

Fragmented Families and Silence of the Faithful

How Religious Leaders and Institutions
Must Speak Up and Reach Out

A SYMPOSIUM



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Laurence Cooper, Jim Daly, Kevin Donnelly,
Bryan Dowd, Sharyn Dowd, Todd R. Flanders, Arvonne
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Kruse Nordin, Bob Osburn, Star Parker,
Bruce Peterson, Larry Purdy, Don Racheter, Joe Rigney,
Mark Ritchie, Linda Runbeck, Don Samuels,
Glenn T. Stanton, David Strom, David J. Theroux,
Robert Wedl, W. Bradford Wilcox, Stephen B. Young

Introduction by Mitch Pearlstein

Center of the American Experiment is a nonpartisan, tax-exempt, public policy and educational institution that brings conservative and alternative ideas to bear on the most difficult issues facing Minnesota and the nation.



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Introduction

Mitch Pearlstein
Founder & President

Back in the summer of 2012, American Experiment published a symposium titled *Fragmented Families and Splintered Classes: Why So Much Churning? What Can be Done? What Will America Come to Look Like?* Among its virtues was its fruitfulness in my unapologetic attempt to borrow and think through good ideas for a book I was in the early stages of writing on the symposium's third question, the one about the future. That book turned out to be *Broken Bonds: What Family Fragmentation Means for America's Future*, released last August. It has been well received, so my great thanks once again to the 36 writers who wrote 34 appropriating-rich essays.

It's now March 2015 and I'm gearing up to write a Minnesota-based report on what religious leaders and institutions in particular can do to reduce nonmarital births, reduce divorce, and slow down the frequency with which people move in and out of romantic relationships, routinely hurting their children, themselves, and the commonweal along the way. In statistical sum, the United States has the highest family fragmentation rates (also known as family *breakdown* rates) in the industrial world. How high? About 40

percent of all American babies, for instance, come into this life outside of marriage. Other rounded-off proportions include 30 percent for white children, 50 percent for Hispanic children, and 70 percent for African-American children. And divorce rates, even though they have moderated for some groups, remain harmfully high. What to do, once again, to help me more fully grasp matters from multiple angles and viewpoints?

Easy, pull together another American Experiment symposium in which a wide variety of smart and interesting people from across Minnesota and the nation consider questions raised by the title of this new anthology: *Fragmented Families and Silence of the Faithful: How Religious Leaders and Institutions Must Speak Up and Reach Out*. In a literary coincidence bordering on a numerical miracle appropriate for the occasion, once again I'm grateful to draw on 34 essays written by 36 diverse writers. (Given that I asked upwards of 850 of my closest friends to write on each occasion, winding up with the exact same number of writers and essays each time must suggest *something* important.)

Without taking anything away from previous American Experiment symposia – we've published about eight over the years on a broad range of subjects – there's something distinctively compelling about this new one. Which I suspect is not surprising given the emotional power and eternal nature of the subjects at hand.



An essential point before going on: “*Healthy marriages*” are the only kinds advocated here and throughout. And when it comes to physically abusive unions, they need to be escaped, abused partners need protection, and abusive partners need cops called.

With that affirmed, what follows is a sampling of comments from the 34 essays, one per piece, in a rough thematic ordering possibly evident only to me. Additional quotes capturing further observations, lessons, and warnings are spotlighted in the main text, which also contains IDs for the 36 writers, who stretch from New York to California via Minnesota, with a long side ride to Australia.

Stephen B. Young. “Because religious institutions, traditions, and leaders – or the lack thereof – shape the beliefs, virtues, and habits that constitute personal character, they load the dice of life for or against success in social relationships.”

Don Samuels. “[Clergy] must call us back to the original sources of our resiliency: commitment, mutual obligations, social compacts, institutionalization, ritual, rites of passage, formalizations, fidelity, and loyalty – all communal qualities epitomized in marriage.”

Ken Lewis. “Children need a family and a church, but they need families and churches that are more than mutely filling a slot. They need parents, pastors, mentors, and teachers who will talk to them and tell them the truth that will set them free.”

Bryan Dowd and Sharyn Dowd (brother and sister). “Because self-sacrificial love is the foundation of Christianity, the proper role of Christian religious leaders and institutions is to promote self-sacrificial love in all settings, including marriages.”

Mark Ritchie. “Just a couple days after [our daughter] Rachel was killed, a thousand people showed up for her memorial service at our church, where nearly the entire congregation helped make this a way of healing that could save our souls.”

Don Racheter. “Pastors and religious leaders are derelict in their duty to children when they do not speak up and reach out to encourage stable, married families – with a father present in the household – providing both economic and moral leadership.”

Jim Daly. “Thus, it is our duty as Christians, among others, to serve the world as the custodians of marriage – not just for those of our own tribes but for the good of all people.”

Chuck Chalberg. “What I’m suggesting here is that these orthodox churches, small and large, haven’t preached goodness and success so much as they have preached a set of virtues conducive to leading a good and, therefore, successful life.”

Todd R. Flanders. “Religious schools have always taught and defended traditions of faith, which connect rational purposes of love, sex, and marriage with the transcendent.”

Laurence Cooper. “In a very sly passage from *Politics*, Aristotle indicates that men resist the instruction of women at their own peril.”

George W. Liebmann. “The opportunities churches afford for intellectual leadership, pastoral counseling and social work, and community organization are ignored.”

Paul D. Allick. “I do not believe we are living in a culture that has any clue about living with oaths and promises and sticking to them.”

Star Parker. “We must restore a prevailing cultural sense that the outcomes of individual lives are the direct result of personal responsibility (or lack of it) that individuals apply to their own lives and decisions they make.”

Bob Osburn. “When Christian cultural authority was eviscerated, we lost the dike that held back the forces of family disintegration and fatherlessness.”

Dan Hall. “We are battling the forces of awakening libidos and a multi-billion-dollar advertising industry.”

Ron Kresha. “Religious leaders should be leading the charge against the popular culture; religious leaders should be fighting the urge to relegate marriage to a simple contract, separated from the covenant.”

David Strom. “Western religion can and should be an antidote to the plague of multiculturalism, but it will be only if religious leaders are willing to confront multiculturalism as the danger that it is and offer a more attractive alternative.”

David J. Theroux. “[T]he progressive narrative upon which contemporary, anti-family policies rest, is false.”

Linda Runbeck. “Some years ago when our daughter was 13, we established a rule in our house. ‘No,’ we told her, ‘you may not sleep over at your friend’s house – her mom has a live-in boyfriend.’ . . . There were tears and angry words from our daughter, but it was a teachable moment.”

Kathy Lohmer. “Leaders in churches and even secular institutions must spend far more time educating young people about the dangers of promiscuity and allowing a very sacred part of their lives to be squandered and overtaken by the lies of the secular mainstream media.”

Arvonne Fraser. “Today’s fragmented families – a term I dislike – are a result of poverty, especially male unemployment and wage stagnation, the increased cost of raising and educating children, income inequality, changing norms and expectations about marriage, and longer lifespans.”

Robert Wedl. “Rather than religious institutions standing in support of a livable wage, they deal with the end result, which includes soup kitchens, food shelves, homeless shelters, and other much-needed services.”

David Lapp and W. Bradford Wilcox. “In an era when America is coming apart along class lines, religious congregations have an opportunity to become places where people from across class lines can come together for a common goal.”

Elliott Masie. “Most of our marriage ceremonies are focused on partners’ desires to spend the rest of their lives together, but most leave out the even more important contracts that two people starting a family should affirm to each other.”

Bruce Peterson. “A vow made before God and one’s gathered family and friends is bound to have a deeper meaning and more staying power than the best of intentions that are never voiced.”

Larry Purdy. “[Are there] distinctions between traditional one-man-one-woman marriages and newly legalized same-sex unions that suggest one deserves more encouragement and strengthening over another? In other words, does gender matter?”

Kevin Donnelly. “While some might argue that Pope Francis’s views about marriage are old-fashioned and restrictive, the reality is that the way marriage has been redefined since the late-1960s has been counterproductive.”

Frank B. Cerra. “Conceptually, the redesign of health care might turn out to be a good example of what can be done, as there are parallels between it and addressing family breakdown.”

Rhonda Kruse Nordin. “I may have learned subliminally about family formation while playing *The Game of Life*; however, teens today need deliberate and thoughtful education that regularly delivers consistent messages early and motivates responsible choices.”

Joe Rigney. “Practically speaking, this means we must recover and embody the gladness of the gospel in our churches and families. There ought not be any scowling from the ramparts of the Bright City.”

Jennifer Marshall. “Married people often say marriage is hard work. We should also acknowledge that a marriage culture is hard work. It will take effort from all of us, married or not.”

Glenn T. Stanton. “[T]he parts of our nation that still enjoy and benefit from strong families are those with a vibrant, substantive, and historically transcendent story flowing from a robust religious faith.”



Pam Myhra. “Instead of repeating the abuse and neglect she experienced growing up, by the grace of God and her personal study of the Bible, [my mother] was able to break a multi-generational cycle of sorrow and provide my siblings and me a safe, nurturing, and loving childhood.”

Jake Haulk. “We never know when or how a force greater than ourselves can work through us to change hearts and lives.”

American Experiment’s work in strengthening families and marriage would be far less robust and attended to without the support of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Chiaroscuro Foundation, LML & FTL Lanners Foundation, Karen and Mahlon Schneider, Richard and Susan Goldman, and many other Center members. We’re all most grateful.

In addition to again thanking our three-dozen writers, my great thanks to Senior Fellow Kent Kaiser for copyediting the 34 essays, something he has done beautifully for every anthology of this sort (I believe) American Experiment has ever published. In his other life (actually he has more than just one more) he’s Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul. Great thanks as well to my very long-time colleague Peter Zeller for tracking down writers, putting the document to paper and more exotic media, and now disseminating it broadly. Likewise to Scott Buschschacher for making the symposium’s design, not just its words sing. As well as to Elliot Polsky, an exceptional intern from the University of St. Thomas who wrote a copious and illuminating literature review in world record time.

And to all of my American Experiment colleagues, both on the Board of Directors and staff, for their right ratios of enthusiasm, patience, and pointed questions.

Individual copies of *Fragmented Families and Silence of the Faithful: How Religious Leaders and Institutions Must Speak Up and Reach Out* are available by getting in touch with Peter at peter.zeller@americanexperiment.org. The same with bulk orders as my colleagues and I hope that clergy and lay leaders at churches, synagogues, mosques

and other religious institutions will find this rich and eclectic anthology worth sharing with congregants, friends, and other constituencies. Depending on the size of requests we may need to charge a modest fee. Which is to say it won’t be much, as the whole idea is to get these thousands of good words out and about as much as possible. And of course everything here is also online, which is to say perfectly free at www.americanexperiment.org.

With that, and as always, we welcome your comments.

*Golden Valley, Minnesota
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Bigger Lives

By Paul D. Allick

I am not convinced that institutional Christianity has enough cultural credibility left to address a topic as sensitive as family fragmentation—so many Americans, especially young adults, are alienated

Why not go out and experience what is happening in our neighbors’ lives?

from institutional religion. I am not sure that we in the institutional church have much voice in the public square when it comes to influencing personal behavior. Yet I hope that the church might find ways to become relevant and helpful in facing this serious cultural problem of family fragmentation.

The first step is for Christians to get out into our communities. We focus on finding clever ways to get people to come to us. Why not go out and experience what is happening in our neighbors’ lives? After all, this is how Christianity started: Jesus and his disciples went out to the people and lived with them. Jesus did it in non-offensive ways. He did not water down his message; at the same time, he showed great compassion toward people. He did not kick people who were down; he lifted them up and showed them how to move forward.

In my parish, St. George's in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, we collaborate with our community in working at two agencies that serve people in need. We encounter many people living in fragmented families. Indeed, it is the norm. We do not seek to judge them or fix them. We seek to learn who they are and how we can best live in community with them. We want to know how we can help them, and we can do this only by actually getting to know them.

My hope is that, over time, we just might draw some of our neighbors into our faith community. Even if we don't, we can still be present to them. Once we develop relationships, we can take the next step in offering healing to families that are broken. We can do this by offering what we are best at: covenantal relationship.

The Bible is full of covenants. God making covenants with the people is really the whole story. God and the people make promises of fidelity, and then something goes wrong. The people have to make amends, and then God forgives, and they start over.

I do not believe we are living in a culture that has any clue about living with oaths and promises and sticking to them. Certainly our men and women in the military, the police force, and emergency services understand such commitments, but overall we live in a very transient culture. Why get married when there is no pressure to do so? Why make promises to others when you can live free from obligations?

The church could have a singular voice in calling people to live bigger and bolder lives—lives based in commitment and service—lives that look beyond the

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self toward the other—lives that always look up and outward instead of inward.

In my tradition, the Episcopal Church, like the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, we have sacraments. Most of the sacraments have to do with living in covenantal relationship with God and each other.

Marriage is a sacrament. Baptism, confirmation, and ordination are also about covenants. The point is, the church has something to say about being in healthy relationships by living according to the promises we make. We also have something to say about how incredibly challenging living in covenants can be. In a covenantal relationship, we must sacrifice some of our own desires for the benefit of others.

If the Christian Church can find a way to get back into relationship with our communities in a trustworthy manner, we might just have a chance to help our neighbors and ourselves start living bigger lives.

Paul D. Allick is a parish priest in the Episcopal Church of Minnesota.

Parallels with Health Care Reform

By Frank B. Cerra, M.D.

Families are challenged and fragmented and the silence of religious leaders, congregations, and institutions is deafening, to the detriment of the families, humankind, and the moral fiber of the country. It is time for religious leaders, congregations, and institutions to provide vocal leadership, advocacy, and support systems that reach beyond their congregational and cultural boundaries and engage their broader communities to recognize the challenge and generate solutions.

Why are religious leaders, congregations and institutions not reaching beyond their immediate boundaries? One might posit that it is related to a lack of awareness of need; a lack of leadership or training of the leaders; cultural and ideological boundaries that are difficult to transcend; or resources. Probably all of these factors and more are operative.

A reader might think I am depressed and pessimistic about the future. That is not the case. There are many examples where religious leaders, congregations, and institutions are reaching out of traditional boundaries and working for the betterment of communities. But



changing the orientation of religious communities, like most sustainable change, will likely happen one person at a time in the presence of supportive leadership, education and dialog. It is hard work.

Conceptually, the redesign of health care might turn out to be a good example of what can be done, as there are parallels between it and addressing family breakdown. To wit,

- Both require a change in culture.
- Both are starting in disarray and must move into a new more productive relationship with communities of people.
- Both must deal with prevention as well as the management of the maladies of mankind.
- Both require the use of teams to get where they desire to go.
- Both require developing an outward focus to improve community health.
- Both require communities to engage, commit, and act.
- Both involve change at the interface of a person, a problem, and an improved state.

The real change in health care, while being assisted by policy and incentives, is happening at the point of contact of health providers and support systems, one patient encounter at a time, with the aims of improving community health and engaging patients, families, and communities, along with improvements in care quality and reductions in cost. The lessons learned in this one are that it takes time, leadership, commitment, cooperation, and a focus on outcomes to move the culture in a new direction.

Family challenges clearly exist; communities of faith clearly exist. Religious leaders, communities, and institutions must speak up, advocate, and act at the local level to provide the support systems that families with challenges need. The people, skills, and resources do exist in communities of faith. The next step is inspiring the willingness and commitment to act.

Frank B. Cerra is a retired surgeon, emeritus professor and emeritus dean of the medical school and former senior vice president of the University of Minnesota.

Ignored by the Rest of Us

By Chuck Chalberg

Not all that long ago, a representative of the archdiocese delivered the Sunday sermon at our parish. His topic was poverty and what to do about it. His solution was money and what might be done, mainly by the government, about spreading it around more equitably.

I can't recall for certain, but no doubt the term "root cause" crept into his talk. It certainly belonged there. Yet a few other things that might have been included were missing.

