriage-strengthening” program can not compete with the message “marriage doesn’t matter.”

That is why, if you want to make a dent in the social and economic costs of family fragmentation, the first order of business is to promote and strengthen traditional marriage and accept no substitutes!

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