Violence in Society

Kerby Anderson helps us take a biblical perspective on a very scary and touchy issue: violence in America. Applying a Christian worldview, he shines the spotlight on areas of today's culture that should concern us all.

It's a scary world today!

Growing up used to be less traumatic just a few decades ago. Children back then worried about such things as a flat tire on their Schwinns and hoped that their teacher wouldn't give too much homework.

How life has changed. A 1994 poll found more than half the children questioned said they were afraid of violent crime against them or a family member. Are these kids just paranoid, or is there a real problem?

Well, it turns out this is not some irrational fear based upon a false perception of danger. Life has indeed become more violent and more dangerous for children. Consider the following statistics: One in six youths between the ages of 10 and 17 has seen or knows someone who has been shot. The estimated number of child abuse victims increased 40 percent between 1985 and 1991. Children under 18 were 244 percent more likely to be killed by guns in 1993 than they were in 1986. Violent crime has increased by more than 560 percent since 1960.

The innocence of childhood has been replaced by the very real threat of violence. Kids in school try to avoid fights in the hall, walk home in fear, and sometimes sleep in bathtubs in order to protect themselves from stray bullets fired during drive-by shootings.

Even families living in so-called "safe" neighborhoods are concerned. They may feel safe today, but there is always a

reminder that violence can intrude at any moment. Polly Klaas and her family no doubt felt safe in Petaluma, California. But on October 1, 1993, she was abducted from her suburban home during a sleepover with two friends. If she can be abducted and murdered, so can nearly any other child.

A child's exposure to violence is pervasive. Children see violence in their schools, their neighborhoods, and their homes. The daily news is rife with reports of child molestations and abductions. War in foreign lands along with daily reports of murder, rape, and robberies also heighten a child's perception of potential violence.

Television in the home is the greatest source of visual violence for children. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

And the latest scourge is MTV. Teenagers listen to more than 10,000 hours of rock music, and this impact is intensified as they spend countless hours in front of MTV watching violent and sensual images that go far beyond the images shown on commercial television.

It's a scary world, and children are exposed to more violence than any generation in recent memory. An article in *Newsweek* magazine concluded: "It gets dark early in the Midwest this time of year. Long before many parents are home from work, the shadows creep up the walls and gather in the corners, while on the carpet a little figure sprawls in the glow emanating from an anchorman's tan. There's been a murder in the Loop, a fire in a nightclub, an indictment of another priest. Red and white lights swirl in urgent pinwheels as the ambulances howl down the dark streets. And one more crime that never gets reported, because there's no one to arrest. Who killed childhood? We all did."

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

Violence has always been a part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Rom. 3:23). But modern families are exposed to even more violence than previous generations because of the media. Any night of the week, the average viewer can see levels of violence approaching and even exceeding the Roman Gladiator games.

Does this have an effect? Certainly it does. The Bible teaches that “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions.

Defenders of television programs say that isn’t true. They contend that televised imagery doesn’t make people violent nor does it make people callous to suffering. But if televised imagery doesn’t affect human behavior, then the TV networks should refund billions of advertising dollars to TV sponsors.

In essence, TV executives are talking out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand, they try to convince advertisers that a 30-second commercial can influence consumer behavior. On the other hand, they deny that a one-hour program wrapped around the commercials can influence social behavior.

So, how violent is the media? And what impact does media have on members of our family? First, we will look at violence in the movies, and then we’ll take up the issue of violence on television.

Ezra Pound once said that artists are “the antennae of the race.” If that is so, then we are a very sick society judging by the latest fare of violence in the movies. The body count is staggering: 32 people are killed in “RoboCop,” while 81 are killed in the sequel; 264 are killed in “Die Hard 2,” and the film “Silence of the Lambs” deals with a psychopath who murders women and skins them.

Who would have imagined just a few years ago that the top

grossing films would be replete with blood, gore, and violence? No wonder some film critics now say that the most violent place on earth is the Hollywood set.

Violence has always been a part of movie-making, but until recently, really violent movies were only seen by the fringe of mass culture. Violence now has gone mainstream. Bloody films are being watched by more than just punk rockers. Family station wagons and vans pull up to movie theaters showing R-rated slasher films. And middle America watches these same programs a few months later on cable TV or on video. Many of the movies seen at home wouldn't have been shown in theaters 10-20 years ago.

Movie violence these days is louder, bloodier, and more anatomically precise than ever before. When a bad guy was shot in a black-and-white Western, the most we saw was a puff of smoke and a few drops of fake blood. Now the sights, sounds, and special effects often jar us more than the real thing. Slow motion, pyrotechnics, and a penchant for leaving nothing to the imagination all conspire to make movies and TV shows more gruesome than ever.

Children especially confront an increasingly violent world with few limits. As concerned parents and citizens we must do what we can to reduce the level of violence in our society through the wise use of discernment and public policy. We need to set limits both in our homes and in the community.

Does Media Violence Really Influence Human Behavior?

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by

the time he or she reaches age 18.

The violent content of TV includes more than just the 22 minute programs sent down by the networks. At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have only been witnessed by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, “Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties.” They found “overwhelming” scientific evidence that “excessive” violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets. In one five-year study of 732 children, “several kinds of aggression– conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency–were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing.”

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior through childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that “the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative.”

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of 8 were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at 30.

They concluded “that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence.”