Curiously, there was no mention of some crucial do's and don'ts about avoiding poverty. Atop my short checklist would be two "do's" and one "don't," as in "do" finish at least high school and obtain employment; "don't" have children outside of marriage; and, once married, "do" your best to stay married.

It's quite possible, perhaps even likely, that violating any one of these three admonitions seriously enhances one's chances of winding up poor—at least for a serious period of time. Would it be too much to suggest that the accumulation of individual decisions that have run counter to this checklist amounts to a root cause of poverty? I would hope not.

I would suggest that the best course that church leaders could take in response to out-of-wedlock births, family breakdown, and poverty would be to minister to their congregations, first and foremost, as men and women of genuine religious faith—not as agents for or advocates of this or that government policy, redistributionist or otherwise.

I suppose what follows comes under the dual heading of intuition and hunch, rather than science. What follows also points toward a crucial, if overlooked, irony. After better than a century of Social Gospel Christianity, we have witnessed the decline and fall of mainline churches in the United States, not to mention the gradual deterioration of the traditional nuclear family. Are these two phenomena related? I fear so.

Conversely, in recent decades, the most successful churches seem to be those that have avoided Social Gospel Christianity (especially in the macro sense) and have instead emphasized traditional, which is to say orthodox, religious beliefs. My guess is that such churches have inadvertently produced a high proportion of good people, including a goodly number of good people who are also successful. My further guess is that this is the case whether the church in question is a suburban mega-church with an orthodox religious message or a small inner-city church with an orthodox religious message.

My next guess is that the smaller the church, the greater the percentage of stories of goodness within the congregation. My last guess—and it is being put forth by someone with no direct experience with either suburban mega-churches or inner-city black churches—is that their stories are largely ignored by the rest of us. I would add, in the case of traditionally orthodox inner-city black churches, those who are doing the ignoring are not limited to white folks.

Permit me to return to that adverb “inadvertently.” What I am suggesting here is that these orthodox churches, small and large, haven’t preached goodness and success so much as they have preached a set of virtues conducive to leading a good and, therefore, successful life.

Herein lies the irony. Churches that eschew the conventionally liberal nostrums when it comes to solving the problem of poverty likely do the best job of getting at—and in individual cases—eliminating what often constitutes a true root cause of poverty. Such a result might not be the goal of these church leaders. After all, their main function is to help guide their followers to heaven. Yet, along the way, they are doing something else. They are helping their members live better lives right here on earth. More than that, they are doing a better job of this than their counterparts among the less-than-orthodox, too intent as they often are on creating a heaven, or at least a slice of it, right here on earth.

John C. “Chuck” Chalberg, an American Experiment Senior Fellow, teaches American history at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Focus Efforts on Women

By Laurence Cooper

Other contributors to this symposium will know far more than I about how and when institutions can influence the greater culture. My beat is the great Western tradition of political philosophy. Does that tradition have anything to say to the questions at hand? Not directly, perhaps. Yet it does offer relevant observations and suggestions. There is too much variance among the great thinkers for the tradition

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to speak in one voice about this or, indeed, any topic. However, a few of its luminaries are worth attending to—especially, I’d say, Aristotle, Rousseau, and Tocqueville. As it turns out, their wisdom is consistent with what good social science has told us more recently.

I’ll state first what I take to be the conclusion: In matters of family formation and fragmentation, efforts by religious leaders ought to be directed primarily at women.

Why?

First, women have been and continue to be more religious than men—that is, more committed to the religious life and more receptive to religious “messaging.” This seems especially true in liberal societies like ours, where the primary strains of religious life are expressed peacefully and for the most part privately, even domestically. The political philosopher to consult on this is Tocqueville.

Second, women, or at least mothers, have more at stake in family stability than men do, though, admittedly, the social welfare safety net mitigates the costs of family fragmentation to mothers. This point is too obvious to require philosophic backing. What may be a little less obvious, at least to many people,



is that the emotional stakes also seem to be higher for women.

The success of sexual revolution was total, and there is no serious prospect of a counter-revolution. Yet, women seem more discontented than men with tenuous and casual bonds of affection with their sexual partners. Mind you, the effects of detachment on men might be just as damaging, if not more damaging, than the effects on women, but it seems that women are more likely to feel or perhaps just to acknowledge the effects.

This, too, might seem obvious to readers. Yet because resistance to this finding is likely to be grounded in ideology, perhaps it would be useful to point to intellectual heavyweights to make the case. Here, too, the go-to man is Tocqueville. Of course, there are plenty of go-to women as well, particularly among contemporary conservative feminists.

Third, if Rousseau is to be believed—and his position has served as the behavioral basis of many who have never read him—women arguably have greater influence or leverage over men than men have over women. “Men will always be what is pleasing to women,” Rousseau teaches. What’s necessary is for women to want the right things and insist on them. The leverage of which Rousseau speaks is not the leverage of one who gives commands. Rather, it’s a species of indirect rule, but it is not for that reason any less powerful—just the contrary, in fact.

Finally, and fittingly, women’s superior power is apt to be matched by their superior wisdom regarding human relations. Here we turn from Rousseau to the supposedly patriarchal Aristotle.

In a very sly passage from *Politics*, Aristotle indicates that men resist the instruction of women at their own peril. Aristotle cites Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Confronted by the would-be calming influence of his wife Tecmessa, Ajax quiets her in the age-old brutish masculine way, exclaiming, “To a woman, silence is an ornament.” What Aristotle leaves to his sensitive readers to remember for themselves (because saying it himself would have offended the majority of his contemporaries, who were indeed chauvinistic) is

that when Ajax acted against Tecmessa’s counsel, he disgraced himself and subsequently killed himself in response. The guy should have listened to his wife.

Of course, Tecmessa’s failure indicates that women’s influence has its limits. Yet the particulars of her and Ajax’s story point to another wise observation. Men will be more receptive to the wisdom of women when in the grip of tender passions rather than spirited ones. How to see to *that*? It’s hard to say, but it might be a good start if women could find a way to get their men to go with them to church.

Laurence Cooper, an American Experiment Senior Fellow, is professor of political science at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota.

Before Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad

By Jim Daly

Many in the Christian community believe that marriage is a Christian institution.

It is not.

In fact, those of Jewish and Islamic faith can tend to think that marriage is a product of their own faiths, too.

To be clear, marriage does come from God, but marriage existed before Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad. In fact, it’s older than any religion. It exists everywhere we find humans, not just in those parts of the world where these three faiths, or any others, have social dominance or influence.

The anthropologist Edward Westermarck, in his definitive three-volume work on the history of marriage in the world, explains that scholars cannot find a time when marriage first appeared on the Earth. There is no “marriage age” as there is the Stone Age or Bronze Age marking the arrival of humans working stone and malleable metals into useful products. Of its development, he explains, “I consider it probable that it has developed out of primeval habit.” That’s the

scientist's way of saying, "It's almost as if marriage existed since the time of the first two human beings."

Yes, marriage is a common good, a common grace, given to all people at all times from the goodness and wisdom of God.

To be clear, marriage does come from God, but marriage existed before Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad.

To whom does marriage belong, then?

- Is it under the domain of the world's religious communities?
- Is it under only specific religious communities—perhaps even just one?
- Is it a product and subject of the state or of that state's laws?

Just as marriage predates religion, it also predates politics and the state and law. It transcends, undergirds, illuminates, generates, activates, and sustains each of these and every other public institution because it is the first and primary human and social union. As Aristotle so clearly recognized (and his teacher, Plato, so radically disagreed), marriage is the most basic and fundamental human cooperative. From, and only from, the marriage of man and woman, father and mother, flows both family and the next generation of every society. From the family, flows the village. A collection of villages creates the state leading to the development of a nation. This is why "nuclear" is not a moral or traditional descriptor of family, but a sociological one, as old as the philosophers. As such, marriage as a foundational and primary human institution belongs to everyone and therefore to no one in particular.

No society has been able to sustain itself for any significant time through any utopian idea—such as Plato's or the commune—that deviates from the nuclear nature of family.

People of faith have a particular interest in marriage for two reasons. First, we—especially those of us who take the book of Genesis as God's word—see marriage as an important gift from God. Marriage formed the

very first human relationship. It was God's chosen means of propagating the human race. Second, we care about marriage because we desire the well-being of our neighbors.

There is, of course, a very direct connection between these two points. Humanity is created for marriage, and when we do that for which God created us, generally speaking, things go well. Indeed, this is exactly what we are seeing from reams of social science, psychological, and medical research over the last 50 years as scholars study the steady decline of marriage and married parenting. Clearly, we dismiss the primacy of marriage at our peril.

Thus, it is our duty as Christians, among others, to serve the world as the custodians of marriage—not just for those of our own tribes but for the good of all people. We must do this by upholding the institution of marriage as sacred, honoring our own spouses, and working to ensure that our unions endure through good times and bad. To do so serves as a strong witness and encouragement to the world.

Yet our congregations must also serve as marriage-saving and strengthening stations in the community. They should be places where people know they can obtain thoughtful and compassionate help for struggling marriages as well as encouragement and education toward cultivating thriving relationships. Places where they can obtain helpful pre-marital preparation so they walk into their new marriages with proper expectations, recognition of potential problems, and the tools to deal with them. They should be places where young couples and families can find older peers to walk alongside them, offering encouragement, advice, and time-tested wisdom.

Jim Daly is the President of Focus on the Family and host of its daily National Radio Hall of Fame broadcast.

Marriage Redefinition Has Been Counterproductive

By Kevin Donnelly

In October 2014, the Catholic Church held a Synod on the Family at the Vatican in which Pope Francis called on the assembly of bishops to reflect on and discuss



the place of the family and the institution of marriage within the Church.

Much of the coverage of the Synod focused on apparent disagreements about issues like whether divorcees should be able to take communion and what the Church's response to homosexuality should be. More significant is the Synod's final report, which discusses the numerous challenges faced by families and the increasing pressure on matrimony as one of the key sacraments of the Church.

There's no doubt that traditional ideas about the importance of marriage and its place in Western cultures are changing dramatically, especially in Western, liberal democracies like Australia. The changes have been occurring for some time.

Before the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, it was socially and morally unacceptable for men and women to cohabit, unless they were married, and divorce was considered the last resort for marriages that had, for whatever reason, failed. To have children born out of wedlock was also unacceptable.

The Cultural Revolution, epitomized by hippies and flower power, the anti-war movement, and the mantra "make love, not war," undermined the status quo in institutions like marriage. People who had been radicalized argued for alternative lifestyles. Books like *The Female Eunuch* by the Australian feminist Germaine Greer argued that marriage was a form of oppression. Some feminists even went as far as describing the physical relationship between a husband and wife as a form of sexual exploitation and enslavement.

In Australia in 1975 the institution of marriage was weakened by the left-of-centre Labor Commonwealth Government's introduction of no-fault divorce, which made it far easier to break the bonds of matrimony.

More recently, the way marriage is treated in the school curriculum provides additional evidence that conservative ideas about marriage (involving a man and a woman in a sacred and lasting relationship for the purpose of having children) have changed significantly. In primary school, children are taught that marriage can involve a man and a woman or

two people of the same sex and that it is wrong to judge either type of union as preferable. A de facto relationship is also considered of equal value and worth as a marriage in the formal sense.

As a result of changing social mores and no-fault divorce, fewer people have married, and divorce rates have increased. Also, the rise of single-parent families and the absence of biological fathers have led to increased rates of child abuse and increased social dislocation and instability.

In his book *Maybe "I do": Modern Marriage & the Pursuit of Happiness*, Kevin Andrews, the current Australian defence minister, argues, "A healthy, stable and happy marriage is an optimal relationship for the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of adults and children." Andrews also argues that "retreat from marriage," instead of being beneficial, has led to greater individual suffering and increased social costs—in terms of both financial and social stability.

What's to be done? The first step is to evaluate the impact that changes in the concept of marriage have had and continue to have on families and society. If redefining the institution of marriage is harmful and counterproductive, then the facts must be revealed.

Second, the school curriculum should no longer adopt a morally relativistic approach to what constitutes marriage. Students should not be indoctrinated with cultural-left views about gender and sexuality.

Finally, religious leaders and institutions must stress the sanctity of marriage and the moral obligation it places on all of those involved. In a narcissistic culture consumed by what is transitory and materialistic, marriage is symbolized by a higher sense of purpose and deeper commitment between a man and a woman. As observed by Pope Francis,

Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. As the French bishops have taught, it is not

born “of loving sentiment, ephemeral by definition, but from the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life.” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*).

While some might argue that Pope Francis’s views about marriage are old-fashioned and restrictive, the reality is that the way marriage has been redefined since the late-1960s has been counterproductive.

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Preach and Teach Self-Sacrificial Love

By Bryan Dowd and Sharyn Dowd

Our assignment was to write about “how religious leaders and institutions can/should play a larger role in strengthening marriage in Minnesota and the United States.” We assume that “strengthening marriage” minimally means reducing family fragmentation by increasing the percentage of marriages that remain permanently intact and reducing the number of out-of-wedlock births. Therefore, what is the role of religious leaders and institutions in pursuing that goal?

Sadly, we must begin by acknowledging that permanently intact marriages are not always and unconditionally a good thing. Spouses and family members who are subjected to abuse deserve protection and justice, and that might include releasing a spouse from the legal obligations of marriage. But what about individuals who simply are unhappy in their marriage, or have met another person they believe to be their true “soul mate?”

This is where we reach a fork in the road. Religions and cultures differ in their idea of what constitutes a good marriage. Many religions permit polygamy, and in many cultures, wife beating and even wife burning are accepted cultural practices. We are Christians and will confine our remarks to Christian marriage.

Christians assert that marriages remaining permanently intact as a result of self-sacrificial love are good because self-sacrificial love is intrinsically a good thing, best exemplified by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the Christian church is known as the bride of Christ, and multiple passages in scripture invoke that relationship between Jesus and the Christian church as the model for relationships between husbands and wives. Marriages based on self-sacrificial love confer benefits on spouses and their children. In addition, because marriages based on self-sacrificial love are a good thing, providing examples of such marriages has spillover benefits to the broader community as it can inspire others to emulate a good thing.

Because self-sacrificial love is the foundation of Christianity, the proper role of Christian religious leaders and institutions is to promote self-sacrificial love in all settings, including marriages. However, they should do this not because of the obvious benefits of such marriages. They should do it simply because self-sacrificial love is the foundation of Christianity. Yes, regular church attendees exhibit better mental health than non-attendees. And yes, Christians are responsible for inventing scores of written languages, educating and healing millions of people who otherwise would be forgotten or ignored. Yes, Christian missionaries have introduced and promoted democracy worldwide. But the value of Christianity does not stem from the good effects it produces. Its value stems from the fact that it is historically and experientially true, and that should be the basis on which Christians talk about it.

It is true that married people are wealthier than unmarried people, on average, and that is an important message to give to young people. Yet if Christian religious leaders point that out, they should do so simply as educated laypersons who are capable of reading the relevant economic literature and drawing the correct conclusions, not as religious leaders making a theological point. The good news of Christianity is redemption, salvation, and sanctification—not a guarantee of material well-being.

Similarly, in a world of rampant sexually transmitted diseases, sex outside of marriage is ill-advised. Yet if



Christian religious leaders point that out, they should do so simply as knowledgeable laypersons who have read the infectious disease literature and drawn the correct conclusions. If, on the other hand, they say that people made in the image of God should treat their bodies as holy temples and not treat other human beings as disposable objects, then they are making the valid theological points that we should expect from religious leaders.

The way Christian religious leaders should promote the practice of permanently intact marriages based on self-sacrificial love is through preaching, teaching, counseling, and, if married, by personal example. Preaching, teaching, and personal example are particularly important because they can help prevent the problems that require counseling.

Good teaching can transmit an abundance of valuable information to young adults who are willing to listen. For example, people truly are not objects and human beings are not disposable. Love is not lust. Pornography and excessive debt are marriage-killers. Honor, duty, and fulfilled promises are not chains of confinement but sources of lasting joy. The feeling that your spouse is not the same person you married undoubtedly is correct; you can recalibrate your commitment to self-sacrificial love with the person your spouse has become.

