

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President  
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska  
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### PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

#### *Fidelity in Marriage: A New Ethic?*

Sexual scandals seem to abound right now in our culture: Politicians, media leaders and former presidents, as well as the normal sexual perversion emanating from Hollywood. Are our expectations about fidelity in marriage too high and, in fact, unrealistic? Will this same expectation of basic fidelity in marriage now be extended to same-sex marriages? Since our culture is now accommodating itself to same-sex marriage (witness the recent legislation from the state of New York), will our culture now change the ethical expectations of marital fidelity? Dan Savage, America's leading sex-advice columnist, for twenty years has been articulating a sexual ethic that challenges the ethic of fidelity in marriage. In his weekly column, *In Savage Love*, he criticizes the obsession of America with fidelity in marriage. In its place, Savage calls for what writer Mark Oppenheimer calls the "American Gay Male" model, after that community's tolerance for pornography, fetishes and a variety of partnered arrangements, from strict monogamy to wide openness. Oppenheimer observes that "Savage believes monogamy is right for many couples. But he believes that our discourse about it and about sexuality more generally, is dishonest. Some people need more than one partner, he writes, just as some people need flirting, others need to be whipped; others need lovers of both sexes. We can't help our urges, and we should not lie to our partners about them. In some marriages, talking honestly about our needs will forestall or obviate affairs; in other marriages, the conversation may lead to an affair, but with permission. In both cases, honesty is the best policy." Among other things, Savage is also a committed advocate of same-sex marriage. So, his support of a new ethic of marriage is dangerous, for the gay lifestyle is stereotyped as compulsively promiscuous. Nonetheless, Savage ardently defends his position. He believes that a more flexible attitude within marriage may be what the "straight" community needs. Oppenheimer writes that "Treating monogamy, rather than honesty or joy or humor, as the main indicator of a successful marriage gives people unrealistic expectations of themselves and their partners. And that, Savage says, destroys more families that it saves."

Savage has been writing his column, now syndicated in more than 50 newspapers across America, since 1991. Raised in Chicago in a Catholic family, he is married to Terry Miller—a same-sex marriage. He and his "husband" adopted a son, DJ, as an infant. He and his partner have published a video project entitled *It Gets Better*, a manifesto to gay youth to tough it out, with all the bullying and ostracism that still exists for gay guys, for life will get better. Gay marriages are possible and you can be happy, he argues. Out of his own life as a gay man he forged his sexual ethic, which is at the core of his newspaper column. At bottom, he believes that we need "a more realistic sexual ethic [that] would prize honesty, a little flexibility and, when necessary, forgiveness over absolute monogamy." In his own same-sex marriage, Savage and Miller practice what they call "monogamish," allowing occasional infidelities, which they

are honest about. According to Oppenheimer, during the interview, Savage and Miller admitted to nine such “affairs.” Savage offers somewhat humorously his dictum for marriage: “GGG—good, giving and game.” By “game” he means “skilled, generous and up for anything.” Savage writes that “The point is that people—particularly those who value monogamy—need to understand why being monogamous is so much harder than they’ve been led to believe.” For that reason, Savage believes that the male gay community might be able to show America the way to a new sexual ethic that is honest and forgiving and therefore can make room for certain infidelities in marriage. The goal is to keep the marriage together—almost at any cost. Savage implores us to know the people we marry and to know ourselves and to, therefore, plan accordingly.

As I read this lengthy article on the new sexual ethic of Dan Savage, I alternated between disbelief and pity. Disbelief and shock that such an ethic is even worthy of discussion; pity that, as a civilization, we have come to a point where a nationally syndicated columnist can propose such an ethic. It certainly validates a dialectic I have observed many times in Western culture: What was once unthinkable becomes debatable and then gradually becomes acceptable. How then should we think about Dan Savage? Several thoughts:

1. Our culture has already made the decision to accommodate to the gay lifestyle and now, it seems, to same-sex marriage. New York now joins five other states, plus the District of Columbia, in recognizing same-sex marriages. Gradually, the other states will no doubt fall in line with making same-sex marriage the moral and ethical equivalent of heterosexual marriage. For that reason, Russ Douthat writes that “Over the decades ahead, the[se political] choices will gradually transform gay marriage from an idea into a culture: they’ll determine the social expectations associated with gay wedlock, the gay marriage and divorce rates, the differences and similarities between gay and lesbian unions, the way marriage interacts with gay parenting, and much more besides. They’ll also help determine gay marriage’s impact on the broader culture of matrimony in America.” For that reason, Savage’s proposal for a new sexual ethic, modeled on the gay community’s sexual ethic, is disturbing, one in which infidelity is an expectation to be tolerated, accepted and forgiven. Douthat correctly observes that “The trouble is that straight culture already experimented with exactly this kind of model, with disastrous results.” I agree with his additional observation that “institutions tend to be strongest when they make significant moral demands, and weaker when they pre-emptily accommodate themselves to human culture.” A successful marriage culture depends not only on a general ideal of love and commitment, but on specific promises, exclusions and taboos. “The less specific and more inclusive an institution becomes, the more likely people are to approach it casually, if they enter it at all.”
2. What is the best foundation for a successful marriage culture? I believe strongly that it is our Creator’s Word and the ideal He constructs in His Creation Ordinance. Our Creator links the institution of marriage to two fundamental realities—gender difference and procreation. You cannot study His Ordinance in Genesis 1 and 2 and come away with any other foundation. But you also must read on into Genesis 3, one of the most depressing chapters in the Bible. In it one sees the fall of the human race into sin and rebellion. We are living with those consequences now. The fallenness of humanity has produced the waves of new sexual ethics and experimentation and the ongoing challenge to God’s ideal for marriage. Marriage is

difficult in a fallen world but its parameters are clear. The Bible is filled with bigamous and polygamous relationships—and none of them are positive. The Bible presents, often in graphic detail, the tragedy and ultimate dysfunction that come with abandoning God's Creation Ordinance. Dan Savage is proposing an ethic that is really not that new. Humanity has been experimenting with this ethic for 5,000 years—and one cannot find any positive results of this ethic. God has spoken on the ethic of marriage and His words are profoundly challenging but require only one response—obedience. When we obey, He promises blessing. When we disobey, he “gives us over” (Romans 1:18-32) to our base desires and the self-destructive lifestyle choices we have observed throughout the history of humanity. This is not a new sexual ethic—it is a very old one warmed over for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will fail, just like every other one outside of God's ideal has failed. May God give us the courage to stand for His ideal for marriage—Genesis 2:18-25.

See Mark Oppenheimer's article on Dan Savage in the *New York Times Magazine* (3 July 2011), pp. 22-27, 46; and Douthat's essay in the *New York Times* (4 July 2011).

## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

### *The War Against the Girls*

Mara Hvistendahl has written a powerful and provocative book entitled *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls and the Consequences of a World Full of Men*. She demonstrates that in China, India and other nations, there are many more men than women, the result of systematic campaigns against baby girls. In nature, 105 boys are born for every 100 girls. Jonathan Last writes “this ratio is biologically ironclad. Between 104 and 106 is the normal range, and that's as far as the natural window goes. Any other number is the result of unnatural events.” However, in India today there are 112 boys for every 100 girls born. In China the number is 121, with some towns in China over 150! Why this incredibly skewed ratio? One reason—abortion. According to Hvistendahl, there have been 163 million sex-selective abortions over the past three decades. If the label “modern holocaust” does not fit this statistic, I do not know what other term would! How did this occur? She demonstrates that in the mid-1970s amniocentesis became available in developing nations, which meant that parents could determine the sex of the baby. When amnio was replaced by the cheaper and less invasive ultrasound, parents who wanted a boy could now choose to abort if the mother was pregnant with a girl. Surprisingly, it was the wealthy that led the way: “Sex selection typically starts with the urban, well-educated stratum of society. Elites are the first to gain access to a new technology, whether MRI scanners, smart phones—or ultrasound machines.” Such technology when applied to sex-selection then begins to filter down to the broader culture. A surprise to me, she demonstrates that the decision to abort girls is usually made by women—either by the mother or mother-in-law. Amazingly, female empowerment often has produced more sex selection, not less. In many communities, Hvistendahl shows, “women use their increased autonomy to select for sons,” because males bring higher social status and wealth. Female power did not produce more social righteousness, only more decadence.