Since their report in the 1980s, MTV has come on the scene with even more troubling images. Adolescents already listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7th and 12th grades. Now they also spend countless hours in front of MTV seeing the visual images of rock songs that depict violence, rebellion, sadomasochism, the occult, drug abuse, and promiscuity. MTV reaches 57 million cable households, and its video images are even more lurid than the ones shown on regular TV. Music videos filled with sex, rape, murder, and other images of mayhem assault the senses. And MTV cartoons like Beavis and “the other guy” assault the sensibilities while enticing young people to start fires and commit other acts of violence. Critics count 18 acts of violence in each hour of MTV videos.

Violent images on television and in the movies do contribute to greater violence in society. Sociological studies along with common sense dictate that we do something to reduce the violence in the media before it further damages society.

Television Promotes Not Only Violence But Fear As Well.

Children see thousands of TV murders every year. And the impact on behavior is predictable. Various reports by the Surgeon General in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, “Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties.” They found “overwhelming” scientific evidence that “excessive”

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Confronted with such statistics, many parents respond that their children aren’t allowed to watch violent programs. Such action is commendable, but some of the greatest dangers of television are more subtle and insidious. It now appears that simply watching television for long periods can manipulate your view of the world– whether the content is particularly violent or not.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s found that heavy TV viewers live in a scary world. “We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world.”

So heavy viewers were less trustful and more fearful than the average citizen. But what constitutes a heavy viewer. Gerber and Gross defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day. Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

They found that violence on prime-time TV exaggerated heavy viewers’ fears about the threat of danger in the real world. Heavy viewers, for example, were less likely to trust someone than light viewers. Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how much TV violence affects children’s perception of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, “Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie

house when you were 12 years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half the 12-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude: "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."

Television violence affects both adults and children in subtle ways. While we may not personally feel or observe the effects of TV violence, we should not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perception and behavior.

Obviously something must be done. Parents, programmers, and general citizens must take responsible actions to prevent the increasing violence in our society. Violent homes, violence on television, violence in the movies, violence in the schools all contribute to the increasingly violent society we live in. We have a responsibility to make a difference and apply the appropriate principles in order to help stem the tide of violence in our society.

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Violence in the Media

Christians must address this issue of violence in our society. Here are a number of specific suggestions for dealing with violence.

1. Learn about the impact of violence in our society. Share this material with your pastor, elders, deacons, and church members. Help them understand how important this issue is to them and their community.

2. Create a safe environment. Families live in the midst of violence. We must make our homes safe for our families. A child should feel that his or her world is safe. Providing care and protection are obvious first steps. But parents must also establish limits, provide emotional security, and teach values and virtue in the home.

3. Parents should limit the amount of media exposure in their homes. The average young person sees entirely too much violence on TV and at the movies. Set limits to what a child watches, and evaluate both the quantity and quality of their media input (Rom. 12:2). Focus on what is pure, beautiful, true, right, honorable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

4. Watch TV with children. Obviously we should limit the amount of TV our children watch. But when they watch television, we should try to watch it with them. We can encourage discussion with children during the programs. The plots and actions of the programs provides a natural context for discussion and teach important principles about relationships and violence. The discussion could focus on how cartoon characters or TV actors could solve their problems without resorting to violence. TV often ignores the consequences of violence. What are the consequences in real life?

5. Develop children’s faith and trust in God. Children at an early age instinctively trust their parents. As the children grow, parents should work to develop their child’s trust in God. God is sovereign and omnipotent. Children should learn to trust Him in their lives and depend upon Him to watch over them and keep them safe.

6. Discuss the reasons for pain and suffering in the world. We live in the fallen world (Gen. 3), and even those who follow God will encounter pain, suffering, and violence. Bad things do happen to good people.

7. Teach vigilance without hysteria. By talking about the dangers in society, some parents have instilled fear—even terror— in their children. We need to balance our discussions with them and not make them hysterical. Kids have been known to become hysterical if a car comes down their street or if someone looks at them.

8. Work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens out of fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these same TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, but they don't want to be the first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a competitive market.

Violence is the scourge of our society, but we can make a difference. We must educate ourselves about its influence and impact on our lives. Please feel free to write or call Probe Ministries for more information on this topic. And then take time to apply the principles developed here to make a difference in your home and community. You can help stem the tide of violence in our society.

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Hinduism: A Christian Perspective

Rick Rood gives us an understanding of this major world religion which is becoming more a part of the American scene

with the growth of a Hindu immigrant population. Taking a biblical worldview perspective, he highlights the major differences between Hinduism and Christianity.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Though Hinduism may seem far removed from our everyday experience, it's becoming increasingly important that we as Christians understand this mysterious religion from India. This is so, if for no other reason than that Hinduism claims 1/6 of the world's population, with over 750 million followers worldwide. But it's also important because its influence is being felt more and more in our own country.

Most of us have had at least some exposure to what has become known as the New Age movement. If so, we have probably realized that Hinduism is the wellspring of a good deal of New Age thinking. Most of us are probably also aware than an increasing number of Asian Indians are residing in the U.S. We may be surprised, in fact, to learn that there are approximately 200 Hindu temples or Hindu centers in the U.S. Many believe that due to its eclectic nature, Hinduism has the potential to serve as a major vehicle for uniting much of the non-Christian religious world.