None of this will be easily said or easily heard. Christianity always has been and will be the ultimate counter-cultural revolution.

Preaching, teaching, counseling, and personal example need not be confined to churches and their congregations. Christians are commanded to spread good news, and thus any Christian, including Christian

Christianity always has been and will be the ultimate counter-cultural revolution.

religious leaders, can extol the benefits of marriages based on self-sacrificial love to anyone who is willing to listen. Given the current rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births, including those among Christians, the ideal of self-sacrificial love may seem unattainable.

Fortunately, it is not entirely up to us. As Oswald Chambers wrote, “[W]hen God elevates you by His grace into the heavenly places, instead of finding a pinnacle to cling to, you find a great table-land where it is easy to move.” For many people this will be news and for some it will be Good News, indeed.

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Teaching Traditions of Faith and Reason

By Todd R. Flanders

The high school senior asked, “But how do I know that mom and dad still love me?” “Trust me, they just do,” was all I could say. This girl was broken up, as so many young people are, by her parents’ breakup. Their reneging on marriage vows had cast unconditional love into doubt, and she was left to wonder about the conditions of her own lovability.

“The important lesson that the family taught,” wrote Allan Bloom a generation ago, “was the existence of the only unbreakable bond, for better or for worse, between human beings.” It’s a lesson that must be taught to children once again if a marriage culture is to be re-formed and unconditional love vindicated. Religious schools are, today, uniquely equipped to teach it.

Why is this? Because the common store of wisdom about sex, marriage, and family isn’t common anymore. Rational truths taught at least since Confucius and Aristotle—that sexual morality is naturally oriented toward family and the family is nature’s own foundation for human society—are denied at the commanding heights of culture. In many universities and schools today, human nature has nothing to tell us about how we should live or how we might govern our passions in

Because the common store of wisdom about sex, marriage, and family isn't common anymore.

accord with our intrinsic dignity. Nature is just matter and energy, purposeless stuff, devoid of direction or meaning. Human nature is an accidental product of unguided evolution. It's just one form of animal nature, driven only by instinctual desires.

On this view, the question "How should I live?" gives way to "What do I want?" "Love" is a feeling associated with chemical activities in the brain. Sex and sexuality become matters of individualized pleasures, preferences, and identities. Children, long understood to be natural gifts of a marital union, can now be, thanks to technological progress, on-demand (and soon, by-design) lifestyle accouterments.

If there are no natural, rational purposes for love, sex, and sexuality, how could it be otherwise? If children are being taught this, either explicitly or implicitly, how could the next generation be ready for the binding demands of marriage and family?

Religious schools have always taught and defended traditions of faith, which connect rational purposes of love, sex, and marriage with the transcendent. It's ironic that now religious schools must, virtually alone, teach and defend a traditional understanding of rationality itself.

A sign of this is the growing embrace by Christian schools of classical curricula. On questions of sex and family, Western civilization's twin heritages of faith and reason unite: love, marriage, and baby carriages should be connected and, as in the old playground verse, ideally in that order. Reams of sociological data suggest that everyone benefits when the children's rhyme and the grownups' reason are in sync.

In Minnesota, it is urgent that religious schools retain freedom to teach our traditions of faith and reason. Children and teenagers in our schools seek wisdom about sex and family, despite or even because of new societal pressures. Chastity can appeal as positive and

life-affirming to young people who witness broken hearts, obsessions, depression, and cynicism among sexually active peers. When kids are invited to sort among 56 "custom" gender identities on Facebook, an alternative proposal can be richer: that man and woman are creations of God, unities of body and soul who equally and mysteriously reflect God's very image. The idea of a man and woman together for life in an unbreakable bond retains extraordinary power in the imaginations of the young wherever they are introduced to good literature. From Cinderella and Prince Charming, to Romeo and Juliet, to Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, even to Anna Karenina, the stories are incomprehensible if "forever" is optional. Unless or until young people are indoctrinated otherwise, they tend to long for the genuine fulfillments of love—naturally.

We who run religious schools must open our arms to any family, whatever tolls the sexual revolution may have taken on them, if they want their children to learn the truth of a better way. It's no surprise that many parents who are either products of divorce or divorced themselves look to religious schools as partners in forming the next generation.

Maybe that last fact provides hope for the broader society. The good news of marriage and family, amid all struggles and failures and against bad ideologies, remains good news—especially for children. Truth dies hard. Perhaps the Roman poet Horace will prove right: "You may drive out nature with a pitchfork, yet she'll be constantly running back."

Todd R. Flanders is headmaster of Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minnesota.

A Partnership with Awesome Responsibilities

By Arvonne Fraser

Religious leaders and institutions play an important role in many individuals' lives and also in our society. Sanctioned by states to marry people legally, religious leaders have an obligation to emphasize that marriage



is a partnership contract with awesome responsibilities, especially where children are involved.

Too many people, including religious leaders, still consider the male-breadwinner marriage the norm, even though it is out of date. Historically, in lower-income families, women often generated income in various ways to help feed, clothe, and house the family.

Too many people, including religious leaders, still consider the male-breadwinner marriage the norm, even though it is out of date.

Beginning in the 1960s, many middle-class married women joined the paid labor force, and today the two-earner family is the norm. What is also not widely acknowledged is that women and children throughout history contributed their labor to the family enterprise, thus reducing the need for outside income. The value of this labor was rarely computed. It was simply taken for granted, because historically the common legal theory—and marriage contract—provided that the husband was the head of the family. Even if the bride brought money or property to the marriage, it became his. All members of the family took the husband's name. He was the legal representative of the family.

Over the last two centuries, every state adopted married women's property acts that gradually gave women the right to hold, inherit, gain, and manage property; to keep income in their own name; to be represented or represent themselves in court; to divorce; and to be guardians or co-guardians of their children. (Google "married women's property acts," and you will find this fascinating history.)

Today's religious leaders should be aware of this history and take it into consideration not only in the training of future religious leaders but also in counseling people who come to them to be married or for help and guidance in troubled marriages. These institutions must be aware of the changes in marriage law and expectations and of current economic trends that affect marriage. It would also be helpful if religious institutions had more female leaders—and not just

in subsidiary roles. While many women have played important roles in religious institutions, they have not often been the formal leaders, which is not a good example for their members or for society.

Today's fragmented families—a term I dislike—are a result of poverty, especially male unemployment and wage stagnation, the increased cost of raising and educating children, income inequality, changing norms and expectations about marriage, and longer lifespans. Few men can afford the family model in which the wife spends her life taking care of home and family, making little or no financial contribution to regular family expenses or to the retirement fund a couple needs given longer life spans and fewer jobs with substantial pensions. Yet too many men think this is the expected, desired model. Religious institutions tend to reinforce that idea. They must speak out about marriage as a partnership agreement with both partners accepting responsibility for not just financing the family but also for the care necessary to maintain homes and raise children.

Finally, religious institutions should examine with their faithful why our society has so many female-headed households—practically another term for fragmented families—and why marriage rates are declining. Examining today's cultural and economic impediments to marriage and family life and suggesting ways in which those impediments might be alleviated would be a real contribution to the national dialogue about marriage and families. This should be done collaboratively, between the leaders and members of all faiths.

Two books as good background for such an examination are Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage: A History*, published in 2005, and Phillip Aries's classic, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, published in English in 1962. While discussions of marriage, especially lately, have focused on the rights of individuals who love each other to become a legal unit, the other and even arguably more basic question regards parents' and society's responsibility for children. Given that the birth rate has declined and is now below replacement rate in the United States and many other industrialized countries, a question religious institutions and others should discuss is, "Who

is responsible and to what degree—for having, raising, training, and educating this nation’s future citizenry and workforce?

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Sharing How Real Success Looks

By Dan Hall

In considering the questions at the heart of this symposium, I acknowledge from the start that I am writing from my perspective as a Christian pastor. I will write this (mea culpa) to my own tribe. I do not presume that all my diagnoses and recommendations will match those in other communities, but I hope and suspect some will transcend our differences.

What should our religious leaders, institutions, and traditions do to strengthen marriage? Religious leaders must be much more deliberate about teaching their flocks the theology and tradition of the church as they relate to marriage.

Many decades ago, when orthodox Judeo-Christian values were assumed by a greater segment of society, religious leaders did not perceive a need to preach the theology and tradition of marriage to the choir, so to speak. Whether folks faithfully attended religious services or not, society had a broader and more orthodox understanding of what constituted socially acceptable behavior and the role of marriage. Society no longer generally assumes orthodox Judeo-Christian marriage values.

A result is that society no longer makes up for the instructional shortcomings of religious institutions as regards marriage. Thus, unchurched people are not assuming orthodox Judeo-Christian values, and church members, lacking adequate instruction from their leaders, are adopting the lack of marriage values of society at large. This has a snowball effect. Christians are called to be salt and light in a needy

world. When Christians fail to act as we ought, society loses an opportunity to witness marriage as a healthy alternative to chaos.

That said, religious leaders and institutions should never forget to reach out to individuals and families as they are, no matter how far they are from the “ideal.” I write these words during the Christmas season and cannot help but recall that the Christmas story features a man committing to be a good husband and a father—to a child that is not biologically his. The story also features a young mother who is told her child will be a cause for great joy for all people and, by the way, the child’s birth will bring a sword that will pierce her soul.

Many Christians no longer really know what, or if, their faith teaches about marriage. Thus, not knowing about the topic, they have ceased to care. Religious leaders must regularly and thoroughly instruct their flocks on marriage. We are talking about 2,000-plus years of wisdom here; it cannot be adequately transmitted during a 20-minute homily once or twice a year.

What should religious leaders, institutions, and traditions do to reduce nonmarital births? Starting within the church, and then subsequently outside the church, older men must speak honestly with younger men. Older women must speak honestly with younger

We are talking about 2,000-plus years of wisdom here; it cannot be adequately transmitted during a 20-minute homily once or twice a year.

women. Those who have traveled the arc of human life and its libidinous impulses must relay truth to a younger generation. Young people are not the first or only people to have walked this path. We must share the very real results of human failure in this area. We must share how real success looks.

We are battling the forces of awakening libidos and a multi-billion-dollar advertising industry. It is a daunting situation. Yet in one life at a time, these battles can be won. The battles can be won in part because society at large shows us how failure looks.



Popular culture shows us that the romantic quest, once unloosed from its inherently religious bonds, never ends. Romantic pilgrims wander from one relationship to another, never finding the satisfaction they seek.

Married life is not always easy, but it is possible. Not only is it possible, it is blessed. It is the “iron sharpening iron” journey of husband and wife that makes it the most successful institution ever created.

Are there things religious leaders and institutions should not do? We should not cede an inch more to the state. We should not do what many churches have done for decades.

Nothing in the human chain of events leading to sexual intimacy is of primary concern to the state: Our conceptions of what it means to be a woman or a man; the roles of the sexes within marriage; sex education; views on birth control; and the family more broadly all stem first and foremost from our religious convictions. The state will, of course, prosper, if religious communities get these basics right, but the state has no primary responsibility in most of these areas. The state can, however, help create environments where religious communities are equally free to promote their beliefs and services in the marketplace of ideas.

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Beyond the Diminishing Satisfaction of the Mundane

By Jake Haulk

Can religious leaders or religious institutions play a positive role in slowing or even reversing the dissolution of the two-parent family as represented in high rates of nonmarital births and divorce? One is tempted to answer quickly and in the affirmative. Who better to do it? Yet given the state of religion in the country with ever-declining numbers of people who attend church services or even belong to a church, is it Pollyannaish to think churches and their leaders can

really reach the vast numbers whose lives are driven almost exclusively by worldly trappings like drugs, sex, and mass consumption?

It is reasonable to believe the drop in religious affiliation is closely related to the slide in personal behavior and refusal to accept responsibility. No doubt massive government welfare programs have contributed by weakening the need for personal responsibility and by making it attractive to have children, especially at a young age, with no husband around. It is hard to imagine a more irresponsible act than bringing a child into the world with no thought given to the life the child will face with no father and no sense of the personal responsibility required to become a self-sufficient, productive member of society.

Then there is the politically correct resistance that will arise in some churches toward any effort to address the problem. To suggest that out-of-wedlock births are in any way a social ill is unacceptable for many people in today’s churches. Sadly, the curse of political correctness has sunk its fangs into even churches. Further, there is the giant progressive establishment that will attack any concerted effort by religious groups or individuals who try to convince people they ought to change their ways and get off welfare or quit having nonmarital births. These efforts will be called callous, racist, sexist, and cold-hearted.

It is a great pain for Christians to see the human wreckage brought on by soft-headed policies and the turn away from morality and decency we have witnessed over the last 50 years. Christians are bound by faith and the teachings of our religion to help people in need. To be sure, it is easy to see the need for food, shelter, medicine, and other basics. Yet we know there are deep unseen and unmet needs as well—the need for a sense of meaning, of something beyond the diminishing satisfaction of the mundane. That is where any remedial approach must be focused.

It is troubling that churches have had so little impact to date. Why have they been unable to counter the siren call of self-destructive behavior in the dependent, hedonistic, collectivist population? It is most likely because they have for too long condoned unacceptable behavior in the belief that all these people are victims of one “-ism” or another and must be coddled and treated with kid

gloves. Three or four generations into the experiment, the situation has grown much worse because the victim explanation and treating people as victims has indeed created a massive increase in the number of victims: victims of the bigotry of low expectations and victims of being classified as a permanent, dependent underclass.

To change behavior permanently will require changing hearts. Hearts will not be changed by messages from people who see the poor or people in fragmented families as victims to be treated as though they are handicapped and feeble. Real love for one's fellow man is, or should be, like love for one's self. We should not want pity or to be dependent. We might need and accept help or a kind word when we are having problems, but what we really crave is the sense of self-respect we feel from being a self-sufficient and fully realized human being. Why would we want less for our fellow man?

Sadly, I fear the time may have passed when teaching self-reliance and using tough love can prevail against the enormity of the problem and the deep roots of cultural rot that have accompanied it. Nonetheless, that is no excuse for people who truly care not to try to help those trapped in a downward spiral. Some might respond positively. We never know when or how a force greater than ourselves can work through us to change hearts and lives.

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Relegating Marriage to a Simple Contract

By Ron Kresha

When religious leaders are ambivalent about the sanctity of marriage and the committed family, there is confusion in the congregation. Popular culture icons seize this confusion and redefine marriage to fit advertising campaigns or cinematic plots where the relationship is about personal bliss instead of commitment. There exists a simple truth about strong marriages and families: Strong marriages benefit society morally and economically.

The family is the most basic community unit, and marriage solidifies and reinforces the commitment between the spouses and the children. As an ideal, marriages should be a reflection of our relationship

When religious leaders are ambivalent about the sanctity of marriage and the committed family, there is confusion in the congregation.

with God and a commitment that extends beyond simply an adult contract. Religious leaders are called to "lead the flock" and help guide us to a stronger relationship with God.

Religious leaders have an obligation to defend and uphold the morally just tradition of marriage as an institution tied to commitment and blessed by God. In the Middle Ages, religious leaders and religious institutions revealed that God's covenant extended into the marriage of a man and woman. This covenant strengthens marriage and encourages family units, not fiefdoms, to grow our Western society.

The growing secular thought in current culture deemphasizes the covenant and emphasizes marriages rooted in convenience for adults. Religious leaders should be leading the charge against popular culture; religious leaders should be fighting the urge to relegate marriage to a simple contract, separated from the covenant. If our religious leaders cannot be trusted to reveal the benefits of marriages with a religious foundation, then expect the morality void to be filled with apathetic views.

Conflicting messages about marriage are presented daily through advertising and media outlets. Neither of these outlets has any motivation to preserve the family or to defend the institution of marriage as a covenant with God. People attend church services to filter out the barrage of cultural messages and to seek the message of God and ultimately a more peaceful path in life.

