

## The Future of Christianity in the West – 4

*This is the fourth of nine articles in a series entitled “The Future of Christianity in the West.”*

We have argued that the West is embracing a secular pagan future that is hostile to orthodox Christianity. In order to meet the challenges that lie ahead, it is imperative that Christians strengthen their basic institutions. Last time we discussed the church. We come now to the second and third of these institutions.

### ***Marriage***

The institution of marriage has been under assault for decades. The high divorce rates which began to be evident in the 1970’s have been joined by low marriage rates of more recent years. The number of Americans over 25 who have never been married has nearly doubled since 1960. Cohabitation outside of marriage, once considered a scandal, is now at an all-time high. Seventy percent of all Americans will cohabit before marriage. This now is considered normal behavior with which little stigma is associated.

Illegitimacy is also at an all-time high rate. A stunning and culturally unsustainable 40% of all live births now occur outside of marriage. Americans are neither delaying sexual relations nor child-rearing until marriage. Black illegitimacy stands at nearly 75% compared to the 14% in 1940 and 25% as recently as 1965.

Rod Dreher asks the question, “Is sex the linchpin of Christian cultural order?”<sup>1</sup> His answer is yes. The sexual revolution has been catastrophic for Christianity. The sexual revolution, says Dreher,

has demolished the fundamental Christian conception of society, of families, and of the nature of human beings. There can be no more peace between Christianity and the Sexual Revolution, because they are radically opposed.<sup>2</sup>

He argues that severing sex from procreation was a key milestone in the triumph of the sexual revolution. “We have gay marriage because the straight majority came to see sexuality as something primarily for personal pleasure and self-expression and only secondarily for procreation.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, “Gay marriage and gender ideology signify the final triumph of the Sexual Revolution and the dethroning of Christianity because they deny Christian anthropology at its core and shatter the authority of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup>

Sexuality is at the center of contemporary culture as well as contemporary controversies in the church. Sexual images are pervasive and invasive. Casual hook-ups in popular media are the norm. Sex and gender issues are dividing denominations and compromising Christian witness. Consequently, marriage must be reaffirmed and sexual discipline must once again be understood as an important aspect of Christian discipleship. “Unbridled erotic passion creates chaos and disintegration,” Dreher warns.<sup>5</sup> The Christian community must be unequivocal in affirming

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<sup>1</sup> Dreyer, *The Benedict Option*, 198.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life. Marital union is indissoluble. Divorce cannot be considered an option for believers (Mt 5:31-32; 19:1-12). This union must also be understood as the context within which children are to be conceived and born.

Erica Komisar, a psychoanalyst and author of *Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters*, in a recent article entitled “Political Correctness is Bad for Kids,” argues for the ideal of traditional marriage. She acknowledges that “children who grow up with same-sex parents, a single mother or other nontraditional arrangements can be emotionally healthy.” Yet she insists “there are obstacles to overcome and losses to acknowledge.” Mothers and fathers each make a distinctive contribution:

Children need a balance of secure attachment and healthy separation, and the traditional two-parent structure provides it. Mothers are uniquely suited for sensitive nurturing, which helps regulate distress and is critical to early development. Fathers provide a balance by teaching children to regulate their aggression and become independent. In my practice I have seen an increasing number of moms who are single by choice. Although the mothers have the attachment part down, they don’t have a man around to help the separation process, and the kids struggle as a result.<sup>6</sup>

Traditional marriage and the sexual norms that protect it provide a context for human flourishing. “Eros that submits to Christ bears fruit in the gift of children, stable families and communities,” says Dreher.<sup>7</sup> We must speak both of the evils of extra-marital sex and of the beauty of marital sex. “Christians must repudiate *the whole sexual revolution*,” says Anthony Esolen.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Family***

A discussion of marriage then leads naturally to an evaluation of the family. Our homes must be centered on God. Positively this means daily family devotions featuring Scripture reading, prayer, and the singing of psalms and classic hymns. It means that our homes must be warm, loving, attractive places which other people will wish to replicate. Negatively it means monitoring one’s children’s peers and, says Dreher, “strictly limiting media, especially television and online media.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Pro-fatherhood***

Every society faces the problem of channeling the energy of young men into productive activity. The terrorists in the Middle East are young men. The suicide bombers (with very few exceptions) are young men. The terrorists and mass murderers at home are young men. The violent criminals at home and abroad, the murderers, the rapists, the armed robbers, those who assault and batter, are all young men. When society does not give to young men a meaningful role, one which affirms their identity as men, their manhood and masculinity, many of them will turn to anti-social means of establishing that identity: promiscuity, alcohol and drugs, and violence. They will establish their manhood by holding their liquor, sexual conquests, and violent exploits.

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<sup>6</sup> Erica Komisar, “Political Correctness is Bad for Kids,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 16, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 209.

<sup>8</sup> Esolen, *Out of the Ashes*, 96.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 126; more on this in a moment.

They will live on the edge. They will flirt with danger. They will shirk responsibility. These are well- documented and universal trends observed by multiple social observers going back at least to Margaret Mead (yes, *that* Margaret Mead).<sup>10</sup> These trends may be observed from the ghetto to Appalachia, from the Arab world to the skinheads and neo-Nazis of Europe.

What is needed is a revived emphasis on the role of husband and father. What proves a man's manhood? What is the most important role for a man in this world? The Christian answer is: that of provider and protector of his wife and family. That alone is comparable to a woman's irreplaceable role as the bearer and nurturer of children.

Current claims that men are expendable, that they have nothing distinctive to contribute to the family, that mothers and fathers are interchangeable, must be fiercely resisted by the Christian community. Fathers are irreplaceable and their absence always comes with a price. Wives need husbands. Mothers need fathers. Children need fathers. A godly man shows his manhood not by sexual conquests, not by hard drinking, and not by violently subduing his rivals, but by submitting his strength to the needs of his wife and children. The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must stand unambiguously on this ground.

*Terry L. Johnson is the senior minister of Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, GA. He is author of various books including *Leading in Worship*, *Worshipping with Calvin*, *Serving with Calvin*, and *The Identity and Attributes of God*.*

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<sup>10</sup> For a summary from the social sciences, see George F. Gilder's books, *Sexual Suicide* (Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1973) and *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 1986).