The appeal of Hinduism to Western culture is not difficult to comprehend. For one, Hinduism is comfortable with evolutionary thinking. As modern science emphasizes our physical evolution, so Hinduism emphasizes our spiritual evolution. As much of modern psychology emphasizes the basic goodness and unlimited potential of human nature, so Hinduism emphasizes man's essential divinity. As modern philosophy emphasizes the relativity of all truth claims, so Hinduism tolerates many seemingly contradictory religious beliefs. As a religion that also emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual over material reality, Hinduism appeals to many who are disillusioned with strictly material pursuits.

Though there are some core beliefs common to virtually all Hindus, there really is no “Hindu orthodoxy”—no hard and fast dogma that all Hindus must believe. It’s actually a family of gradually developing beliefs and practices.

Hinduism has its roots in the interrelationship of two basic religious systems: that of the ancient civilization residing in the Indus River Valley from the third millennium B.C., and the religious beliefs brought to India by the Aryan people (possibly from the Baltic region) who began infiltrating the Indus Valley sometime after 2000 B.C.

The religion of the Aryans is described in the writings of “holy men” contained in the Vedas (meaning “knowledge” or “wisdom”). The Vedas are four collections of writings composed between about 1500 and 500 B.C., which form the basis for Hindu beliefs, and which reveal a gradual development of religious ideas. The later sections of the Vedas are known as the Upanishads. These Vedic writings are considered inspired. Later Hindu writings, including the renowned Bhagavad Gita, are of lesser authority, but widely popular.

Hindu Beliefs About God And the World

An understanding of the Hindu beliefs about God is important even if we don’t know any Hindus or people from India because we are all in contact with the New Age movement, and it draws its ideas about God from Hinduism. What then do Hindus believe about God?

The early portions of the Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas describe a number of deities who for the most part are personifications of natural phenomena, such as storms and fire. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to these gods. An extensive system of priestly rituals and sacrifices was eventually developed which served as means of obtaining the blessing of these gods.

The later portions of the Vedas, called the Upanishads, reflect a significant development in Hinduism's concept of the divine. Many of the Upanishads, instead of speaking of a multitude of gods, refer to an ultimate reality beyond our comprehension called Brahman. Though Brahman is impersonal in nature, it is sometimes referred to in personal terms by the name Isvara.

Along with this idea of a single divine reality, the Upanishads also teach that at the core of our being (referred to as "Atman") we are identical with this ultimate reality.

A popular saying in Hinduism is "Atman is Brahman!" In fact, all living things are Brahman at their innermost core! In addition, instead of ritual sacrifice, intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things came to be endorsed as the way of contact with divine reality. Also found in the Upanishads is the teaching that the material world (including our conscious personalities) is less than fully real. The word "maya" is used to designate the power by which God, or ultimate reality, brought this less than real world into existence.

Though this monistic or pantheistic philosophy provided a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the divine reality for Hindus, it lacked a strong appeal to the heart. As a result, just before the dawn of the Christian era, a great transformation occurred in Hinduism, spurred particularly by the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, the "New Testament" of Hinduism. The Gita records a conversation between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna (who is unveiled as an incarnation of the god Vishnu), in which personal devotion to deity is endorsed as a way of salvation for all classes of people.

From this time forward, these two major streams of Hindu thought and practice grew and developed—the more intellectual and philosophical stream that emphasized the oneness of all things, and the stream that emphasized personal devotion to a

god. The latter stream has predominated among the common people of India to this present day. Chief among the gods so venerated are Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). In India there are many temples devoted to Shiva (or to one of his "wives," such as Kali), or to Vishnu (or to one of his ten incarnations known as avatars). All in all, it is often stated that Hinduism claims 330 million gods and goddesses!

One might wonder how such a multitude of beliefs about the divine could possibly co-exist in one religion. But they do. There is, however, a widespread recognition that none of the personal gods of Hinduism is in any way exclusive or unique. They are all simply different ways of conceiving of the one reality behind all things—Brahman.

Foundational Hindu Beliefs

Next we must turn our attention to two core beliefs of Hindus: (a) what they believe about the source of evil and suffering and (b) what they believe about life after death.

The first of these core beliefs is the doctrine of *karma*. The word karma means "action." But the religious concept has more to do with the results or consequences of actions. The doctrine of karma states that every thought and action results in certain consequences born by the actor or thinker. If a person lies or steals, he will be wronged in some way in the future. Hindus believe that all suffering is due to one's own past actions, in this or in a previous life. Some believe that karma implies strict determinism or fatalism (that one must simply resign himself to living out his karma). Most, however, believe that though our present is determined by our past, nonetheless we can influence our future by conducting ourselves in a proper manner in the present.

Some have equated the doctrine of karma with the statement in Galatians 6:7 that "whatever a man sows, that he will also

reap." It is certainly a biblical teaching that our actions have consequences—for good or ill. But this is not the same as believing that every experience in life is a consequence of one's own past actions. This is definitely not a biblical idea.

The second core belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, called *samsara*. Since it is impossible that all of one's karma be experienced in one lifetime, the Hindu scriptures state that after death individual souls are "reborn" in this world, in another body—human or otherwise. The nature of one's rebirth is determined by the karma resulting from past actions.

Closely associated with the doctrine of reincarnation is that of *ahimsa* or non-injury to living things. This is the core moral value of Hinduism, the protection of all life (which is ultimately divine), and is the main reason why some Hindus are vegetarian.