Our religious leaders must speak with purposeful intent about why committed marriages lead to firm families and how this foundation is key to the



community. The successful committed relationship of marriage takes dedication, love, patience, and acceptance of a higher ideal. Religious leaders who do not reveal the role of God in the marriage present doubt about the relationship with God and how our relationship with God strengthens our commitment of marriage. Marriage is tested and often strained. Religious leaders will do well to help people to rely on God's grace to strengthen marriage, and society will benefit from a move beyond fragmented families.

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Across Class Lines for a Common Goal

*By David Lapp and
W. Bradford Wilcox*

Working-class adults are not only more vulnerable to family fragmentation but also less likely to attend a religious congregation regularly compared to those with a four-year college degree or more. Thus, the question about how religious institutions can help strengthen marriage and families must address how religious leaders can engage young people who are not likely to be in the pews. We have four ideas.

1. Acknowledge the suffering that many young adults have experienced in their families of origin.

Fifty-three percent of adults aged 25 to 44 without a high school education, and 43 percent of adults with a high school education but no four-year college degree say, "Marriage has not worked out for most people I know." This contrasts to only 17 percent of college-educated adults. Their experiences of family fragmentation, whether witnessed directly or indirectly, are formative and defining. For instance, one young man who never met his father described his struggle to trust

people and to trust that marriage that could last. Why? "What really f***** me is the dad situation," he said. "Of course that's gonna make me grow up and feel like I can't trust nobody... He turned his back on me."

Because of family fragmentation, many young adults carry wounds from their childhood into adulthood, as documented by researchers such as Judith Wallerstein and Elizabeth Marquardt. In response, religious leaders could create safe spaces for young adults from fragmented families to share their stories. In that encounter, religious leaders could also share their own traditions' theologies of suffering that might lend meaning and hope to young adults struggling to make sense of difficult family histories. Existing retreat experiences like Christ Renews His Parish, which gives a team of congregants the opportunity to share their life stories with each other, offer potential models.

2. Provide practical help to fragile families.

For all the trends that signal a retreat from institutions—documented, for instance, by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*—religious congregations are ideally suited to offer havens of solidarity, as well as practical help, to single parents and fragile families. While those are the very families that are most likely to be absent from congregational life, congregations could take the first step and go find them. For instance, a team of women from a congregation could form a "Mom's Team" in which volunteers identify single moms who could use an extra hand around the house for a few hours a week.

3. Look for the assets that adult children of family fragmentation have.

It is true that children of family fragmentation are at greater risk of a host of problems, but it is also true that their experiences sharpen their resolve to give their own children the family stability that they did not experience in their own families. As the young man quoted above put it, "That's one good thing I can say that came out of me not having a father: That makes me a better father, because I know how it feels to not have a dad."

Adult children of divorce carry a hard-earned wisdom

and resolve, and religious institutions can empower them to apply that wisdom to their own lives and to share with others. As Bill Doherty and Jason Carroll put it, “The greatest untapped resource for strengthening families is the knowledge, wisdom, and lived experience of families and their communities.... Families must be engaged as producers and contributors to their communities, and not just as clients or consumers of services.”

For instance, the pastor of a congregation could invite a team of young people—including some who come from fragmented families—to advise the congregation on how better to reach those who experience family fragmentation as well as to provide ideas about improving the congregation’s ministry to young couples and single parents.

4. Propose a better story about love and sex and marriage.

For divorce-wary young adults who wonder how to make love last, a religious leader could invite a couple celebrating their golden anniversary to share their story. For young adults jaded by the expectation of early sex in relationships and wondering how to find a good man or woman, congregations could retrieve what their own traditions have to say about the meaning of sex and love.

In an era when America is coming apart along class lines, religious congregations have an opportunity to become places where people from across class lines can come together for a common goal. Creating that space, however, may not happen without the ingenuity of risk-taking religious leaders who are willing to go out and meet the very people—working-class men and women who are divorced, cohabiting, and rearing children outside marriage—whom few congregations are reaching.

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Overcoming the Perceived Perfectionist Requirement

By Ken Lewis

I began my full-time pastoral ministry 40 years ago. Of the first seven weddings I was asked to perform, the brides were pregnant in five. This was not how it was supposed to be among presumably conservative evangelicals.

Of the first seven weddings I was asked to perform, the brides were pregnant in five. This was not how it was supposed to be among presumably conservative evangelicals.

Something had to get through to the young men and women who were making the choices that led to these troubling results. Christ said, “The truth shall set you free.” Charles Murray wrote in *Coming Apart* that conservatives know a great deal of truth, but we’re not effectively passing it on.

Over the next years, I took over leadership of the youth group, telling them the straight truth of the Bible. Like the scriptures, I talked plainly, bluntly about sexuality.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, we read one of the foundations of both the Hebrew and Christian faiths,

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (ESV)

Clearly, God is calling us to be pretty persistent communicators about scriptural truth, particularly with



our own children. Notice, too, that it's not simply a "one-and-done" proposition. God knew that His fallen creation had pretty hard heads and hearts. Communicative redundancy would be required. A vital relationship with God is also necessary for the power to enable us to follow the truth. Truth alone will not suffice, but neither would pietistic sincerity that was silent about the truth.

I used everything I could think of: plain scriptural teaching discretely seasoned with my own experiences, various teaching materials ranging from Charlie Shedd's *The Stork Is Dead* to James Dobson's *Preparing for Adolescence* and many other sources. I treated sexuality with the *dignity* the Creator desired, but, like scripture, I was *blunt* about the truth. I used what I could find for my bully pulpit.

In one series on the Dobson material we'd been frankly discussing God's intention for sexuality with a group of junior high students – that it was God's good gift, meant for procreation and pleasure, but it was to be reserved only for marriage. I asked the kids to write anonymously on a piece of paper how many of their parents had been discussing sexuality with them. Almost without exception, the answers came back, "None."

I knew I had found one of the contributing keys to our problem. I knew, too, that the people in my parish were good, godly people. They wanted to do right, yet clearly they were reticent to discuss sex with their kids.

In order to pass on the truth, the two obstacles we must overcome are reticence and the falsely perceived "perfectionist requirement."

Reticence, shyness, and reluctance to talk about *that* . . . you know . . . sex, must be throttled. If we don't talk to the children in our family or church, someone else will. In the '70s that someone would probably have been Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*, or one's local-community version of Fonzie, boasting in a locker room, perhaps, or late some Friday night in the back seat of a car. Today, it will be the generalized media which has virtually adopted Hefner's values, or our public schools, which have largely done the same.

You know, "Sex isn't meant solely for marriage, how quaint. It's meant to be enjoyed by everyone, and enjoyed *now*. No need to wait for marriage. Anyone got a banana? I want to show you how to start the fun."

Secondly, we must overcome the perceived perfectionist requirement — the belief that we must have a *perfect* record personally in order to speak to our children about moral values. People can learn from their failures, and some of the best teachers are those who use that ample accumulated wisdom to speak out.

Ever told a lie? Probably. Does that preclude encouraging truthfulness in our children? Ever been rude? Same thing, eh? Does that prevent us from teaching our kids to be polite? Some of the most effective spokeswomen for pro-life thinking have been the women in congregations who had earlier made the mistake of having a convenient abortion. They now regretted it deeply, and have been willing to powerfully, authentically speak out.

The same principle applies to communicating about sexuality. After all, the only people God has available, then and today to carry out Deuteronomy's charge are *imperfect* ones. One of the left's most effective lies to squelch both tradition and truth is that, in order to advocate either one, a speaker must have practiced them perfectly. Says who? That artificial requirement would have silenced Deuteronomy's author, the murderer Moses, too, as well as the rest of us, wouldn't it?

Children need a family and a church, but they need families and churches that are more than mutely filling a slot. They need parents, pastors, mentors and teachers who will talk to them and tell them the truth that will set them free.

Ken Lewis, who has been happily married to his wife Janell for nearly 45 years, is the father of two children and grandfather of seven. He is now retired after nearly 40 years of pastoral ministry in the Baptist General Conference.

“Confirm Thy Soul in Self-Control, Thy Liberty in Law”

By George W. Liebmann

In addressing the problems presented by fragmented families, religious institutions must first strengthen themselves. There was a time when the ministry was considered one of the three great learned professions, together with medicine and the law. At the turn of the 20th century, something like a fifth of the graduates of our elite colleges entered the church. Today's graduates no longer even think of the ministry as a vocation; typically there are not more than one or two men and women of the cloth in each Ivy League graduating class.

The opportunities churches afford for intellectual leadership, pastoral counseling and social work, and community organization are ignored. They recruit fortuitously, and their recruits too often are psychologically wounded people looking for a refuge

There was a time when the ministry was considered one of the three great learned professions, together with medicine and the law

from engagement with the world. This must change. As for strengthening marriage, Max Rheinstein, the most learned and notable secular writer on these problems, considered that a mere two changes in law and practice could discourage family breakdown: premarital counseling, with emphasis on the need for mutual tolerance; and relief from economic pressures through family allowances and the like. Pressures which were greatly intensified by bracket creep, erosion of tax exemptions, and increased payroll taxes in the 1960s and 1970s.

The claim for full-time public daycare is inconsistent with what Learned Hand called “the preservation of personality.” “Parents tend to be fond of their children, and do not want them to be the subjects of political schemes,” Bertrand Russell wrote in 1927. “The State cannot be expected to have the same attitude.”

Two notable but forgotten studies urge that half-time day care is the best solution, relieving the isolation and boredom of mothers and their separation from careers while preserving emotional attachments with children during what one psychiatrist called “the magic years.” Children who do not form emotional attachments with at least one adult when they are young are the sociopaths and psychopaths of the future. The first of these studies is the pioneer American social worker Mary Richmond's book, *985 Widows*. The second is the British Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools* (2 vols., 1968).

One older approach to family support that has revived interest is a visiting-nurse program for parents of young infants, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. The latter-day sponsors of such programs seem to be entirely unaware of the earlier work along these lines under the Sheppard-Towner Act approved by President Coolidge that ultimately fell victim to lobbying by the medical profession.

As for what religious leaders should not do, I would urge that they not be too modish. In particular, they should uphold the unpopular notion that men and women have different characteristics, different needs, and different destinies. The distinctive responsibilities of motherhood do not begin at birth and end with the severance of the umbilical cord. College women do not have, and should not have, an equal right to get sloshed on Saturday night, and no redefinition of sexual offenses and rules of evidence can protect them if prevailing mores do not. All relationships are not created equal, and there must be an association of rights with responsibilities. Actions have consequences; women who give men no reason to marry should not be surprised at a shortage of husbands. Self-denial is essential to civilization. Churches can be judgmental in their administration of sacraments. Their anthem should be what was once the unofficial anthem of the country: “Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.”

George W. Liebmann is executive director of the Calvert Institute in Baltimore, Maryland.



God is Not a Cosmic Killjoy

By Kathy Lohmer

It seems to me, a weekly church attendee at a conservative, biblically based church since the early 1990s, that there has been precious little discussion of morality—almost an aversion to speak about “social issues.” The scriptures are vital, but avoidance of topics such as homosexuality, abortion, pornography, divorce, and extramarital sex are rarely discussed.

Young people can spend their entire growing-up years attending a church and rarely hear a compelling argument from the pulpit about God’s views in these areas. They need to hear that God is not a “cosmic killjoy” but rather loves them so much that He wants the very best for their lives here on earth.

Leaders in churches and even secular institutions must spend far more time educating young people about the dangers of promiscuity and allowing a very sacred part of their lives to be squandered and overtaken by the lies of the secular mainstream media. I would even suggest that we parents and leaders encourage an avoidance of a good many popular television shows and movies to force producers to engage in bringing good, wholesome messages to our young people rather than the harmful messages being spewed out today. Most television programs and movies today have a gay character, a single mother, or single father portrayed as normal and mainstream.

We need a very strong emphasis on the message of selflessness rather than selfishness when it comes to divorce and its very painful effects on children and our culture as a whole. My kids (I have four sons) have, at various times, thanked me and my husband for staying together. The vast majority of their friends’ parents were divorced or are in the process of divorcing, and the extreme pain experienced by their friends was heartbreaking.

I guess the bottom line is, there cannot be too much taught in this area, as the message from the popular culture constitutes a daily bombardment of unhealthy lifestyles and choices. We must celebrate and honor people who stay together in marriage and acknowledge

that long-term, monogamous marriage has major mental and physical health benefits. We must return to teaching children at home and at school the practical issues of marriage and family. Many young people today are even avoiding marriage at all, and this needs to change. Churches and private institutions must lead here, and young people will need to be encouraged to invite their peers to events and groups that champion these ideas.

We could also do a better job on encouraging abstinence and, again, movies and television programming could be produced that would show struggles of poverty and lifelong dependence on government that comes with out-of-wedlock births. At the same time, there should be more movies and television shows that tell the benefits of children having a mom and a dad.

We are fighting for our futures and we desperately need leaders who are not afraid to talk about these things. Silence is killing our culture.

Kathy Lohmer, a Republican from Lake Elmo, serves District 39B in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Loving and Esteeming What We Do Not Have

By Jennifer Marshall

For many people in church pews, the marriage ideal historically preached from the pulpit hasn’t worked out. Meanwhile, in the culture at large, dramatic changes have resulted from divorce, unwed childbearing, and prolonged singleness. That’s led some commentators to suggest that marriage is an outdated institution and that we should give up on the sexual complementarity, monogamy, exclusivity, and permanency that define it.

Should we give up on marriage just because it hasn’t worked out for many of us personally? The way we answer that—the way we help each other answer that, no matter what stage of life—will have consequences not only for us individually but also for our culture generally.

Religious leaders have an opportunity to remind people in their communities that we can love and esteem what we do not have. We can have a sense of contentment now, even as we hope for something more in the future.

For as long as pollsters have been asking, the vast majority of young people have said that a happy marriage and family life are important future goals. Yet over the last four decades, the median age of marriage has risen by more than six years. Today, almost half of women are still single at 30. Last summer, we heard the news that the proportion of never-married adults has reached an all-time high.

Clearly, there is a gap between reality and what we desire. How to close that gap is a cultural question that needs attention from leaders in all sectors of society, including religious leaders. How to live in the midst of that gap is a personal question with which unmarried people must wrestle, and religious leaders can help address it through spiritual formation.

Religious leaders can help congregants make sense of the cultural chaos spurred by the sexual revolution and the feminist movement. Once upon a time, there were more clear-cut paths to marriage in our culture. That's not the case now.

Today's romantic scene is casual and non-committal and often focused more on finding sex than helping a woman meet a marriage-minded man. A generation ago, feminists were frustrated by barriers to fulfilling work. Today, many young women are frustrated by obstacles to lasting love.

Some of those obstacles seem to be byproducts of the feminist movement itself. In many instances, it stoked the battle between the sexes by interpreting male-female relationships as a power struggle.

We have a lot of cultural confusion to clear up. Religious congregations can help.

First, religious teachers should challenge the notion that we should throw off marriage because it isn't working out for enough of us. Despite what some people may argue, marriage is not an ideal because the majority, the powerful, or forces such as evolution or

economics made it so. Marriage is an ideal because it is rooted, timelessly, in the universal nature of man and woman.

Religious leaders can shape congregants' outlook on marriage—whether those congregants are unmarried or married. Here are three specific ways that religious leaders should talk about marriage:

First, religious teachers should challenge the notion that we should throw off marriage because it isn't working out for enough of us.

- Marriage is not about self-validation. Marital status does not determine a person's worth. The desire to be married should not be driven by a sense that marriage will somehow validate us as human beings. Our worth comes from our Creator, not from a spouse, a boyfriend, or anyone else.
- Marriage is about serving one another, not focusing on self. Singleness should be about serving others as well. Interactions between men and women, whether single or married, should be about restoring and reconciling, not agitating or competing. It's time to throw off the tired battle between the sexes.
- Both marriage and singleness present us with the challenge of finding purpose and contentment now, even if all our longings are not fulfilled.

Today's confusion about marriage, and heartache from its brokenness, cry for guidance from preachers and teachers. People wrestling with unwanted singleness can gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of marriage and thus play a part in helping restore the truth about what marriage is and what it is not.