What are the effects of the resulting gender imbalance that sex-selection at birth produces? (1) Hvistendahl shows that there is a demonstrable connection between sex ratios and violence:

“High sex ratios mean that a society is going to have ‘surplus men’—that is, men with no hope of marrying because there are not enough women. Such men accumulate in the lower classes, where risks of violence are already elevated. And unmarried men with limited incomes tend to make trouble. In Chinese provinces where the sex ratio has spiked, a crime wave has followed. Today in India, the best predictor of violence and crime for any given area is not income but sex ratio. (2) She also shows that high sex ratios mean that it is harder to secure a bride and men can find themselves “buying or bidding for them. This . . . contributes to China’s astronomical household savings rate; parents know they must save up in order to secure brides for their sons. . . This savings rate, in turn, drives the Chinese demand for US Treasury bills.” (3) Furthermore, in such cultures, a young woman may actually become very valuable, providing income for their families or their pimps. Evidence now is growing that this sex ratio change is actually producing a female underclass. A small but significant group of women are ending up being stolen or sold from their homes and forced into prostitution or marriage. This is the modern sex-slave trade! (4) She also unveils a major scandal based on a series of unpleasant documents from the Ford Foundation, the United Nations and Planned Parenthood, showing how they all pushed sex-selective abortion as a means of controlling population growth. Malcolm Potts, in 1976 the medical director of International Planned Parenthood, stated that “Early abortion is safe, effective, cheap and potentially the easiest method to administer.” In an interview with population doomsday Paul Ehrlich, author of the 1968 classic *The Population Bomb*, she shows that he still believes that sex selection is a positive thing because it will keep families from having more and more children until they get a boy!! In 1977, another Planned Parenthood official celebrated China’s coercive methods of family planning, stating that “persuasion and motivation [are] very effective in a society in which social sanctions can be applied against those who fail to cooperate in the construction of the socialist state.” She shows in case after case that western population advocates hailed sex-selection techniques as test-case solutions to the world’s population challenges. As columnist Ross Douthat argues, “. . . an unlikely alliance between Republican cold warriors who worried that population growth would fuel the spread of Communism and left-wing scientists and activists who believed that abortion was necessary for both the ‘needs of women’ and ‘the future prosperity—or maybe survival—of mankind.’” Hvistendahl powerfully contends that the American establishment began this movement but it has now taken on a life of its own: Sex-selection has spread inexorably with access to abortion and produced this grisly number of 160+ million girls that have been aborted. This means that the 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal must now defend the proposition that these unborn girls were not yet humans and also likewise defend the proposition that abortion is a near absolute right. But for me, the monstrous tragedy of what Hvistendahl has shown is scandalous. Amazingly, she refuses to take a position of when life begins and still believes that abortion is a right. I concur with Douthat that the bottom line of what she has uncovered is that these 160 million girls are not “missing”; the horrific nature of what she has uncovered is that they are dead!!!!

The truly unbelievable tale that Hvistendahl tells is evidence once again of what happens when humanity tries to manipulate and control life to a predetermined end. Population control in a culture that values males will produce, with the aid of technology, infanticide—in the form of sex-selection abortions. Then the unintended consequences of that brutality will begin to unfold. This is what we are seeing in our world today. Hvistendahl shows that throughout history the ratio of boys to girls at birth has remained equal or at about 106 boys to 100 girls. But over the last thirty years that number has skewed in favor of boys and the consequences are horrific. We

not only see the death of 160+ million girls but also the devastating consequences that I have summarized in this *Perspective*. God has established a ratio that He has maintained through all of history. Humanity has now upset that ratio with profound results. But if God is no longer viewed as the Creator and Sustainer of life, then we are now sovereign, with the technology to control and manipulate our lives and our populations. How are we doing? It is abysmal. This is perhaps the greatest holocaust in history—done in the name of population control and supported, at least at the onset, by western money and western power brokers, including the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations and Planned Parenthood. It has now taken on a life of its own. Collectively, the western world should hang its head in shame! There is nothing to be proud of here. The shame and the guilt should haunt the West as we see the social consequences permeating our world. Once again, when man tries to take the place of God, calamity results. When will the human race ever learn?

See Jonathan Last's helpful review of Hvistendahl's book in the *Wall Street Journal* (18-19 June 2011) and Ross Douthat in the *New York Times* (26 June 2011).