Also associated with reincarnation is the *caste system*. According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes or social classes (and thousands of sub-groups within the castes). Each has its own rules and obligations pertaining to nearly every facet of life. At the top are the Brahmins or priests. Second in rank are the Kshatriyas or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas or merchants and farmers. Below these are the Shudras or laboring class. Salvation is possible only for the top three castes, who are called the "twice born." Outside the caste system are the untouchables or outcastes. Though outlawed in India in the late 1940s, many in the countryside are still considered outcastes.

One's caste is determined at birth by his or her own personal karma. Attempts, therefore, to bring about social change or to improve one's social position would appear to run contrary to the law of karma and the caste system.

It’s little wonder that the chief aim of the Hindu is to experience release or liberation from this cycle of death and rebirth caused by karma. Hindus call this liberation *moksha*.

Hindu Ways Of Salvation

Why do New Agers practice yoga? Why are they so devoted to meditation? It may come as some surprise that these practices are central to the Hindu search for salvation!

We noted earlier that the chief aim in Hinduism is to gain release from the cycle of reincarnation caused by karma—the consequences of past actions, in this or in previous lives! Now we want to look at the primary ways in which followers of Hinduism seek to achieve this salvation—liberation from earthly existence.

Before discussing the three primary ways of salvation in Hinduism, we must mention the four goals of life permissible to Hindus. Hinduism recognizes that in the course of many lifetimes people may legitimately give themselves to any of these goals. The first is the goal of pleasure or enjoyment, particularly through love and sexual desire. This is called *kama*. The second legitimate aim in life is for wealth and success. This is called *artha*. The third aim in life is moral duty or *dharma*. One who gives himself to dharma renounces personal pleasure and power, to seek the common good. The final aim in life, however, is *moksha*—liberation from the cycle of lives in this material world, and entrance into Nirvana.

Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga*. This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one’s familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued. The Code of Manu lists many of these rules. Most important among them are certain rituals conducted at various

stages of life.

The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge or *jnana yoga*. The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance or *avidya*. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves and not one with the ultimate divine reality called Brahman. It is this ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third and final way of salvation is the way of devotion or *bhakti yoga*. This is the way most favored by the common people of India; it satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It is self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, *puja,* at the temple, in the home, through participation in the many festivals in honor of such gods, and through pilgrimages to one of the numerous holy sites in India. In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God.

A Christian Response to Hinduism

The editor of the periodical *Hinduism Today* said not long ago that a “small army of yoga missionaries” has been trained to “set upon the Western world.” And in his own words, “They may not call themselves Hindu, but Hindus know where yoga came from and where it goes.”

What should be the appropriate Christian perspective on this religion of the East that is making such an impact in the West? At the outset we must say that as Christians we concur with Hindus on a couple of points. Hindus are correct in their recognition that all is not right with the world and with human existence in it. They are correct as well in suggesting that the ultimate remedy to the human dilemma is spiritual in nature. Beyond these two points, however, there's little common ground between Hinduism and Christianity. Let's note just a few of the more important areas of divergence.

First, Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose. It is common for Hindus to speak of God bringing the universe into existence simply as a "playful" exercise of His power. Also lacking is a conception of God as infinitely holy and righteous and as the One to whom we as His creatures are accountable for the way we conduct our lives.

The second major area of contrast between Hinduism and Christianity is the conception of human nature and of the source of our estrangement from God. According to Hindu teaching, man is divine at the core of his being. He is one with God! The problem is that man is ignorant of this fact. He is deceived by his focus on this temporal and material world, and this ignorance gives rise to acts that result in bad karma and traps us in the cycle of reincarnation.

According to the biblical teaching, however, the source of our alienation from God (and ultimately of all that is imperfect in this world), is not ignorance of our divinity, but our sinful rebellion against God and His purpose for our lives.

This leads to the third and final point of contrast—the way of salvation. According to most Hindu teaching, salvation from the cycle of reincarnation is achieved by our own efforts—whether through good works, meditation, or devotion to a deity. According to the Bible, however, our spiritual need is for deliverance from God's judgment on our sin and for

restoration to a life under His direction and care. This salvation can be provided only by God's gracious and undeserved action in our behalf.

It is true that in certain Hindu groups there is a similar emphasis on God's grace (probably as a result of past Christian influence). But even here, there is a major distinction. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for an atonement for sin, but simply offers forgiveness without any satisfaction of the judgment on sin required by a holy God.

In contrast, the Christian gospel is this: God the Son became a man, died a sacrificial death on the cross, making real forgiveness of real sins against the real God possible to those who place complete trust in Christ. All who do so can experience true forgiveness, know God and His purpose for their lives, and have the certainty of eternal life with Him!

For a list of resources on Hinduism, and on sharing the gospel with our Hindu friends, contact us here at Probe!

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Broken Homes, Broken Hearts – A Christian Perspective on Sex Outside of Marriage

Kerby Anderson examines the impact of teen pregnancies on our society from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. He suggests steps we must take if Christians are to combat this problem of our American society.

As the family goes, so goes society.

Families are the bedrock of society. When families fall apart, society falls into social and cultural decline. Ultimately the breakdown of the American family is at the root of nearly every other social problem and pathology.

Just a few decades ago, most children in America grew up in intact, two-parent families. Today, children who do so are a minority. Illegitimacy, divorce, and other lifestyle choices have radically altered the American family, and thus have altered the social landscape.

Karl Zinsmeister of the American Enterprise Institute has said, "There is a mountain of scientific evidence showing that when families disintegrate, children often end up with intellectual, physical and emotional scars that persist for life." He continues, "We talk about the drug crisis, the education crisis, and the problem of teen pregnancy and juvenile crime. But all these ills trace back predominantly to one source: broken families."