Married people often say that marriage is hard work. We should also acknowledge that a marriage culture is hard work. It will take effort from all of us, married or not.



Jennifer A. Marshall is vice president for the Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity at The Heritage Foundation and author of Now and Not Yet: Making Sense of Single Life in the 21st Century.

Affirming Commitments to Future Children

By Elliott Masie

Every day in the United States, an average of 6,200 couples look into each other's eyes and take a marriage vow. The most traditional and common vow is,

I, (name), take you (name), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward, until death do us part.

Our religious institutions usually officiate the weddings, witnessed by an average of 178 guests hearing these sweet and powerful words spoken as two people's public commitment to one another.

Yet if you look closely at the vows, which are beautiful, you will notice the lack of the word "family." Most of our marriage ceremonies are focused on partners' desires to spend the rest of their lives together, but most leave out the even more important contracts that two people starting a family should affirm to each other.

Why can't religious institutions transform marriage and wedding preparation and affirmations into a contracting and commitment process to assist, coach, and validate a strong contract about creating, raising, and supporting a family together?

What if our wedding vows were to include a public commitment to bind each other to raise a child together—to create a family setting with both parents present and with financial, emotional, and educational support for each child from birth onward?

Some couples, marrying later in their life and blessed with previous resources, create a prenuptial agreement that outlines an enforceable agreement about the economic dissolution of the marriage, along with details of what would be shared or not shared between the partners. Yet where is the "pre-child agreement?"

What if our religions engaged partners heading towards a wedding to consider, communicate, and contract with each other about their continued joint presence in a family household upon birthing a child? What if our religious counselors asked a series of tough questions to the couple such as the following?

- If you create a child, how will you share or balance earning the money needed for the family?
- If you create a child, what are the expectations of each partner in the care of the children—at a detailed level?
- If you create a child, what are the roles of extended family members in helping with the support of the family in terms of time, presence, or even money?
- If you have a problem in your relationship, how will you work to resolve it? Additionally, how does that commitment change if you have children?
- What assistance and counseling are you agreeing to, if the marriage should be at risk?
- If you would choose to separate, what are your commitments in term of time, money, and geographic co-location to continue to support the family?

Wedding vows celebrate relationships registered with the law and perhaps blessed by a couple's religion(s). Yet where is the sense of serious contracting around the joint responsibility of creating children and maintaining a supportive household for them?

A growing number of couples are waiting until pregnancy to marry. They may live together for some time or, triggered by a pregnancy, find themselves together suddenly. For these couples, it is even more important for religious leaders to focus on the family commitments and contracts they must make to both each other and, more important, to the child about to be born.

The 6,200 couples marrying today in the United States are part of an annual overall outlay of over \$72 billion

in which food, music, toasts, and celebrations surround the happy joining of two people. Yet where is the focus on affirming their commitments to a future family, with explicit statements and vows, in the presence of their religion that affirms the seriousness of creating a child? Where is the explicit commitment of what they will do, if their relationship should weaken? Where are the best man and bridesmaid, to whom they will look for help, should their commitment to the marriage start to weaken?

Religious leaders can bring the focus of a wedding to answering all these questions.

Elliott Masie is the Chair of The Learning CONSORTIUM, headquartered in Saratoga Springs, New York, which works with major corporations on workforce education.

Breaking a Multi-Generational Cycle of Sorrow

By Pam Myhra

A little over a decade ago, I was on the East Coast for a family vacation. While visiting a large, crowded museum, two young brothers came up to me with a desperate plea for help. Their fear and distress formed tears in their eyes as in unison they explained they couldn't find their mother anywhere. I knelt down to their level and promised we would find her.

I offered, and they eagerly grasped, my hands. We searched the immediate area with no success, so I took them to the museum entrance. While still a distance off, they saw their mother, released their firm grip on my hands, and ran to her.

Even after all these years, I still tear up when I recall their mother's tears and how she and I looked so similar. We were nearly the same age, both brunettes with the same haircut, and we wore the same style of clothes; I felt like I was looking at my own reflection. The young boys trusted me because of the comforting familiarity of my appearance.

Whether good or bad, in times of stress or conflict, we most frequently fall back on the familiar. Unfortunately, many people are in constant family turmoil because they don't have positive memories or role models to follow, so they imitate the failed behaviors they have seen.

We search for love and crave forgiveness. Regrettably, in this divorce-prone, litigious society, there is little of either as seemingly everyone wants to shirk responsibility and instead aggressively search to find fault in others. Few people practice understanding, and fewer still model what is needed to build

We search for love and crave forgiveness.

strong marriages: unconditional love and complete forgiveness. Families flounder while parents recite and children learn hurtful scripts.

Individuals and families desperately need strong role models, effective mentors, and a change in the prevalent cultural message of antagonism, blame, and self-justification to a message of commitment, love, and forgiveness.

Recently, my young adult daughter said, "Mom, I want a marriage like yours and Dad's, and I'm willing to wait for it." I believe her comments came from her well-founded belief and experience of being unconditionally loved. She knows full well her father and I are not perfect, but she has seen us model strong commitment, love, and forgiveness. She has heard us both sincerely say, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

Unfortunately, it is a significant challenge for many people to practice unconditional love and complete forgiveness when they have experienced neither.

Nevertheless, the transformation demonstrated in my mother's life gives me hope. She grew up with devastating abuse and neglect but as a teenager realized her need to be forgiven and to forgive; she learned of God's unconditional love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Instead of repeating the abuse and neglect she experienced growing up, by the grace of God and her personal study of the Bible, she was able to break a multi-generational cycle of sorrow and provide my siblings and me a safe, nurturing, and loving childhood.



I believe to strengthen marriages, it is imperative parents and religious leaders confidently provide strong role models, mentor the struggling, and articulate a hopeful message of commitment, love, and forgiveness.

Pam Myhra is a former Minnesota state representative, wife to her husband Chuck for 33 years, and mother of three young adult children.

STOP. Get Married. Add Spouse.

By Rhonda Kruse Nordin

It was a giant project, cleaning out the old four-story farmhouse that stood regally surrounded by a stand of pines. Solid, erect, white, and square, it had been home to multiple generations of my family and now was ours due to the passing of our father. Thus, my sister, brother, and I tackled the job—tossing dishes, clothing, tools, papers, and what-not that had accumulated over a lifetime in the far-reaches of the four levels.

Finally, one morning I came to the game cupboard. I forcefully jarred the swollen wooden doors from their frames. As they parted, my heartstrings felt a strong tug, for there aligned neatly on the shelves—unmoved throughout a quarter-century of disuse—were games Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers had created to occupy our time and space in a simpler, slower slice of life.

My eyes shot to colorful boxes of *Checkers*, *Chess*, *The Match Game*, *Clue*, *Monopoly*. Memories recalled days-long marathons waged among my siblings and me.

Then I saw the big one—a box larger than the others—our favorite: *The Game of LIFE*. My heart stopped. It had taken only 45 minutes—maybe an hour—to shoot around the board as a child, yet those minutes left me with a lifetime of guidelines, rules, and principles about winning the so-called game of life. In the eyes of Milton Bradley, winning meant emerging with the most money.

The Game of LIFE we knew was the second edition; the first, *The Checkered Game of Life*, originated in

1860. To commemorate its 100th anniversary, Reuben Klammer reinvented the game for a new era that reached our family via Santa Claus about 1965. I still feel my excitement as I launched my miniature pink car around the board. Playing *The Game of LIFE* paralleled real life in certain ways, yet aware that the game was based on chance—a spin of the wheel—I couldn't help but believe my choices influenced my ability to win the game.

The first choice players made was to attend college or go into business. The assumption: All players were equipped to do one or the other. Moving along the board, players encountered obstacles and opportunities (many downright silly) that rewarded players accordingly with money that either added to or deleted their coffers.

One event that players didn't get to choose occurred early in the game: *We had to marry*. When reaching the tile boldly marked in red, "STOP: Get married. Add spouse," each player had to do just that: stop and marry. That was the rule. We added a spouse to our little cars then continued jauntily around the board, ensuing spins landing us on tiles that represented realistic life events such as adding babies or buying a house, or unrealistic life outcomes such as winning the sweepstakes or catching a whale.

The Game of LIFE was meant to be entertaining and also teach us about life. The game has been updated numerous times since 1960 to reflect changes in society. Players might now be rewarded for a politically correct pet adoption or for recycling trash and may be more likely to land on a tile that increases tuition or demands a tax payment than one that results in the inheritance of a shrunken-head collection or getting lost in the jungle, as might have occurred in early versions.

Two things though, have not changed from edition to edition: Each player *still* must marry, and each player *still* cannot add a baby until after marriage. While the tiles of recent editions were rewritten to appeal to current generations, no designers have dared alter the order by which families are formed.

I propose faith communities up their game when teaching the game of life. We've gotten too timid when talking about "the order." Perhaps the process deemed to work best to increase odds of prosperity in 1860—

that of marrying first, *then* having a baby—works best also in 2015.

I may have learned subliminally about family formation while playing *The Game of LIFE*; however, teens today need deliberate and thoughtful education that regularly delivers consistent messages early and motivates responsible choices.

Barna Group reports that three of five teens attend at least one meeting at church within a three-month period and are drawn there to seek fresh perspectives and experiences and to learn principles to guide life decisions. Churches must develop stronger voices about the marriage culture and promote marriage as an opportunity to love and respect another and as a channel to develop self-respect, pride, and integrity. Marriage comes first, *then* a baby. Recall that no tile on any Milton Bradley edition instructs, “Don’t Marry. Live together.”

Milton Bradley spelled it out long ago, “STOP. Get Married. Add spouse.” Babies came thereafter—along with a much better chance at winning the game.

Rhonda Kruse Nordin, an American Experiment Senior Fellow, is an author, educator, and public speaker whose research-based offerings provide point-of-view trends and recommendations to strengthen families.

We Were Wrong!

By Bob Osburn

Mitch Pearlstein not only has the pulse of America’s greatest social problem but also is one of the very few people with the courage to say that religion and religious institutions have unparalleled potential for healing the scourge of family fragmentation.

By appealing to the powers of religion both to preserve and to heal marriages and families, Pearlstein reminds me of C.S. Lewis’s description of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: “He’s wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.” Definitely not “Minnesota Nice.” No anodyne prescriptions for fragmented families. Instead, three powerful words:

“We were wrong!”

If we are serious about family fragmentation, we must unleash the power of downright edgy, sometimes-controversial, and often-prophetic religious vocabulary to stimulate a reconceptualization of our assumptions about marriage and family. When we do so, then policies, programs, projects, and dollars can genuinely advance the cause of human flourishing amongst those

Utilizing the Judeo-Christian vocabulary, let’s start with the word *repent*. In the Greek . . . it refers to “changing one’s mind.”

mired in the quicksand of family fragmentation. Utilizing the Judeo-Christian vocabulary, let’s start with the word *repent*. In the Greek from which the word is usually translated, it refers to “changing one’s mind.” What if some of us were willing to repent publicly—that is, change our minds when we have been wrong about marriage and family policy?

I’ll be the first to call to repentance white churches that often led the flight to the suburbs as urban areas integrated racially. Rather than providing stable family models for their new African-American neighbors, they left their new neighbors without models and effective resources for creating stable, whole families. For that matter, have white Americans (who see themselves as individuals, but who are seen as a group by African-Americans) ever considered formally repenting for the dual tragedies of slavery and Jim Crow? I am suggesting that when more than 80 percent of African-American children are born out of wedlock in Hennepin County, Minnesota, our problems are fundamentally spiritual and cannot be solved by redistributing wealth.

Another group must repent: secularists who very often command the cultural heights in our society. Their ideological ancestors pulled off a “secular revolution” in our universities over a century ago, and they themselves pulled off a Cultural Revolution in the 1960s that demolished America’s religiously grounded moral consensus. When Christian cultural authority was eviscerated, we lost the dike that held back the forces of family disintegration and fatherlessness.



Have our cultural leaders betrayed the common good by declaring that the path to happiness is fulfilling one's sexual desires spontaneously, freely, "authentically," as long as there is consent? Why have many Americans lost the power of the holy negation "Thou shalt not?" Shorn of religious vocabularies while urged to throw off the strictures of literalist religion by proselytizing professors of secularism, Americans jump sexual and moral fences with abandon. Policymakers have only too willingly climbed aboard by sanctioning no-fault divorce and endless other social experiments designed to free Americans from traditional restraints so they can taste the fruit of freedom. That fruit, we now know, leaves a very bitter aftertaste in the mouths of the millions of children whose educational and economic futures are stunted.

Repentance is a two-step process. The first step is confession: telling others the truth about our worst failures. Christians and Jews alike have always taken great solace in King David's confession, in Psalm 51, of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." What is stopping us from telling the truth that our marriage and family policies (prescriptions) are failing because our secular assumptions (diagnoses) are wrong?

The good news for people who feel unfairly assaulted by this jeremiad is that another word in the religious vocabulary is *forgiveness*. With forgiveness comes a new start, a new way forward. Imagine cultural leaders actually using the language of right and wrong, along with other useful tools, to help families and marriages succeed.

In Minnesota, Brian and Denise Walker of Everlasting Light Ministries stand ready to help African-American marriages heal, while Prof. William Doherty helps multiple religious communities develop "marital first responders." Meanwhile in New Brighton, members of Faith Christian Reformed Church tutor children at Bel Air School, while other churches across the Twin Cities are finding ways to help public schools turn around. Nationally, African-American activist Nicole Baker Fulgham champions church involvement in schools through the Expectations Project, as does Hope4Kids as it trains churches to help schools.

This essay may have galled, at worst, or provoked wonder, at best, among secularists. Some, I hope, may be willing to say, "We were wrong!"

Bob Osburn is the Executive Director of Wilberforce Academy, where he trains international students to be redemptive change agents. He also teaches a course on religion and educational policy at the University of Minnesota.

Returning Government to Its Original Role

By Star Parker

I have been asked to suggest what actions can be taken on the part of the clergy to strengthen marriage and reduce nonmarital births, and what the clergy should not do.

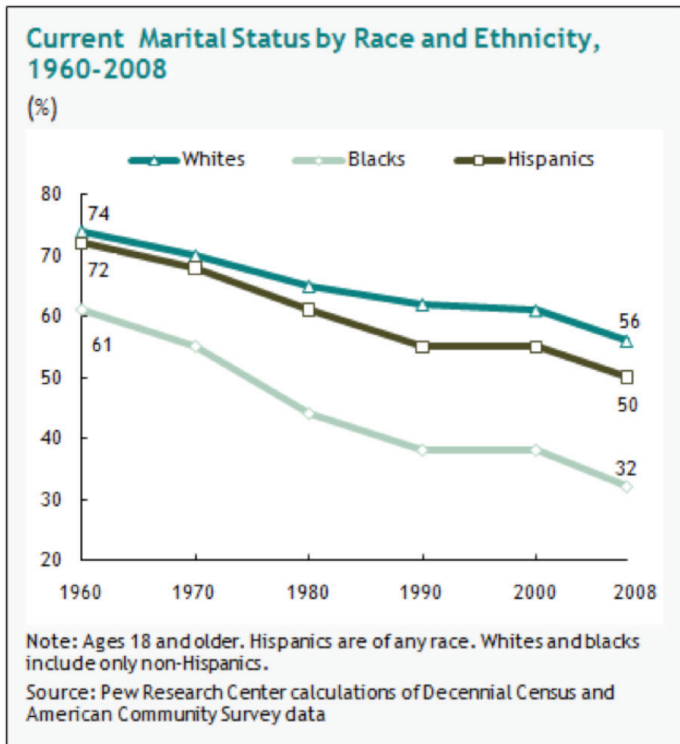
To suggest solutions to a problem, I would first need to define it. Let me use four graphs to summarize the picture as I see it:

Graph I

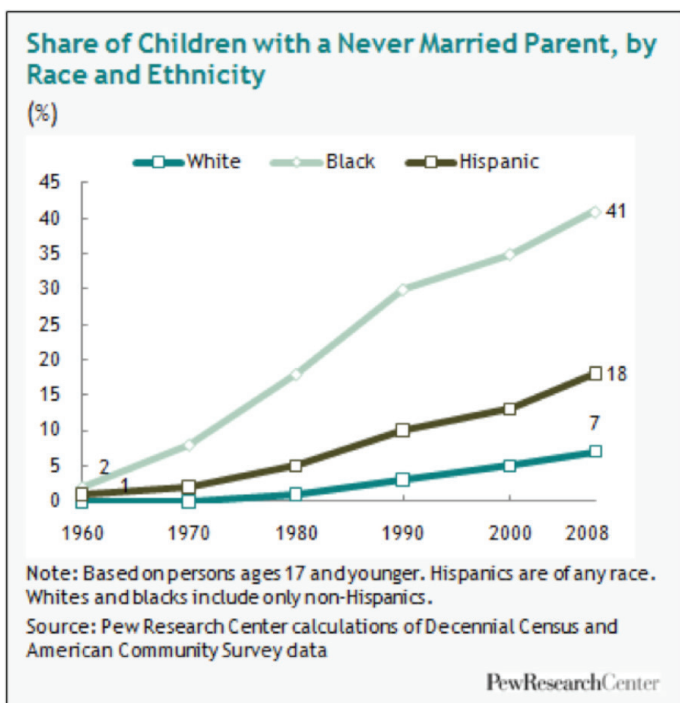


Viewing these four graphs together, we see a process whereby in a little over a half century, the importance with which Americans see religion in their life has diminished. At the same time, we see dramatic decreases in the percentage of American adults who are married, dramatic increases in children with an unmarried parent, and dramatic increases in the percentage of federal spending going as direct payments to individuals.

