

BOOK REVIEWS

Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization, by Brad WilcoxJason Jewell¹¹ Center for Great Books & Human Flourishing, Faulkner University<https://doi.org/10.54669/001c.121819>

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Just about everyone agrees that marriage is in decline these days. In 1970, nearly 60 percent of American adults aged eighteen to fifty-five were married with at least one child. In 2022, that number was down to 33 percent. Influential voices in media and the corporate world urge caution and delay with respect to marriage. The familiar hostility to marriage from radical feminists is now echoed on the right of the political spectrum by elements of the “manosphere,” especially the movement known as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). Even the Christian churches appear to be accommodating themselves to a post-familial culture in various ways, seldom making public statements concerning the importance of marriage as a social norm. For example, Anthony Bradley recently pointed out on his Substack that the popular faith and work movement is curiously silent on the subject of marriage and family, even though the concepts are invariably joined in Scripture.

In this context, Brad Wilcox’s *Get Married* provides a welcome breath of fresh air, reminding us that marriage usually confers many benefits not only on husbands and wives, but also on children whose biological parents are married to each other. Moreover, society benefits from a stable norm of marriage. In the course of eleven chapters and almost three hundred pages, Wilcox delivers mountains of sociological data that counteract the marriage skepticism so prevalent in Western culture today.

After an introduction that surveys marriage’s current plight, Wilcox profiles four groups he designates as “masters of marriage”: churchgoing Christians (the “Faithful”), adherents of bourgeois and traditional values (“Conservatives”), college-educated professionals (the “Strivers”), and Asian Americans. In each of these groups, a “family-first orientation” predominates in which marriage is viewed not exclusively or even primarily as a vehicle for personal fulfillment, but as an institution within which one’s desires should often be subordinated for the good of the community and to ensure the best

possible foundation for the lives of one's children. Members of these four groups are disproportionately likely to marry for life and to report being "very happy" in marriage.

A key attribute shared by the masters of marriage is "a tendency, as groups, to reject the anti-marriage messaging promoted by our ruling class" (34). Wilcox devotes several of the following chapters to explaining and rebutting the various myths alleging the superiority of the unmarried life. He gives them catchy names like the "flying solo myth," the "family diversity myth," the "soulmate myth," and the "parent trap." Although some of them have deep historical roots, Wilcox pegs the 1970s as the crucial decade in which they began to exercise significant influence. The cultural messaging of the "Me Decade" coupled with the advent of no-fault divorce legislation contributed to a "divorce revolution," the effects of which are felt today.

With several examples, Wilcox documents each myth's promotion in media and advertising and its influence in society. He then produces data belying those myths from one or more of seven large surveys, some of which are decades-long longitudinal studies. Chapter 5, which deals with the "soulmate myth," is a representative example. Survey data reveal that large majorities of young, unmarried adults believe that a soulmate is out there waiting for them and that marriage is about being "in love." Adherents of this model tend to think that healthy marriages experience low or no friction and require few or no sacrifices on their part. They are more likely to get divorced when these expectations are not met. Wilcox argues that those in search of a soulmate fail to understand two things: first, that the intense passion of romantic love fades for nearly everyone, and second, that marital happiness is more often found when it is not pursued directly. Among adults who are actually married, the family-first orientation predominates, especially in the groups previously identified as masters of marriage.

Of particular interest to readers of this journal will be chapter 10, which discusses the effect of religion on marriage. After citing several pieces from the *New Yorker*, the *Daily Beast*, and the *Guardian* that attempt to paint "a dark portrait of the role that religious faith plays in ordinary family life," Wilcox summarizes evidence demonstrating the opposite conclusion (174). Religious Americans report greater marital happiness and stability, greater overall happiness, and better relationships with their children than their unchurched counterparts. Part of this discrepancy is likely due to selection effect. In other words, the kinds of people who attend church often disproportionately have other traits that are associated with success in marriage. However, Wilcox argues that participation in religious life also forms the "values and virtues that prioritize family life," provides supportive social networks, and gives a sense of meaning and purpose, all of which reinforce an orientation toward the future that helps one resist "short-term temptations" to behaviors that are likely to damage one's family life (182).

The book's conclusion identifies "five Cs," pillars upon which the masters of marriage have created strong and stable marriages: communion ("we before me"), children, commitment (to avoiding divorce), cash (especially breadwinning husbands), and community (surrounding the couple with friends and family who have a high view of marriage). Wilcox urges Americans to "reject the me-first ethos of our culture" and its "progressive orthodoxies" and to publicly embrace the value of these pillars (228). He also calls for a handful of specific policy changes, such as the elimination of the marriage penalty for Medicaid eligibility.

Get Married unashamedly advocates for marriage rather than posing as a dispassionate survey of social-scientific data. However, it is largely free from polemic. The one group Wilcox criticizes is the Strivers, who live out the behaviors conducive to successful marriage while studiously refusing to endorse those behaviors to those on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder—a critique reminiscent of Charles Murray's in *Coming Apart*. Although the book is intended for a general audience, Wilcox provides copious citations and gives an overview of his source material in a manner that will probably satisfy scholars. Both groups can gain useful insights from this timely work on a crucial problem in contemporary society.

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