Broken homes and broken hearts are not only the reason for so many social problems. They are also the reason for the incumbent economic difficulties we face as a culture. The moral foundation of society erodes as children learn the savage values of the street rather than the civilized values of culture. And government inevitably expands to intervene in family and social crises brought about by the breakdown of the family. Sociologist Daniel Yankelovich puts it this way:

> *Americans suspect that the nation's economic difficulties are rooted not in technical economic forces (for example, exchange rates or capital formation) but in fundamental moral causes. There exists a deeply intuitive sense that the success of a market-based economy depends on a highly developed social morality—trustworthiness, honesty, concern for future generations, an ethic of service to others, a*

> *humane society that takes care of those in need, frugality instead of greed, high standards of quality and concern for community. These economically desirable social values, in turn, are seen as rooted in family values. Thus the link in public thinking between a healthy family and a robust economy, though indirect, is clear and firm.*

Illegitimacy is our most important social problem.

One of the most significant factors contributing to the breakdown of the family has been the steady rise of unwed births. Since 1960, illegitimate births have increased more than 400 percent. In 1960, 5 percent of all births were out of wedlock. Thirty years later nearly 30 percent of all births were illegitimate. Among blacks two out of every three births are illegitimate.

To put this astonishing increase in illegitimate births in perspective, compare 1961 with 1991. Roughly the same number of babies were born in both years (about 4 million). But in 1991, five times as many of these babies were born out of wedlock.

Social commentator Charles Murray believes that **"illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else."** The public costs of illegitimacy are very high. "Children born out of wedlock tend to have high infant mortality, low birth weight (with attendant morbidities), and high probabilities of being poor, not completing school, and staying on welfare themselves. As a matter of public policy, if not of morality, it pays for society to approve of marriage as the best setting for children, and to discourage having children out of wedlock."

In her famous article in *Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right," Barbara Dafoe Whitehead warned Americans of the cost of ignoring the breakdown of the family:

> *If we fail to come to terms with the relationship between family structure and declining child well-being, then it will be increasingly difficult to improve children's life prospects, no matter how many new programs the federal government funds. Nor will we be able to make progress in bettering school performance or reducing crime or improving the quality of the nation's future work force—all domestic problems closely connected to family breakup. Worse, we may contribute to the problem by pursuing policies that actually increase family instability and breakup.*

While speaking of Dan Quayle, it might be wise to remind ourselves of what the former Vice-President said that brought such a firestorm from his critics. While speaking to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Vice President Quayle argued that "It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown—a character who supposedly epitomized today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another lifestyle choice."

At the time, one would have thought the Vice-President had uttered the greatest blasphemy of our time. Yes, he was using a fictional character to make a point. Yes, he was challenging the tolerant, politically-correct conventions of the time. But he was addressing an important issue neglected by so many.

Fortunately, a year later *Atlantic Monthly* magazine devoted the cover of its April 1993 issue to the story: "Dan Quayle Was Right. After decades of public dispute about so-called family diversity, the evidence from social-science research is coming in: The dissolution of two-parent families, though it may benefit the adults involved, is harmful to many children,

and dramatically undermines our society."

The conclusion should not be startling, yet in a society that no longer operates from a Christian world and life view, it has nearly become front page news. For decades, the United States has engaged in a dangerous social experiment. Two parents are no longer seen as necessary. Stable, intact families are no longer seen as important. We are trying to reinvent the family and are finding out the devastating consequences of illegitimacy, divorce, and other lifestyle choices. As a society, we must return to the values of abstinence, chastity, fidelity, and commitment. Our desire to reject Christian family values has inevitably lead to the decline of Western civilization. It is time to find the road back to home.

The flood of teenage pregnancies is destroying our social fabric.

One of the most significant factors contributing to the breakdown of the family has been the steady rise of unwed births. Since 1960, illegitimate births have increased more than 400 percent. In 1960, 5 percent of all births were out of wedlock. Thirty years later nearly 30 percent of all births were illegitimate. Among blacks two out of every three births are illegitimate.

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One of the driving forces of illegitimacy is births to unmarried teenagers. Every 64 seconds, a baby is born to a teenage mother, and every five minutes a baby is born to a

teenager who already has a child. More than two thirds of these births are to teen girls who are not married.

Becoming a teenage parent significantly decreases the chance that the young mother will be able to complete high school, attend college, and successfully compete for a job. She is much more likely to rear the child in poverty than girls who do not become mothers as teenagers. “When teenagers have babies both mothers and children tend to have problems—health, social, psychological, and economic. Teens who have children out of wedlock are more likely to end up at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.”

If the increase in teenage pregnancy isn’t disturbing enough, there are other disturbing trends. A growing number of adults are having sex with teens. This is more than just Joey Buttafuoco and Amy Fisher or Woody Allen and Soon-Yi Previn. Social statistics show that adult males are fathers of two thirds of the babies born to teenage girls.

In some ways, this is not a new phenomenon. In 1920, for example, 93 percent of babies born to teenagers were fathered by adults. But the difference is that pregnant teens no longer marry the father. Today, 65 percent of teenage moms are unmarried. Many of these kids are destined to spend a lifetime in a cycle of poverty and welfare dependency.