Graph II

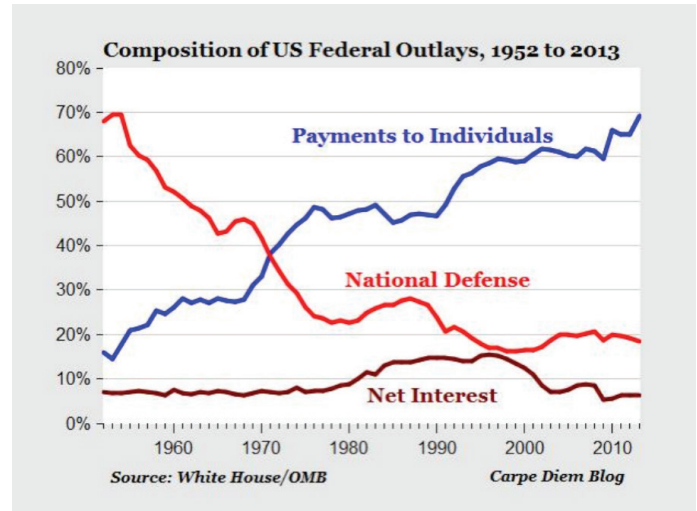


Graph III



I would put as major milestones over this period the banishment of school prayer in 1962, the escalation of the American welfare state with President Johnson's launch of the War on Poverty in 1965, and the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion in 1973.

Graph IV



This overall picture shows what I would call the secularization of America. This might be defined as increasing cultural belief that man's problems can be solved by government and social engineering rather than in the personal realm, whereby individuals assume personal responsibility and apply eternal truths transmitted through tradition in the milestone personal decisions they make.

What happens as part of this transformation is that man's social needs take place through relationship to government rather than in family. It is no accident that socialism and atheism go hand in hand.

These dynamics must change in order to restore marriage and family as the central social institutions of our citizens, rather than government and politics.

Given this definition of the problem, let me say first what clergy should not do: They should not be involved in efforts that expand government.

Given this definition of the problem, let me say first what clergy should not do: They should not be involved in efforts that expand government.

The overriding imperative must be a conviction that government must be returned to its role as originally conceived by America's founders: to be limited to protecting life, liberty, and property.



We must seek opportunities to scale back government involvement in the personal lives of citizens beyond its core function, whether in education, housing, health care, retirement, or welfare.

We must restore a prevailing cultural sense that the outcomes of individual lives are the direct result of the personal responsibility (or lack of it) that individuals apply to their own lives and the decisions they make. We must restore a sense that the social context through which individuals receive the vital information needed to make those responsible decisions is through family.

I recommend two priorities for changing the public landscape in America so as to achieve the needed culture transformation described above:

- We should work to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, make abortion illegal, and restore once again congruence between American law and respect for the sanctity of life.
- We must promote school choice so parents can have the option of sending their children to religious schools where they can learn religious values. In education, money should follow children.

If clergy take responsibility to be involved in changing these two major aspects of public life in America, the prospect for renewal of marriage, family, and raising children in this context will improve dramatically.

Star Parker is founder and president of the Center for Urban Renewal and Education in Washington DC (urbancure.org) and a nationally syndicated columnist.

Commitments to Parenting and Other Solemn Rituals

By Bruce Peterson

I know our editor is looking for creative ideas about how religious institutions can reduce divorces and nonmarital births, two developments which he has repeatedly, forcefully, and correctly warned often lead to a host of personal and social disadvantages.

Yet I think that horse is out of the barn. The economic independence of women, unstable employment prospects for many men, and the cultural ethics of personal freedom and self-fulfillment mean very high rates of family fragmentation are, in all likelihood, here to stay. That is not to say that efforts to achieve small reductions in these rates are not eminently worthwhile, and I have been involved in several. Yet the chance for big payoffs comes not from reducing the rates but from reducing their impact on children. It is here that religious institutions can play an important role.

The research on exactly why divorce and unmarried parenting are so problematic for children isn't simple, but it generally points to the quality of the relationship between the parents. It is the parental conflict, not the divorce, that is most damaging for children, and it is the lack of cooperation and trust between the parents that makes effective co-parenting between unmarried parents so difficult and rare. Children in fragmented families would be better off if their parents were on their best behavior toward each other.

I was baptized, confirmed, and married by a minister, and my mother was buried by one. Watershed life events are times when we seek divine guidance, make public commitments, and need help to calm difficult emotions. For these purposes, religious organizations have traditionally opened their doors for ceremonies and rituals. A vow made before God and one's gathered family and friends is bound to have a deeper meaning and more staying power than the best of intentions that are never voiced.

A divorce or the birth of a child to unmarried parents is a life event no less worthy of the attention of God and the religious community than a marriage or a funeral. I urge religious organizations to inject themselves wholeheartedly into the business of strengthening fragmented families through solemn, public rituals. Some are doing this already.

My minister has shared with me several divorce ceremonies he has used in his long career. In beautiful language, these provide an opportunity for divorcing couples to acknowledge the good things they shared, to express their sadness over the loss of their dreams,

to forgive each other, and to vow to value and support each other as individuals and parents in the future. I do not know how widespread such ceremonies are, but among the many hundreds of divorcing couples I have worked with in court, I have heard of only a handful. Yet I have no doubt that children of a marriage with a spiritually supported ending will do better than those of a divorce whose pain is never shared ceremonially.

If unmarried parenting is to become a nurturing context for children, I am concerned that many young people may need an attitude adjustment. A young married man about to become a father is well aware that his priorities are about to shift dramatically. Evenings out with his friends are going to become pretty rare. Workouts might be relegated to six o'clock in the morning. Being unemployed is not an option. Friends and family understand and reinforce these expectations.

The same reordering is not necessarily expected of unmarried fathers—I simply do not always see the same recognition that life must be organized around the needs of the baby.

One modest proposal: A Commitment to Parenting ceremony, conducted with the formality and ritual of a wedding, in which new parents publicly commit to do what it takes to nurture their child and work together respectfully, no matter what the state of their own relationship. The ideal place for such a ceremony would be in a house of worship.

There is much more that religious institutions can do to improve the prospects of children in fragmented families—counseling, support groups, and simple recognition of the challenges of single parenting—but a good place to start would be with solemn rituals designed to bring out the best in parents.

Bruce Peterson is a Hennepin County (Minneapolis) judge.

What Exactly Should Religious Institutions Strengthen?

By Larry Purdy

While decades of accumulated data overwhelmingly demonstrate the benefit to society when traditional “marriage” is encouraged and strengthened, there is an increasingly ambiguous assumption that must be clarified, particularly if we are talking about the actions of religious leaders and institutions. Stated simply, how do we define marriage? Not to put too fine a point on it, but it seems obvious that whether marriage is worth strengthening may depend upon the religious leader’s or religious institution’s definition of the word.

For example, notwithstanding the data that demonstrate the economic and emotional challenges facing children born out of wedlock, do these challenges largely dissipate if there are two adults who permanently reside in the child’s home and fulfill the role of parents? If so, should all leaders—religious and secular—shift their focus to strengthening the commitment to parenting irrespective of the parents’ actual marital status?

Equally related is the question of whether there are distinctions between traditional one-man-one-woman marriages and newly legalized same-sex unions that suggest one deserves more encouragement and strengthening over another? In other words, does gender matter?

These questions are not intended to pass judgment on the merits of any particular form of marriage, including still-forbidden forms (e.g., polygamy) that may be just over the horizon in gaining social acceptance. Yet if we are debating the role of religion in strengthening marriage, isn’t it incumbent upon us to understand clearly what it is we are expecting religious institutions to be encouraging and strengthening? In fact, don’t the institutions themselves need a clear understanding of what it is they are trying to strengthen in order to develop the processes needed to accomplish the goal?



These thoughts obviously do not address what religious leaders and institutions should not do. However, given society's (and many churches') increasing tolerance for expanding the definition of marriage, these questions demand answers before deciding what, if anything, religious leaders and institutions should do.

The data show that a child does better on virtually every important measure—educationally, emotionally, socioeconomically—when both parents (presumptively the biological father and mother) reside in the home. Must these parents—biological or otherwise—be married to be positive role models in the child's life?

If new evidence were to suggest that neither the parent's marital status nor the form of their marriage make any difference, religious leaders presumably should be comfortable strengthening all manner of broadly redefined marriages. Still, what if the evidence doesn't suggest that? Then what? Would such evidence inevitably place religious leaders who support broadly expanded definitions of marriage on a collision course with religious codes that for centuries have defined marriage much more narrowly? Would it vindicate clergy who adhere to more traditional views on the definition of marriage?

Larry Purdy is an attorney in private practice in Minneapolis.

Time for a Fifth Great Awakening

By Don Racheter

The data on the negative impact of fragmented families on children's socioeconomic and educational status, delinquency, and crime are clear. Pastors and religious leaders are derelict in their duty to children when they do not speak up and reach out to encourage stable, married families—with a father present in the household—providing both economic and moral leadership. Our children's and grandchildren's lives and future depend on it, as does our country's.

Fewer than half (46 percent) of U.S. kids younger than 18 years of age are living in a home with two

married heterosexual parents in their first marriage. This is a marked change from 1960, when 73 percent of children fit this description, and 1980, when 61 percent did, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of recently-released American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census data.

Outside-the-box ideas are needed to reverse this pernicious trend and return to a more historical and conservative notion of the role of adults as parents who pass on civilization, norms, and acculturation to succeeding generations. God created the institutions of marriage and the family as the bedrocks of society, and the further we drift from them, the worse we are for it. Thus, while religious leaders may be in the best position to take the lead on trying to solve this problem, leaders of all sorts in our society must pitch in as well. Indeed, we are due for a fifth "Great Awakening" throughout American society.

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American society.**

It may not be politically correct to do so, but we need our leaders, especially our religious leaders, to preach and teach to our youth about why out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, divorce, and broken homes are bad for the individuals involved and bad for society as a whole. Writers, actors, producers, and others in the mass media and entertainment industries can also take a leading role in this. While it is a good thing for educators to teach their students to be tolerant of differences in race, creed, color, class, and so on, we need them to go back to teaching students to be less tolerant of behaviors that have such negative social consequences. Even if our society can achieve this about-face—and it is a very big "if," given current trends—there will still be many broken families in the interim that will not be helped by such a long-range solution.

One way our religious leaders and congregations could address the problem in the near term is to start many more "big brother" type programs where males would volunteer to be good role models for children from homes without a male present. These men, their

families, and their churches could simultaneously seek to bring the children from broken homes to a religious life.

Other ideas to encourage and support stable families include job application workshops, family game nights, shared babysitting, a wardrobe closet for job interviews, a loaner car for times when someone with only one car has a breakdown, homework study tables, and after-school programs on budgeting and home maintenance. All these are low-cost items well within the reach of most congregations with the will to reach out.

While religious leaders should be preaching and teaching about God's plan for marriage and parenthood, the politicians could also do their part. C.S. Lewis once stated: "We all want progress, but if you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns around the soonest is the most progressive."

In retrospect, it is clear we took a wrong road when welfare benefits were tied to the number of children a woman had and the presence of a man in the household to provide support was penalized. These pernicious incentives broke up many families and prevented many more from forming in the first place. We must repeal the current welfare system and replace it with something that incentivizes families to form and stay together.

Whether we institute social ceremonies to honor people who remain married many years, increase tax credits for married couples the longer they are together, or devise other incentives is less important than doing something to reverse the current disincentives to family formation and persistence. It is time to turn back from family-disintegration-friendly policies and social attitudes. It is time for a fifth Great Awakening to the moral, cultural, and religious importance of helping families form and persist for both the good of the specific individuals involved and for the wider society.

Don Racheter is a retired political scientist.

"A City Set on a Hill Cannot be Hidden"

By Joe Rigney

Speaking to this symposium's questions as a committed evangelical and addressing the members of my own tradition in particular, I ask, "What should evangelical leaders, institutions, and traditions do to strengthen marriage in a fragmented culture?" We ought to be the Bright City on a Hill that Jesus said we are.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). What does this mean for us? I'd suggest two key features of this Bright City that are most relevant in our own day.

First, the Bright City, like all ancient cities, has walls. Cities of the ancient world had gates and fences and barriers to separate the world within from the world without. The Bright City is no different, and one of our chief aims today ought to be to repair the ruins of our own wall. In concrete terms, I believe it is necessary for the church to recover and utilize church discipline with respect to its own members. Expecting the broader culture to conform to God's pattern for marriage when half the church is neck deep in sexual foolishness, father hunger, and unchecked divorce is a perfect example of putting carts before horses.

It's impossible to uphold the value of marriage for the common good if our marriages and our families are in shambles. We cannot magnify the meaning of marriage if our own homes are being rent apart by brokenness and frustration, by bitterness and futility. Church discipline—by which I mean the church's responsibility to preach the gospel, to teach obedience to the commands of Jesus, and to confront and address high-handed rebellion against those commands, up to and including removing unrepentant members from the body of Christ—is essential for the health and fruitfulness of Christ's church. Without such discipline, the Bright City cannot help but grow dark.

Of course, exercising church discipline in this way would require some measure of courage. We live in a day when any censure or discipline for immoral behavior is met with furrowed brows and cries of



“Who are you to judge?” Ostracism, at least when it comes to biblical faithfulness, is not in vogue. Yet the crying need of the hour is for church leaders and church members who embrace their God-given responsibility to testify to God’s design for the family by confronting philandering husbands, adulterous wives, absentee fathers, and wandering mothers with Christ’s call to repentance and the promise of glorious acceptance when genuine repentance occurs. Short of such courage, a compromised church will continue to bumble and stumble its way down the slippery slope paved by the sexual revolution.

Still, it’s not enough to have high walls around the City of God. Church history has known plenty of severe brethren who did little to arrest the brokenness and futility of their own day. We must remember why God has erected these walls around the Bright City in the first place: because he wants life to happen inside. As G.K. Chesterton reminded us, the chief aim of God’s structure and order is to give room for good things to run wild. God has put boundaries around marriage and family for the same reason that gardeners put fences around gardens: so that something glorious and delightful can grow.

Practically speaking, this means we must recover and embody the gladness of the gospel in our churches and families. There ought not be any scowling from the ramparts of the Bright City. This is the City that Joy built, the City that Joy bought, the City that Joy bled and died for, and that Joy must bubble up from the deep wells and water the garden. Then, and only then, can it flood the earth.

