

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

An Update on Marriage in America

One of the major themes of *Issues in Perspective* is the centrality of marriage as an institution. The health of this most basic of all institutions says much about the health of the larger culture. In this *Perspective*, I want to provide an update on the health of marriage in 2011.

- First, we have long known that the birth control pill has not been positive for marriage in America. The research and conclusions of Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas are most helpful in seeing the connection between the pill and the health of marriage in America. [His book is entitled, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying.*] Before the advent of birth control pills, sex and marriage were closely linked. Premarital sex was much less common because women typically insisted on a commitment of marriage before having sex—and men were often willing to make that commitment. But that link is now broken—sex without marriage is common, for “the price of sex is pretty low,” Regnerus argues. Low commitment or really no commitment in terms of sexual hookups are common, while high-commitment is postponed, often for decades. Women are marrying later, often into their thirties, and are better educated and financially more autonomous. Therefore, men are no longer as essential to the welfare of a family. In one very real sense, men are becoming obsolete to women, especially to those who are independent and often quite autonomous. This is shown by the following statistical comparison: In 1986, only 27% of women in their late 20s were still unmarried. In 2009, that statistic jumped to 47%. For men, of all races, they were unlikely to be married until their 30s, while black men wait until ages 35 to 39!
- Second, for the first time in American history, married couples have dropped below 50% of all American households. Married couples represent just 48% of American households, far below the 78% in 1950. [There are 37 states, plus the District of Columbia, in which married couples make up fewer than 50% of all households.] According to a recent report by the Brookings Institution, “as women moved into the work force, cohabitation lost its taboo label and as society grew more secular, marriage lost some of its central authority.” Throughout most of American history, marriage defined gender roles, family life and a person’s place in society. That truth no longer seems to apply. Women with college degrees are now more likely to marry than those with just high school diplomas, the reverse of several decades ago. The new pattern for college-educated women seems to be marrying later in life and then to stay married. By contrast, women with only a high school diploma are increasingly opting not to marry the fathers of their children, whose fortunes have declined along with the nation’s economic opportunities. In addition, demographics are affecting the state of marriage. Americans are living longer than ever, so households now include a growing number of elderly singles. Finally, other changes in the state of marriage include 41 states

that showed declines in traditional households of married couples with children. In 2000, married couples with children were fewer than 20% of all households in just one state, plus the District of Columbia. Now they are less than 1/5th in 31 states. Overall, the largest change for the decade was the jump in households headed by women without husbands—up 18% in the decade.

- Finally, marketing and promotional specialists understand that 85% of the buying decisions in the US are made by women. Apparently, the purse strings of the American economy are held by women. For that reason, some are now calling America the “Sheconomy.” Women today are not only the chief purchasing officers of the culture, they now make up about half of the workforce: 49.9% of all nonfarm labor jobs are female and 51.5% of high-paying management and professional positions are female. In addition, college graduation rates indicate that these percentages will only grow—for every two men who graduate from college, three women do. As Belinda Luscombe argues in an important study published by *Time*, “Wives’ education and earning power have changed the relationship they have with their family finances as well as their families. It’s not his money she’s spending; it’s their money—or hers. Similarly, the one-way relationship between consumers and the mainstream media has been overturned by social networking. Women—and men too—don’t have to wait for Big Media’s attention; they’re taking their stories straight to the public, and the media are following them. Midas and Best Buy, after discovering that steering their business toward women is less like changing the oil and more like reinventing the lightbulb, transformed their relationships with their customers, letting them see more of the guts of the operation and weigh in on changes. If women can’t get a place in the corporate inner sanctum, then they’re just going to start running companies from the outside—where the money is.”

What does all this mean for the health of the American family? It certainly is not evil that women are attaining higher levels of education, better paying jobs and making 85% of all buying decisions. The challenge is the effect all this has on men. God has designed the role relationships between men and women rather clearly. As men fail in their roles, women naturally pick up the slack. Men today are more confused and more disoriented than ever. Women are re-defining their roles as a result. The often negative impact of all this change on the family is another natural result. In the long run, it is difficult to see all of this as a positive set of developments.

See Belinda Luscombe in *Time* (22 November 2010); Cheryl Wetzstein in the *Washington Times* (25 May 2011); and Sabrina Tavernise in the *New York Times* (26 May 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

Two Intellectuals and God

Intellectuals often have a real struggle with the idea and existence of God. Atheism, or at best agnosticism, are frequently the standard worldview for the intellectual. Two recent examples highlight this sad pattern.