Why teenage girls become sexually involved with adult males is sometimes difficult to discern. A desire for a mature male and teenage insecurity are significant reasons. Teenage girls from broken homes or abusive homes often are easy prey for adult men, which may explain why adult men seek out teenager girls. In many cases, teen sex is not consensual. Girls under the age of 18 are victims of approximately half the rapes each year.

Stemming the tide of teen pregnancy, and reforming the current welfare system that often encourages it, are important action points. But doing so must take into account that adult males

are a significant reason why teenage girls are becoming pregnant.

Whether we look at the increase in illegitimate births in general or teenage pregnancy in particular, we can see a disturbing trend. In essence, Americans have been conducting a social experiment for the last three decades. And the evidence clearly points to major problems when children are reared in families without two parents. Illegitimate births are part of the reason for the breakdown of the family; divorce is the other.

We must honor and promote sexual abstinence.

Thus far we have been talking about the problems. Now it's time to propose a solution. There are two parts to this approach. First, we must teach sexual abstinence. A fundamental reason for the increase in unwed births is teenage sexual promiscuity. Reduce teenage sexuality and you will reduce illegitimacy. Fortunately, the abstinence message seems to be gaining in popularity and getting the media attention it deserves.

or example, the front page of the Sunday *New York Times* Style section featured the surprising headline: "Proud to Be a Virgin: Nowadays, You Can be Respected Even if You Don't Do It." And the March 1994 issue of *Mademoiselle* featured an article proclaiming "The New Chastity." The article wondered if "saying no to sex might turn out to be the latest stage in the sexual revolution." *Mademoiselle* found that views on sexuality seem to be changing. Virgins, for example, are no longer seen as individuals who are fearful or socially inept. In fact, abstinence is now being equated with strength of will and character. Those once labeled "carefree" are now considered "careless" in light of the AIDS and STDs.

One of the most visible campaign for abstinence has come from

the “True Love Waits” campaign by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) begun in the spring of 1993. Students pledge: “Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, those I date, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually pure until the day I enter a covenant marriage relationship.”

A grassroots movement to promote abstinence through a variety of programs has been spreading throughout the country. Crisis Pregnancy Centers provide speakers to address the issue of abstinence. Untold groups—with names like “Aim for Success” and “Best Friends” and “Athletes for Abstinence”—are spreading the positive message of abstinence to teens who need to hear an alternative to the safe sex message.

There are substantial personal benefits to abstinence. But the greatest benefit to society is a reduction in the illegitimate birth rate which drives nearly all of the social problems discussed in this book.

We must target teen pregnancy.

Now we must address the second part of the problem; that is, we must target teen pregnancy. The problem with teenage sex is not simply that teens are having sex. In approximately half the cases, adults are having sex with teenagers. State laws governing statutory rape are often called a “fictitious chastity belt” since law enforcement often ignore the laws.

The reasons for lax enforcement are varied, but they surely include the fallout from the sexual revolution and the children’s rights movement. As a society, we have come to accept the notion that even young teenagers are engaging in consensual sex. While there may be some tawdry publicity when a high profile entertainer like Woody Allen or Kelsey Grammar is accused of sex with a teenager, generally the issue is ignored.

But the issue cannot be ignored. “Welfare reform, sex education and teen pregnancy prevention programs and welfare reform are doomed to failure when they ignore the prevalence of adult-teen sex.” Education about the problem and enforcement of statutory rape laws would substantially reduce the number of unwed teens.

We must honor and promote strong marriages.

Now I would like to propose additional solutions to the problem of family breakdown. First, we must teach marriage principles. Marriages are falling apart and other marriages never begin as sexual partners choose to live together rather than get married. Churches and Christian organizations must teach marriage principles so that marriages will last. Once built on commitment, today’s marriages are a contract: as long as love shall last. Sound, biblical education is necessary to put marriages back on a firm foundation.

Fortunately, a growing number of effective organizations are providing that needed education. Family Life Ministry holds weekend Family Life Conferences through out the country and the world to packed audiences eager to learn more about how to build strong marriages and families. The Marriage Encounter program has been providing the same important teaching in church and retreat settings. And lots and lots of books, tapes, videos, and other seminars are focusing needed attention on the principles that will build strong marriages and allow them to flourish.

We must honor and support fatherhood.

Second, we must emphasize fatherhood. As more and more children grow up in single-parent homes (which are primarily female-headed homes), fathers appear irrelevant and superfluous. Not only are they seen as expendable; they are

often seen as part of the problem.

Yet the consequences of fatherless homes is devastating. “More than 70 percent of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes.” Children who grow up without fathers are more likely to be involved in criminal behavior because they lack a positive male role model in their lives. Fathers are not irrelevant. They may indeed spell the difference between success and failure for their children.

Often fatherless homes feed the cycle of illegitimacy itself. “Young white women who grow up without a father in the home are more than twice as likely to bear children out of wedlock. And boys living in a single-parent family are twice as likely to father a child out of wedlock as boys from intact homes.”

Fortunately, there are many ministries encouraging men to stand with their families. Gatherings like the Promise Keepers conferences nationwide are highly visible symbols of a much greater movement of men (individual churches or parachurch organizations) who have dedicated themselves to running their families on biblical principles. Groups like Mad Dads (Men Against Destruction Defending Against Drugs and Social disorder) have been organized to encourage fathers in high crime urban areas. Especially critical are young urban (often black) youths who do not have strong male role models to emulate. One organizer said, “They saw pimps and hustlers and dope dealers and gang bangers and hypersexual individuals who like to make babies but didn’t assume the responsibility of taking care of them—so why should the kids? And so our first goal was just to mobilize strong, black fathers who were drug-free, who were willing to stand up and be role models, giving our kids another group of men they could look at.”