If we are to revive the moral imagination of this country, and especially of the young people who are the collateral damage of the sexual revolution, then our homes and our marriages and our families must be havens of life and joy and gratitude. Our words about the beauty and sanctity of marriage will be powerful and effective when those words flow out of strong, stable, happy families. Put simply, we need strong, sacrificial husbands who take responsibility for their capable, godly wives who joyfully submit to their strong, godly husbands, as they together seek gladly to spend themselves that their children may hope in God.

If this should happen, if our leaders and churches build the walls high around the City of God by faithfully disciplining according to the word of the living God, and if glad tidings of great joy are sung and lived from every hearth and home in the Bright City, then shall come to pass the rest of the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Then, our light, the light of the Bright City, will shine before men. Then, they will see our good works—our merry marriages, our glad-hearted homes, our Christ-exalting churches—and they will join us in the Bright City, and together we will glorify our great and glad Father in heaven.

Joe Rigney is assistant professor of theology and Christian worldview at Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis.

Hold Them in Your Arms

By Mark Ritchie

Sometimes families are fractured by tragedy. Mine was—shattered might be more precise—by a drunk driver who smashed into our only child, Rachel.

Intoxicated and distracted drivers kill and injure many thousands on our roads each year in the United States. One of the many cruelties of this form of homicide is that many of us left behind are unable to withstand the anger, sadness, grief, and spiritual crisis. The divorce rate among couples who have lost children is high, but this is not the only thing that drives loving couples apart.

Families are also being fractured as a consequence of the multiple deployments of our servicemen and women to the Middle East. The rate of divorce for returning soldiers has risen significantly over the last decade, with a measurable increased risk with each additional month of deployment.

Because many people continue to drive drunk, and because multiple deployments are not about to end, we have to do everything in our power to help families survive. Here is where I can speak from a very positive experience. When Rachel was killed, our friends and

family inside and outside our church put their arms around us and did not let us kill ourselves and did not let us shatter beyond repair.

With their love and support, we were mostly able to avoid the inevitable self-blame and “what-if” mind games. This is an especially difficult problem to tackle due to the way so many people approach divorce, with a blame-the-victim and punish-the-villain mentality. My wife, Nancy, and I are so incredibly fortunate to be deeply rooted in an amazing community of friends and family who loved Rachel as we did. Our church is large and over 150 years old, so it had the capacity for abiding compassionate care that helped us in many ways. Just a couple days after Rachel was killed, a thousand people showed up for her memorial service at our church, where nearly the entire congregation helped make this a way of healing that could save our souls. It was this kind of ministry—the caring for us and for all manner of things—that helped us feel able to go on living.

Over the past 14 years since we lost Rachel, ministers have come and gone, and the community has changed and grown. Yet when I sit there on Sunday mornings, I can still see the people who came to her memorial service, and I can still hear her good friend from high school singing *Amazing Grace*. I can still remember the hundreds of loaves of bread and all the comfort food that church members brought to feed the multitudes who came, because they loved Rachel as we did.

Mitch Pearlstein’s kind invitation to contribute to this collection at first seemed at odds with my own life experience. The idea that families were fracturing as a result of something wrong within the family was not my experience. In my life the shattering came from outside—from a young man who made the tragic decision to drink and drive. After some clarifying emails, I came to see that the central question being posed was, “What should our religious leaders, institutions, and traditions do to strengthen marriage?” My gut answer is, “Do everything within your power to make sure that no other families have to face the crisis of losing a son or daughter.”

Of course, we can’t totally protect our children from

the war being waged on our nation’s highways. Given this reality, I would answer in this way: Always be there to support families in crisis. Love them; hold them in your arms in as many ways as possible. Know

Always be there to support families in crisis. Love them; hold them in your arms in as many ways as possible.

they are feeling self-doubt and most likely blaming themselves. Know they may be consumed with anger and desire for revenge. Know they will need your deepest spiritual traditions to pass through grief and mourning into a continuation of life.

Sometimes families cannot be saved—even by the most devoted ministers and caring religious communities. Families unable to survive the grief and trauma should be spared all the subtle and not-so-subtle “failure” insinuations—they have suffered enough. Never slide down the slippery slope of blaming the victim.

Drunk drivers have had an impact on one of every two people in our country. If the goal is keeping families together, then doing something to prevent the shattering of families by impaired driving would be a good place to begin.

Mark Ritchie is chair of EXPO 2023, Minnesota’s World Fair, and served as Minnesota’s Secretary of State from 2007 to 2015. He and his wife Nancy Gaschott live in Minneapolis.

Minnesota Government is Not Interested in Marriage

By Linda Runbeck

Some years ago, when our daughter was 13, we established a rule in our house. “No,” we told her, “you may not sleep over at your friend’s house—her mom has a live-in boyfriend.” My husband and I didn’t want to put our daughter in a risky situation or to condone the live-in boyfriend lifestyle.



There were tears and angry words from our daughter, but it was a teachable moment. Conservative friends cheered us for our bravery, and liberal friends criticized us for being insensitive and “judgmental.”

Looking back on the intervening years of weakening marriage statistics, our society needs more, not fewer, people rendering judgment in defense of marriage and the two-parent family. Solid evidence warns that where marriage and the two-parent family are in decline, society itself is in decline—bringing with it impoverished lifestyles, declining education levels, criminalized youth, little upward mobility, and unskilled and unmarriageable young men.

At the Minnesota Legislature, where I’ve spent nearly two decades, there is silence about marriage and its value to the culture. Political liberals and moderates who’ve been in support of greater sexual freedoms since the 1960s are not about to reverse themselves and declare the two-parent family the preferred environment for safe and successful child-rearing.

Big government incentivizes non-marriage. State and federal anti-poverty programs undermine the formation of two-parent families. In Minnesota, single moms are eligible for an array of public assistance programs with attractive benefits. Free college and free childcare are strong incentives to raise a child in a fatherless family, even if the biological father wishes to marry.

Put simply, government officials and politicians in Minnesota are not interested in the positives of marriage or the negatives of divorce. In the latest Minnesota Department of Health annual *Health*

Put simply, government officials and politicians in Minnesota are not interested in the positives of marriage or the negatives of divorce.

Statistics Summary, we read that “data on marriage and divorce is not available after 2009.” In other words, Minnesota is not collecting or reporting on statewide marriage and divorce statistics. Marriage and divorce data available in many states,

down to the county and city level, are fueling a host of pro-marriage and “divorce-proofing” programs. Groups are having success with programs to increase marriage and reduce divorce: Examples include Marriage Savers, a church-based program focused on pre-marriage assessment and training of mentors. Another program is Marriage, Inc., based in Kankakee, Illinois, which brings together civic leaders and pastors committed to increasing rates of marriage and decreasing rates of divorce in the county. Their efforts have resulted in improving statistics (my sister and brother-in-law are the directors). Similarly, in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, work by a group of pastors to focus on promoting marriage has seen positive results.

I believe strong two-parent families are the answer to the growing underclass in our state. How do we make this happen?

- Live and talk about our belief in marriage. Whether as individuals, couples, neighborhoods, congregations, or legislative districts, we can all bolster marriage by our talk and actions. We can inspire local churches to organize in promoting marriage. We can create local pro-marriage groups, hold forums, and invite speakers.
- Promote marriage policies and encourage your legislator. Policy institutions such as The Heritage Foundation suggest policies that can be adopted by state or local governments. Former State Senator Steve Dille of Litchfield was ahead of his time when he pushed a bill in the 1990s to offer couples a 50-percent reduced-cost marriage license in exchange for completing a pre-marriage assessment course.
- Celebrate marriage so young people know and understand its importance. Marriage matters more than we knew. It is the surest way out of poverty. It keeps neighborhoods safer. It tames men and stops risky behavior. It protects children, guarantees greater success in school, leads to less likelihood of serving time in prison, and provides overall better health and happiness. We must work to re-strengthen marriage in our culture.

Linda Runbeck, a Republican from Circle Pines, serves District 38A in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Prophetic Leadership Needed

By Don Samuels

I've had the gift of being both a custodial parent to my son, who is now 39, and later parenting three girls with my wife Sondra. Hands down, parenting three as a team is easier and better than parenting one alone. Although I was equally conscientious in each case, the benefits of a good marriage to my daughters and to my well-being have been incalculable.

My still-single son certainly had a stable and consistent father, but he was robbed of the security of a team and the model of a consistent, mutual relationship to inform his own relationships. Any success and ease he has in his romantic life, today or tomorrow, will be due to his independent, necessary work and struggle.

While he had a happy, well-adjusted father, I could never compensate for an absent mother. This became painfully clear to me one evening when we had an intact family over for dinner. At a certain point during the visit, we ended up in the kitchen alone. He burst into sobs and cried four simple words, "I want my mom." His broken heart broke mine. America is full of broken-hearted children.

My life with Sondra is enriched by the companionship of a supportive and collaborative partner. We halve our sorrows and double our joys. We are twice as rich and half as stressed. Our girls receive twice as much attention and, when appropriate, a second opinion. As an African-American family living in the inner city, we have been much more exposed to the threat of environmental violence. A loving and supportive home works wonders in building resiliency and dissipating the negative impacts of community violence.

With all these benefits of a good marriage, one would think the concept of marriage should be supported and encouraged, but that is not the case. In fact, even though I had been a weekly churchgoer, across six cities for the first 25 years of my professional life, I do not recall one single sermon or presentation from

the pulpit promoting marriage, helping marriages work, encouraging fidelity, delaying childbearing till marriage, or even helping parents be better together.

How could it be that the religious leadership of my community, with its highest rates of single heads-of-household, the lowest rates of marriage, and the greatest loss of social stability, also has so little advocacy for the proven solution?

I believe communities get stuck in deep grooves of past priorities and do not break free into relevancy without great pain and prophetic leadership.

Prior to the 1960s, black church theology reflected harsh intransigent realities. Sermons and songs were preoccupied with themes of survival and paradise. There is no better record of this than old church hymns and Negro Spirituals. Here are two short lists on each of those themes.

Survival

- "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"
- "Sometimes I feel Like A Motherless Child"
- "Standing In The Need of Prayer"
- "I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired"

Paradise

- "Deep River"
- "Peter Go Ring Dem Bells"
- "Roll Jordan Roll"
- "Heav'n, Heav'n Goin' to Shout All Over God's Heav'n"

These songs speak volumes of the trampling limitations on black aspirations. Yet during the decades of the Civil Rights era, black resistance supplanted acceptance and created a new Liberation Theology.

Andrew Young gave hints of sources of this breakthrough at his 2015 National Prayer Breakfast sermon this past February. He reflected on the influence of several university presidents, including his own, and Martin Luther King's, who attended Gandhi's funeral and brought back his interpretation of Jesus as a non-violent resister of the oppression. This galvanized the imagination of both young men.



Young spoke also of a visit to Texas to meet young activists who had gathered to strategize non-violent resistance. There were about 50 college students in the room; only two were black. Young could not understand why these young whites wanted to work for black liberation. They told him they were simply following Jesus. They said their parents would all disown them if they knew their kids were in an integrated meeting, but they were willing to risk loss of family.

Young disclosed that he had never heard this interpretation of the gospel in his own black church or from his own black pastor. This was a different theology and a different Jesus than he had known, and it was this Jesus that informed his prophetic voice and the movement. You can hear the shift in tone in the hopeful songs of the 1960s, like “We Shall Overcome” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around.” I joined the black church community in 1976. The sermons I heard from New York to California were often influenced by the new Liberation Theology.

Today, the external contributors to racial inequities are all easily rehearsed. Even ten-year-olds call out racism. Legal actions against prejudice often prevail, and many liberal whites are sensitized to white privilege and systemic racism.

Yet the clergy are supposed to be our prophets. They must lead us into confrontation with our internal degeneration challenges. They must show the great value of marriage and family to the stability of community and the well-being of children.

They must call us back to the original sources of our resiliency: commitment, mutual obligations, social compacts, institutionalization, ritual, rites of passage, formalizations, fidelity, and loyalty—all communal qualities epitomized in marriage. They must help us find relevant and effective rhetoric to capture the imagination of men and boys who gravitate to casual relationships and our women and girls who have internalized misogyny.

My hope is that this symposium will capture the attention of a new generation of young seers, who, like

Young and King, are not too proud to answer the call to prophetic leadership, even when that call comes from an unexpected and external source.

Don Samuels is a Minneapolis politician and community activist. He also is an ordained minister, holding a master's of divinity degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

Overarching Narratives that Transcend

By Glenn T. Stanton

Douglas Coupland, a brilliant and unique novelist writing on post-Boomer life, observes in his book, *Polaroids from the Dead*, that one of the plagues of our time is not too much information, but too little—or at least too little that brings any real meaning and cohesion to our lives. He explains that starting in the early 1980s, “It became possible to be alive yet have no religion, no family connections, no ideology no sense of class location, no politics and no sense of history. *Denarrated*.”

Our culture continues to be a factory of *denarration*. Like David Bowie’s Major Tom, many of us are tether-less, “floating in a most peculiar way. It’s more than living without a story. More than living without transcendence. While the question used to be, “Will the center hold?” it has become, “What’s a *center* anyway and is it even knowable?”

The relativistic atomization this makes of humanity has been found soul-crushing beyond imagination. The various “-isms” that dominated the political and cultural scene of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Bloc throughout the previous century have left a black hole on the soul of these nations and the faces and spirit of their people.

We are seeing largely that same thing—yet in different fashions—in many parts of North America today. The veritable canary in the coal mine in this regard is the health of the family. It is certainly not narrow-

minded or mere sentimentalism to say that any community's humaneness rests on how it cares for the family. For every other essential community asset flows directly or indirectly from thriving and expanding families. The family certainly does

While the question used to be, “Will the center hold?” it has become, “What’s a center anyway and is it even knowable?”

involve love and appreciation for the other, as well as a sense of self-satisfaction, but it cannot long survive without an overarching narrative that transcends the group, the village, and the nation. Thus, the parts of our nation that still enjoy and benefit from strong families are those with a vibrant, substantive, and historically transcendent story flowing from a robust religious faith.

Many people understand that religion is essential for family, but we tend to view faith's role here merely in terms of tradition and morality: “This is the way it's always been” and “That other way is just wrong.” While true, these are not enough to develop durable and thriving families from generation to generation. One's life, intimate and domestic relationships, family life, and our participation in the creation and raising of new life must exist in and out of a worthy narrative.

Any life-defining and enduring narrative must be so precisely, intentionally, and repetitiously unhand-down by the Church—through families—as if relying on oral tradition. Rules and wise proverbs are not enough, as true as they might be, because rules and nuggets of wisdom can't transform us. They can only inform. Thus, our various communities of faith—primarily Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—show, teach, demonstrate, and proclaim why and how family and domestic life both fit into and flow out of their faith's belief regarding how it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. From where eternity past came, how this shapes the nature of life now, and where the whole story is going in eternity future. This is illuminated by knowing the nature and character of God, who is behind, over, and through it all. It is demonstrated time and again, that family is best

encouraged, sustained, and protected in communities where faith is vibrant and substantive.

Here we find the context to put all the particulars of family together in their unique, meaningful, and meaning-giving whole.

- There are no true individuals; being truly human requires an I/Thou.
- Male and female matter and require each other to be what they distinctly are.
- Love is not just a feeling or about your needs. It is for and toward the other.
- Real sexual union requires the protective and empowering boundaries of marriage.
- It's very difficult for good or even adequate fatherhood to happen outside marriage.
- It's nearly impossible for women to find the provision and protection they desire and require as mothers without the enduring and protective bond of marriage.
- It's significantly more likely that children will live in poverty; face serious struggles and limitations in their educations; suffer higher levels of physical and sexual abuse; and have lower levels of physical and mental health as well as experience unmarried pregnancies, violent and criminal behaviors, and serious substance abuse when their mother and father are not married.

Faith is not sentimentalism. It is the most correct and substantive humanism, not because it makes man the measure of all things, but because it, and only it, gives each man, woman, and child proper self-measurement. Faith is the only thing that can inspire, inform, and bind this essential three-strand cord that secures every humane society together.