- Christopher Hitchens: In 2007, Hitchens, a well-known writer and commentator, was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. So difficult has his battle with cancer been that he can no

longer for the most part talk. He remains committed to his worldview of atheism. He has no regrets and blames much of the world's difficulties on religion—in all its forms. For him God is a petty and vindictive god of the gloaters. He despises the self-righteousness of religious people, especially Christians, who gloat that as he has blasphemed God all his life, now “God has taken away his voice.” But he has also seen true, biblical Christianity at work. Countless believers have told him that they are praying for him. He has befriended Dr. Francis Collins, noted evangelical and director of the Human Genome Project. (Collins is also one of Hitchens' doctors.) Hitchens needs to come to terms with the God who is not vindictive, but who experienced, in the 2nd person of the Trinity, all the hate, bitterness and vindictiveness of rebellious humanity. That same man, the Godman Jesus Christ, became a victim of horrific evil so that He might eradicate evil from this planet. God has taken the most eloquent of public speakers and writers, Christopher Hitchens, and made it possible for him to listen. May Hitchens embrace the God who loves him, who died for him and is reaching out His hand to him. Pray for Christopher Hitchens.

- Stephen Hawking: Since 21 years of age, physicist, Stephen Hawking, has lived with a motor neuron disease, what many believe is ALS disease. He is perhaps one of the most famous scientists alive today. For years he held the chair at Cambridge University once held by Sir Isaac Newton. Brilliant, witty and driven, Hawking is a remarkable scientist. Yet, his new book, *The Grand Design*, betrays a purely secular viewpoint. His worldview has no place for God. His atheism is profound and naively arrogant. He writes:
 1. “I have lived with the prospect of an early death for the last 49 years. I’m not afraid of death, but I’m in no hurry to die. I have so much I want to do first.”
 2. “I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.”
 3. In an interview in the US, he again rejected the notion of life beyond death and emphasized the need to fulfill our potential on Earth by making good use of our lives. When asked how we should live, he responded: “We should seek the greatest value of our action.”
 4. When asked what is the value in knowing “why are we here?,” he responded, “The universe is governed by science. But science tells us we can’t solve the equations, directly in abstract. We need to use the effective theory of Darwinian natural selection of those societies most likely to survive. We assign them higher value.”
 5. When asked about God as creator and sustainer, he responded: “Science predicts that many different kinds of universe will be spontaneously created out of nothing. It is a matter of chance which we are in.”

For Stephen Hawking, his god is science and the supreme aspect of life is his mind. When he dies he expects non-existence to follow. The physical world, which he has studied all his life, is all there is. It seems to me that Paul's words in Romans 1 apply perfectly to Hawking as one who “suppresses the truth [about God] in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” For 49 years, Hawking has been studying about God—and he refuses to acknowledge Him. Pray for Him!

Pray that the God that he has studied all his life will be seen as his Savior and Lord. May God have mercy on Stephen Hawking.

See *World* (18 June 2011), p. 28 and Guardian.co.uk (15 May 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

THE SCANDAL OF CO-ED DORMS

I recently read an op-ed essay by John Garvey of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. I was absolutely stunned by a statistic Garvey cited in his piece: More than 90% of college housing in the US is now co-ed!! Common sense tells me that this is not a good thing for our culture. What are we saying to our young people—the next generation of leaders—about values, about virtue and about sex? It seems logical to me that we are saying there is no relationship to how you live while in college and how you will live as a husband or wife, a dad or a mother. That we have 90% of our college housing as co-ed living is a moral and ethical disaster! Garvey cites several connections between co-ed living and other social dysfunctions:

- Students in co-ed dorms (41.5%) report weekly binge drinking more than twice as often as students in single-sex housing (17.6%).
- Students in co-ed housing are more likely (55.7%) than students in single-sex dorms (36.8%) to have had a sexual partner in the last year—and more than twice as likely to have had three or more.
- Garvey cites these connections because of other stunning statistics in the US: Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death for young adults aged 17-24. Students who engage in binge drinking (about 2 in 5) are 25 times more likely to do things like miss class, fall behind in school work, engage in unplanned sexual activity and get in trouble with the law. They also cause trouble for other students, who are subjected to physical and sexual assault, suffer property damage and interrupted sleep, and end up babysitting problem drinkers. Further, hooking up is as common as drinking. One study he cites reports that 40 to 64% of college students report hooking up! Rates of depression reach 20% for young women who have had two or more sexual partners in the last year, almost double the rate for women who have had none. Sexually active young men do more poorly than abstainers in their academic work. Obviously, sex on those terms is destructive of love and marriage!!

For all these reasons, Garvey, as president of Catholic University, has decided that his university will end co-ed dormitory living. I was very pleased to hear of his decision. He is taking a bold step in restoring one of the most important functions of a college education—teach and model virtue and an ethical lifestyle, and help the future leaders of tomorrow understand that there are profound consequences to the choices they make while in college. We do not need any more studies or research. The evidence is clear. What God has been saying in His Word for nearly 5,000 years remains true: Sexual abstinence before marriage is the wisest sexual choice to make. The colleges and universities of our nation have been fostering a self-destructive lifestyle on our college campuses. We should not be surprised with the results we are now seeing.

See Garvey's profoundly important essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (13 June 2011).