

Why Save the Nuclear Family?

It merely supplies workers for the servile State, and its doom was sealed 200 years ago

By Kevin Michael Grace

After the French Revolution had nationalized marriage and unfettered divorce Sir Walter Scott thundered, “If fiends had set out to discover the most efficient way of destroying whatever is venerable, graceful, or permanent in domestic life., they could not have invented a more effectual plan than the degradation of marriage into a state of mere occasional cohabitation or licensed concubinage.” It took most of two centuries to develop, but “licensed concubinage” is what marriage has devolved into— sterile, brief “incompanionate” unions disconnected from the past and uninterested in the future. Now homosexuals, who think in similar terms, want to be licensed too. Well, why not?

Until the Reformation, marriage in the West was the domain of the Roman Catholic Church, and it was for keeps. There were certain exceptions, however, as Alan Carlson, president of the Howard Center (www.profam.org) in Rockford, Illinois, points out. “There was much corruption- The Church prohibited all kinds of marriage, but you could get a dispensation from a bishop for the proper sum.”

A dispensation played a crucial part in British his history After the death of Henry VIII's brother Arthur, Henry wanted to marry his widow, Catherine of Aragon. This was incestuous under canon law, so Henry applied to the Pope for a dispensation, which he got. When Catherine proved unable to provide a male heir. Henry went back to the Pope demanding an annulment, claiming the dispensation illicit, he was refused, and the Anglican Church was born.

Martin Luther's rebellion resulted in marriage being taken from the authority of the Church in Protestant countries. Mr. Carlson argues, “Luther assumed that those who ruled the State would be governed by Christian principles regarding marriage and a whole lot of other things. What emerged for a while was pretty much that.”

However, the State— not just the Jacobin and Bolshevik states- has long sought to make the family serve its ends. In his landmark 1977 study, “*Haven in a Heartless World: the Family Besieged*”, the late sociologist Christopher Lasch observed, “By the end of the 19th century, American newspapers and magazines brimmed with speculation about the crisis of marriage and the family. Four developments gave rise to a steadily growing alarm: the rising divorce rate, the falling birth rate among “the better sort of people”, the changing position of women, and the so-called revolution in morals. **Between 1870 and 1920, the number of divorces increased fifteen-fold.** By 1924, one out of every seven marriages ended in divorce, and there was no reason to think that the trend toward more and more frequent divorce would reverse itself.”

In his 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii* (Christian Marriage), Pope Pius XI lamented the “many unmindful (people). .. totally ignorant of the sanctity of marriage, who impudently deny it, who even allow themselves to be led by the principles of a modern and perverse ethical doctrine to repudiate it with scorn... These pernicious errors and degraded morals have begun to spread even among the faithful.” Soon enough. they would spread

even among the hierarchy, as millions of western Catholic divorcées got what Henry VIII could not' Pius XI quoted Leo XIII on the purpose of marriage: "The chief cause of wedlock established in the beginning by God's authority: *Increase and multiply.*" Very few Catholics and almost no one else would assent today to that proposition.

Lasch was not a Catholic or even a believer, but he understood that the family's proper purpose is not providing workers for the managerial state. He wrote. "[The history of modern society...is the assumption of social control over activities once left to individuals or their families.](#) During the first stage of the industrial revolution, capitalists took production out of the household and collectivized it, under their own supervision, in the factory. Then they proceeded to appropriate the work, workers' skills and technical knowledge, by means of 'scientific management,' and to bring these skills together under managerial direction. Finally they extended their control over the worker's private life as well, as doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, child guidance experts, officers of the juvenile courts, and other specialists began to supervise child-rearing, formerly the business of the family."

Lasch was among the first to understand the symbiotic relationship of capitalism and feminism. Feminists want women out of the house because they want to free them; capitalists want them out because they lower wages. Feminists fought the traditional family because it was patriarchal: capitalists fought it because it was not prepared to forsake its neighbourhoods and communities for higher wages.

The "nuclear family" we recognize today performs none of the functions of the traditional family. These functions have been assumed by the welfare state or by business. Kinship networks have for all practical purposes ceased to exist (among western families; some immigrants manage to maintain them for more than one generation). Most children do not know their grandparents intimately, and cousins have ceased to matter. In any event, couples do not require and increasingly reject marriage. Following Europe, Canada now recognizes no practical distinction between legal and common-law couples. Common-law couples now claim all the rights and bear all the responsibilities of married couples, whether they want them or not. or even whether or not they are in a sexual relationship.

The destruction of the traditional family was long the goal of the therapeutic professions. The cleverer among them realized, however, that marriage could be emptied of meaning over time. Mr. Carlson explains that the clever Swedes devised 'companionate marriage' as a substitute. The companionate marriage, which comprises the vast majority of unions in the West, is based on romantic love, friendship, sexual attraction or common interests. The purpose of the union is the individual happiness of each man and woman (or, soon enough, man and man or woman and woman); it is strictly nuclear. Children can be added if desired; one is not obliged to raise them; nevertheless, couples prefer contraception and abortion instead. Romantic love ends, sexual attraction fades, and friendship and common interests are weak bonds in crisis. So companionate marriage may be dissolved as often as necessary. The welfare state succours single moms and chivvies deadbeat dads.

Social commentator Edward Luttwak noted several years ago that the West is engaged in an experiment unprecedented in human history: people without families. In 1977 Christopher Lasch found the early evidence discouraging: "It is precisely the separation of love and discipline (associated with communal forms of child-rearing) that encourages...the development of personality traits more compatible with totalitarian regimes than with democracy: a strong attachment to the peer group. a marked fear of being alone, more or less complete alienation from the past... a strong concern with personal authenticity' in relations with others, unmediated by conventional forms of politeness or even by respect for the other person's individuality [and a lack of introspection and of a highly developed inner life.](#)" The road to Columbine started here.

So when our legislators of the left and the right tussle over the future of marriage, perhaps they might ponder, if

only for a moment, the consequences of their social Jacobinism. More likely they will salute another victory for “choice,” which has usurped the place occupied by “virtue” in the ancient world and “holiness” in the Christian era.

Mr. Carlson predicts “total ruin. Perhaps not for a few decades, but you can’t fool Mother Nature.”

James Howard Kunstler (www.kunstler.com) predicts a happier ending. The author of *The City in Mind: Notes on the Urban Condition* predicts that the stock market crash is leading to a collapse of the bubble economy—and nothing less than the end of the “modern.” Penury will force us to live less selfishly. Think of it as “creative destruction.”

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