Glenn T. Stanton is the director of family formation studies at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Colorado as well as author, most recently, of Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor: Being Friends in Grace and Truth and The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage.



Nothing Short of Self-Confident Evangelization

By David Strom

The decline of the nuclear family in the West has generally correlated with the decline of traditional religious institutions.

The parallel declines are related, yet it would be wrong to believe there is any simple causal relationship between the two. In fact, I think both are related to a larger phenomenon: a general decline of Western culture.

The West is infected with a bizarre ideology of multiculturalism that now dominates every major educational and cultural institution in the country, including the mainline religious institutions. As long as multiculturalism holds sway, the decline of the family and all that entails will continue.

Multiculturalism, at root, is an ideological commitment to a lopsided cultural relativism. Multiculturalists argue that the Western ideal of universal human rights is actually an ideology of oppression in which other valid cultural values are suppressed. Thus, multiculturalism is actually an ideology that values all cultural beliefs as long as they are not Western.

Multiculturalism is bizarre for a simple reason: Cultures, by their very nature, are built upon a shared set of beliefs about what is true, good, and beautiful. They are exclusive; they define an “us” vs. “the rest.” They define things, proscribe things, and encourage one set of behaviors over another. The Greeks divided the world into “Greeks” and “barbarians,” and every culture does something similar. There is no culture without a genuine belief that the values that underpin it are superior to alternatives. Real cultures are built upon some version or another of “Thou shalt.”

We tend to think of culture in terms of art, music, food, language, and traditions. Yet the most important function of culture is to reward and punish certain kinds of behavior and to instill meaning in the necessary sacrifices and self-denials that are part of sustainable human relationships, including holding together

functioning societies. Cultural values serve to ennoble and give meaning to those sacrifices.

Since at least the time of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, a growing and now dominant strain of thinking has directly attacked the legitimacy of Western values and culture. Far from embodying the path to the best form of life, Western institutions (including family structures and religious beliefs) have been under constant attack as tools used by power elites to oppress the powerless. Just as religion is seen as the “opiate of the masses,” liberal values are viewed as a masked attack on oppressed groups and other societies.

The most damaging legacy of multiculturalism has been the spread of an enervating relativism that encourages self-indulgence.

Relativism and self-indulgence are exactly what we are supposed to unlearn through maturation, and multiculturalism has served to undermine the moral maturation of a vast swath of our society. Multiculturalism has encouraged Westerners to remain, in a sense, moral teenagers. Hence the high divorce rate. Hence the rising out-of-wedlock birth rates. Hence the hostility toward being “judgmental” about the behavior of others.

Western religion can and should be an antidote to the plague of multiculturalism, but it will be only if religious leaders are willing to confront multiculturalism as the danger that it is and offer a more attractive alternative.

Christianity is particularly well placed to do so, and some Christian leaders have taken up the challenge (and faced the inevitable hostility that accompanies doing so). Christianity embraces evangelization in a way that Judaism cannot, and Christian teaching embraces both the awareness and forgiveness of human weakness and the willingness to acknowledge the moral superiority of certain behaviors over others. Sins can be forgiven, but they are sins nonetheless.

Christian leaders must fight against multiculturalism, but in a particularly Christian fashion—not through outward clashes, or set piece battles on the cultural turf of the reigning elite. We must offer something that

multiculturalists cannot. The ultimate good offered by multiculturalists is ease and pleasure; what Judeo-Christian values offer are the loving, never-ending embrace of God and the more mature pleasures of peace and happiness that come from living a good life. Nothing short of a self-confident evangelization will suffice to restore the health of our society. It must be an evangelization based not upon arrogant clashes

An unwavering willingness to evangelize in the spirit of love is the only path that can work.

with those whom we disdain but rather on outreach to the large number of people who are distracted but unfulfilled by the temporary pleasures of modern society. That is a rather large number of people—perhaps the majority of people in America.

Direct confrontation won't work, but passive acceptance of decline isn't necessary. An unwavering willingness to evangelize in the spirit of love is the only path that can work.

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Christianity's Revolutionary Recognition of Women as Equals

By David J. Theroux

Marriage has been universal to civilization with most marriage ceremonies involving religion. Yet for years, traditional marriage and the family have been subjected to secular ridicule, with the family increasingly politicized and socialized by "progressive" government bureaucracies. The result has been an unprecedented decline of the family in America, producing increasing rates of nonmarital births, divorces, juvenile crime, substance abuse, and other pathologies. This trend can be reversed, however, because the progressive narrative that supports it is unfounded and easily refuted.

The biblical account of marriage begins with one man and one woman: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them." And, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Jesus later called humanity back to these records (Matthew 19:4–5, Mark 10:6–8), and the Christian story is viewed as ending with the wedding of Christ with His bride, the Church, from which all Christian discussions of marriage stem.

In Christianity, marriage is hence a sacred union of the highest order. However, since the Enlightenment, secularism has defined marriage as a civil union. Many academics view traditional marriage as a patriarchy to dominate and oppress women, all supported by Christian despots. Such a narrative is based on the theory that primitive mankind was egalitarian, matrilineal, and socialist, with communal sexual relations, despite the biological and kinship basis of heterosexual pairing.

However, for thousands of years around the world, a wife *was* considered a husband's property. In ancient Jewish communities, almost every adult was married. By age thirteen, a man chose a wife who was betrothed and considered married. The man headed the family, with the wife his property. In the Greco-Roman pagan world, marriage was reserved for citizens, and a woman shared her husband's station as mother of his children, but she and the offspring were his.

While adultery was prohibited for women, no fidelity obligation existed for men. Older men could force marriage on pre-pubescent girls and compel them to have abortions, usually certain death for not only the baby but also the girl. Moreover, according to sociologist Rodney Stark in his book *The Rise of Christianity*, infanticide was a commonplace, with baby girls disproportionately abandoned, resulting in "131 males per 100 females in the city of Rome, and 140 males per 100 females in Italy, Asia Minor, and North Africa."

Only with the arrival of Christianity did the status of women change as obligations were placed on husbands. As Stark has shown, "Christians



condemned promiscuity in men as well as in women and stressed the obligations of husbands toward wives as well as those of wives toward husbands.... The symmetry of the relationship Paul described was at total variance not only with pagan culture but with Jewish culture as well.”

Stark shows that Christianity recognized women as equal to men, all sacred to God. Christian wives did not have abortions (neither did Jewish wives), and Christians opposed infanticide, polygamy, incest, divorce, and adultery—all to women’s benefit. No longer serfs to men, women had dignity, were not rushed into marriages, and served as leaders in rapidly growing Christian communities. Christian women married older than pagans and into more secure families, had better marriages, were not forced to remarry if widowed, and were given assistance when needed. Stark notes Paul’s teaching:

But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.

Thus, the progressive narrative upon which contemporary, anti-family policies rest, is false. Only through Christianity did women receive full marriage rights and gender equality in fidelity. The private, monogamous family has served the human needs for

Only through Christianity did women receive full marriage rights and gender equality in fidelity.

love and companionship, economic and social well-being, and the rearing of children. Abandoning these lessons is at the root of the modern decline of the family, and government can only further undermine the rights and benefits that have uplifted the lives of countless men, women, and children through Christian-inspired marriage. To restore the family, civic and

religious leaders must challenge such folly to achieve the needed privatization and de-politicization reforms.

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Religious Institutions Must Embrace Change

By Robert Wedl

My ideas for strengthening marriage do not constitute a list of programs or methods for churches, synagogues, or mosques to adopt. I want to present some higher-level ideas from a progressive perspective that I believe have huge implications.

I would first ask whether religious institutions have actually had much of substance to say about how to improve marriage or whether people struggle to find relevance in what religious institutions have to say. I suggest it is the former. For religious institutions and their leaders to contribute and help strengthen marriage, changes in the religious institutions will be necessary.

First, the definition of marriage has changed in Minnesota law. This coming June (2015), the U.S. Supreme Court will likely make that change nationwide. Some religious institutions have welcomed all persons to their communities; others not only do not welcome all persons, they condemn some. How does hatred contribute to strengthening marriage?

Second, religious institutions, with some wonderful exceptions, are male-dominated. The Catholic Church and the Moslem faiths lead on this, but some Protestant denominations are close seconds. If a religious institution is to have impact, it must be credible to all members. In today’s world, that means it must be inclusive. It must respect all persons and demonstrate that through its teachings. For some churches, “maleness” is reinforced with directives from the Bible and the Koran. Their teachings foster

the notion that the male is the wise leader and that wives must be submissive. Churches must support the notion that married women may say “no” and have that respected. When a religion teaches that marriage is not an equal partnership, how likely is it that the church will successfully strengthen a marriage?

Third, marriage does not become stronger by what marriage partners do alone, but also by other factors in our society that directly affect marriages. Some people argue that we must keep religion out of politics. What nonsense. The stresses of unemployment, discrimination, and injustice place

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huge stresses on marriages. When parents must work two jobs to support their family, the side effects include not being with their children to support their education, not keeping the kids off the streets, not having proper nutrition, and so on. These stresses rip families apart.

Rather than religious institutions standing in support of a livable wage, they deal with the end result, which includes soup kitchens, food shelves, homeless shelters, and other much-needed services. Thank goodness they do. Yet how can these institutions stand by when minimum wage legislation is discussed? Religious leaders must speak loudly and forcefully about injustice and about the growing chasm between the haves and have-nots. They cannot just be placidly supportive. They must be at the forefront. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. decided he could not wait to support someone else. He led the Civil Rights Movement through the application of religion. Through non-violence.

Fourth, our churches have a role regarding the increasing numbers of single mothers having children, but how does one strengthen a marriage when there isn't one? A few decades ago, former Minnesota Gov. Al Quie was among the first to ask, “Where are the dads?” Single moms were left to care for the children. Churches must support sex

education. Better prevention will make it so that Governor Quie's question need not be asked.

Fifth, religious institutions should recognize that at times the best possible outcome of a marriage is divorce and perhaps remarriage. While divorce is usually a disruption of children's lives, the children likely suffer far more in a home where abuse and turmoil are daily events. Ending marriage is sometimes the best outcome. Religious institutions that either mandate individuals remain in dysfunctional marriages or refuse to acknowledge the validity of remarriage are adding stress, not strength, to marriage.

Finally, our religious institutions, like every other institution, must embrace change. Church membership continues to fall, especially among the younger generation. Religious leaders must not only teach the lengthy list of “thou shalt nots” but must also create relevant and inclusive programs of assisting in marriage-building, helping others, and fostering peace and justice. For example, churches must understand and accept that more and more young people are now living together before marriage. These arrangements should not be seen as a sequence of one-night stands but rather as respectful relationships between young adults. They view this experience as part of their courtship. Having religious leaders respect those decisions is one way to support strengthening marriage.

Most individuals understand that making their marriages work makes their lives work. Clearly, religious institutions have a role in making lives better. That is why they exist. Yet their actions must change. Their relevance in the lives of each of us and with future generations depends on it.

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Religious Belief and the Virtue of Inner-Direction

By Stephen B. Young

The psycho-social sequence I see leading either to stable marriages or to broken and dysfunctional marriages starts with individual character and then flows to capacity for trust and commitment and then to the quality of relationships.

Because religious institutions, traditions, and leaders—or the lack thereof—shape the beliefs, virtues, and habits that constitute personal character, they load the dice of life for or against success in social relationships.

It is a presumption of secularists that the absence of religion is either inconsequential or positive in its impact on the quality of communal life. In the modern era, beginning especially with the arguments of Jean Jacques Rousseau for maximum individual liberation from social and cultural formalisms, the presumption of human nature as inherently noble and good obviated the need for education in the values and habits of good character. Goodness in humanity could be presumed; personal shortcomings were the fault of society and institutions.

Yet just as religion has its impacts, so does the absence of religion. The absence of religion is not a vacuum. It is an alternate reality that habituates people to its own norms. The absence of preference for one norm for personal character is the presence of another form of cultural and social indoctrination. Individuals are always the product of some social and cultural environment, for better or worse.

In the United States, the deterioration in the quality of marriages since the 1960s followed the hollowing of orientation towards and declining respect for religious traditions, institutions, and leaders. This cultural evolution continued the trend towards skepticism in matters of faith and revelation that had begun seriously with the Enlightenment and its alternative faith in human reason and secular social engineering of life outcomes.

The counterculture among baby boomers tipped the

norms of our communities away from traditional religion towards individual self-actualization. For women, new opportunities to prevent pregnancies and feminist reconceptualizations of gender identities in terms of reason alone guiding free will (“a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle”) undermined traditional family norms and practices. Parents became burdens as children sought self-expression. Spouses and children also more easily became obstacles to self-fulfillment.

The bounds of compromise, which permit stable marriages, became narrow and unpromising for individuals seeking self-actualization. Breaking relationships seemed more satisfying.

It is fitting to recall David Riesman’s predictive sociology contrasting traditional “inner-directed” individuals with more contemporary “other-directed” personalities constantly surveying their social horizons for peer permission to believe this or that or do this or that. With the decline of religious templates for living, Americans have tended to lose their inner-direction and more and more have become other-directed followers of fad and fashion. The rise of other-directedness in personalities and their supporting culture has facilitated the social shift away from responsibility in marriage and parenting. The movement towards other-direction has also stimulated superficiality and inconstancy in our values and beliefs.

The rise, as Karen Armstrong has pointed out, of fundamentalism in the Abrahamic faiths and Hinduism has been a desperate rear-guard maneuver to hold on to what has been becoming more and more challenged by the belief systems of modernity. Inner-directed religion is in retreat, and fundamentalism will not halt that trend in human evolution.

To re-balance our culture towards responsibility, religions must reform themselves to provide individuals with more inner-direction. This will not be easy, as traditional intellectual and cultural supports for religion have dissipated. Revelation has not the power to sway our minds and hearts as it once did.

Inner-direction comes to the fore in a person who has core values. Those values provide for trust in oneself,

obviating the need to be guided by others in important matters. Of course, an important core value is use of the moral sense, in religious terms, this is working from compassion or following the Golden Rule. Thus, an inner-directed person is not necessarily egocentric, emotionally cold, or imperious vis-à-vis others.

A person with core values is self-confident, less fearful, and more apt to act as a leader to overcome hardship, trust others, not succumb to feelings of victimization, and have a strong work ethic. These traits and habits, by the way, promote stable relationships and families.

From a religious perspective being inner-directed indicates the presence of a “charism.” Such a person has an inner light and power to attract others. The “charism” is a link to the transcendent, the realm of religious insight and conviction.

An absence of insight and a lack of conviction prevent a person from having a “charism.” Thus one role religions can play in community is to facilitate the emergence of individuals empowered by and guided by a “charism.”

To make this contribution, religious institutions and leaders must themselves be “charismatic.” They must be inner-directed, self-confident, trusting in their mission and being trustworthy in their vocations.

Today religion must regain trust in itself. It needs a new basis for charisma, a new basis for being authoritative.

What is the formula for the reconfiguration of religious charisma?

Today religion must regain trust in itself.

It lies, I suggest, in an ironic way in science. Natural laws, being transcendent, can provide a source of truth and confidence. One linked to natural law can come to possess a charism. One natural law now within sight is the presence of the moral sense in each person.

From new thinking in evolutionary biology to neuroscience on the workings of oxytocin and the pre-frontal cortex, we have learned that all people can be inner-directed and socially responsible.

Using this conviction, religious leaders can re-engage with secular thinking to promote virtue and virtuous behaviors. Successfully done, this will prime individuals for assuming personal responsibility in marriage and in parenting.

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Center of the American Experiment's Minnesota Policy Blueprint delivers a wide-ranging set of policy recommendations aimed at enabling all Minnesotans to thrive in their personal and financial pursuits. These recommendations are grounded in the firm belief that broad prosperity depends on free enterprise, personal initiative and a limited, frugal government. The Blueprint represents American Experiment's most strategic, comprehensive, and ambitious effort to shape and shift public policy in Minnesota. The full set of recommendations can be found at the Center's website, AmericanExperiment.org.