Building strong families must include building families with fathers. Fatherlessness is one of the primary causes of social disintegration. Parenting cannot be left to mothers and grandmothers. Fathers are essential.

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Safe Sex and the Facts – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Ray Bohlin provides a look at the many problems surrounding the idea of safe sex from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective as well as a scientific perspective. He provides a sound argument for supporting the Christian view of sex being reserved for the marriage relationship.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

At age 16 John had sex with Andrea. Just one time. He enjoyed the experience but felt guilty and decided the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy were just too great. He did not have sex again until nine years later when he married Cindy, who was a virgin. Three months after their wedding Cindy began having painful symptoms. Unknowingly John, who had never had any symptoms of disease, had brought two STDs into his marriage. But John and Cindy were lucky; they both responded to treatment and are healthy today. Many others, however, are not so fortunate. Today STDs are at unprecedented and epidemic proportions. Thirty years of the sexual revolution is paying an ugly dividend, and those most at risk are teenagers. This is true partially because teenagers are more sexually active than ever before, but also because teenage girls are more susceptible to STDs than males or adult females.

While a few STDs can be transmitted apart from sex acts, all are transmissible by the exchange of bodily fluids during intimate sexual contact. I want to discuss the severity of the

problem as well as what must be done if we are to save a majority of the next generation from the shame, infertility, and sometimes death, that may result from STDs.

If you are not aware of some of the following statistics, then prepare to fasten your seat belt because what I have to report is not pretty. The information I am about to share is from data gathered by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health in Austin, Texas.(1) All of these statistics are readily available from reputable medical and scientific journals.

Today, there are approximately 25 STDs. A few can be fatal. Some are relatively harmless, but all are humiliating. Many women are living in fear of what their future may hold as a result of STD infection. It is estimated that 1 in 5 Americans between the ages of 15 and 55 are currently infected with one or more viral STDs, and 12 million Americans are newly infected each year. That’s nearly 5% of the entire population of the U.S.! Of these new infections, 63% involve people less than 25 years old.

This epidemic is a recent phenomenon. Some young people have parents who may have had multiple sexual part-ners with relative impunity and conclude that they too are safe from disease. However, most of these diseases were not around 20 to 30 years ago. Prior to 1960, there were only two prevalent sexually transmitted diseases: syphilis and gonorrhea. Both were easily treatable with antibiotics.

In the sixties and seventies this relatively stable situation began to change. For example, in 1976, chlamydia first appeared in increasing numbers in the U.S. Chlamydia, particularly dangerous to women, is now the most common bacterial STD in the country. In 1981, human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV), the virus which causes AIDS, was identified. By early 1993, between 1 and 2 million Americans were infected with HIV or AIDS, over 12 million were infected worldwide, and over 160,000 had died in the U.S. alone. Then herpes was added

to the mix. This STD now infects 30 million people.

In 1985, human papilloma virus (HPV) began a dramatic increase. This virus can result in venereal warts and will often lead to deadly cancers.

By 1990, penicillin-resistant strains of gonorrhea were present in all fifty states, and by 1992 syphilis was at a 40-year high. As of 1993, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is almost always caused by gonorrhea or chlamydia, was affecting 1 million new women each year. This includes 16,000 to 20,000 teenagers. This infection can result in pelvic pain and infertility and is the leading cause of hospitalization for women between the ages of 15 and 55, apart from pregnancy.

Pelvic inflammatory disease can result in scarred fallopian tubes which block passage of a fertilized egg. The fertilized egg, therefore, cannot pass on to the uterus, and the growing embryo will cause the tube to rupture. From 1960 to 1990 there was a 400% increase in tubal pregnancies, most of which were caused by STDs. Making matters even worse is the fact that 80% of those infected with an STD don’t know it and will unwittingly infect their next sexual partner.

The Medical Facts of STDs

Syphilis is a terrible infection. In its first stage, the infected individual may be lulled into thinking there is little wrong since the small sore will disappear in 2 to 8 weeks. The second and third stages are progressively worse and can eventually lead to brain, heart, and blood vessel damage if not diagnosed and treated. The saddest part is that syphilis is 100% curable with penicillin, yet there is now more syphilis than in the late 1940s, and it is spreading rapidly.

Chlamydia, a disease which only became common in the mid-1980s, infects 20 to 40% of some sexually active groups

including teenagers. In men, chlamydia can cause infertile sperm, a condition reversible with antibiotics. In women, however, the infection is devastating. An acute chlamydia infection in women will result in pain, fever, and damage to female organs. A silent infection can damage a woman's fallopian tubes without her ever knowing it. A single episode of chlamydia PID can result in a 25% chance of infertility. With a second infection, the chance of infertility rises to 50%. This is double the risk of gonorrhea.

Treatment with antibiotics is not always successful. One study reported that 18% showed a recurrence of infection within 3 weeks. As many as 14% of teenagers do not respond to treatment, and ultimately require a hysterectomy. It is an overwhelming burden for an 18- or 19-year- old girl to have to face the fact that she will never be able to bear a single child.

The human papilloma virus (HPV) is an extremely common STD. One study reported that at the University of California, Berkeley, 46% of the sexually active coeds were infected with HPV. Another study reported that 38% of the sexually active females between the ages of 13 and 21 were infected.

HPV is the major cause of venereal warts which are extremely difficult to treat and may require expensive procedures such as laser surgery. HPV can result in pre-cancer or cancer of the genitalia. By causing cancer of the cervix, this virus is presently killing more women in this country than AIDS, or over 4,600 women in 1991. HPV can also result in painful intercourse for years after infection even though other visible signs of disease have disappeared.

And of course there is the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The first few cases of AIDS were only discovered in 1981; now, in the U.S. alone, there are between 1 and 2 million infected with this disease. As far as we know, all of these people will die in the next ten to

fifteen years. As of early 1993, approximately 160,000 had already died.

In 1991 a non-random study at the University of Texas at Austin showed that 1 in 100 students who had blood drawn for any reason at the university health center was HIV infected.

While the progress of the disease is slow for many people, all who have it will be infected for the rest of their lives. There is no cure, and many research-ers are beginning to despair of ever coming up with a cure or even a vaccine (as was eventually done with polio). In 1992, 1 in 75 men was infected with HIV and 1 in 700 women. But the number of women with AIDS is growing. In the early years of the epidemic less than 2% of the AIDS cases were women. Now the percentage is 12%.

Teenagers Face Greater Risks from STDs

One of the statistics I have mentioned is that teenagers are particularly susceptible to STDs. This fact is alarming since more teens are sexually active today than ever before. An entire generation is at risk, and the saddest part about it is that most of them are unaware of the dangers they face. Teenagers must be given the correct information to help them realize that saving themselves sexually until marriage is the only sure way to stay healthy.

The medical reasons for teens' high susceptibility to STDs relates specifically to females. The cervix of a teen-age girl has a lining (ectropion) which produces mucus that is a great growth medium for viruses and bacteria. As a girl reaches her 20s or has a baby, this lining is replaced with a tougher, more resistant lining. Also during the first two years of menstruation, 50% of the periods occur without ovulation. This will produce a more liquid mucus which also grows bacteria and viruses very well. A 15-year-old girl has a 1-in-8 chance of developing pelvic inflammatory disease simply by having sex,

whereas a 24-year-old woman has only a 1- in-80 chance in the same situation.

Teenagers do not always respond to antibiotic treatment for pelvic inflammatory disease, and occasionally such teenage girls require a hysterectomy. Infertility is an increasing problem in our society. It is estimated that one-fourth to one-third of all female infertility in marriage is a result of STDs.

Teenagers are also more susceptible to human papilloma virus, HPV. Rates of HPV infection in teenagers can be as high as 40%, whereas in the adult population, the rate is less than 15%. Teenagers are also more likely to develop precancerous growths as a result of HPV infection than adults. These precancerous growths in teenagers are also more likely to develop into invasive cancer than in adults.

Apart from the increased risk from STDs in teens, teen-age pregnancy is also at unprecedented levels. In 1985 there were over 1 million teen-age pregnancies; 400,000 of these ended in abortion. Abortion is not a healthy procedure for anyone to undergo, but this is especially true for a teenager. Not getting pregnant to begin with is far better. Oral contraceptives are not as effective with teenagers, mainly because teens are more apt to forget to take the pill. Over a one-year period, as many as 9 to 18% of teenage girls using oral contraceptives become pregnant.

Finally, when teenagers start having sex earlier in life, they are much more likely to have multiple sexual partners, a behavior that puts them at greater risk for STD. When teenagers become sexually active before they are 18 years of age, 75% of them will have more than 2 partners and 45% of them will have 4 or more partners. If sexual activity begins after the 19th birthday, only 20% will have 2 or more partners and only 1% will have 4 or more partners. (These statistics were reported by the Centers for Disease Control after

interviewing people in their 20s.)

Is Safe Sex Really the Answer?

I must now take a hard look at the message of safe sex which is being taught to teens at school and through the media.

Some people believe that if teens can be taught how to use contraception and condoms effectively, rates of pregnancy and STD infection will be reduced dramatically. But common sense and statistics tell us otherwise. At Rutgers University, the rates of infection of students with STD varied little with the form of contraception used. For example, 35 to 44% of the sexually active students were infected with one or more STDs whether they used no contraceptive, oral contraceptive, the diaphragm, or condoms. It is significant to note that condoms, the hero of the safe sex message, provided virtually no protection from STDs.

Will condoms prevent HIV infection, the virus that causes AIDS? While it is better than nothing, the bottom line is that condoms cannot be trusted. A study from Florida looked at couples in which one partner was HIV positive and the other was negative. They used condoms as protection during intercourse. After 18 months, 17% of the previously uninfected partners were HIV positive. That is a one-in-six chance, the same as in Russian roulette.

Condoms do not even provide 100% protection for the purpose for which they were designed: prevention of pregnancy. One study from the School of Medicine Family Planning Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania reported that 25% of patients using condoms as birth control conceived over a one-year period. Other studies indicate that the rate of accidental pregnancy from condom-protected intercourse is around 15% with married couples and 36% for unmarried couples.

Condoms are inherently untrustworthy. The FDA allows as many

as one in 250 to be defective. Condoms are often stored and shipped at unsafe temperatures which weakens the integrity of the latex rubber causing breaks and ruptures. Condoms will break 8% of the time and slip off 7% of the time. There are just so many pitfalls in condom use that you just can’t expect immature teenagers to use them properly. And even if they do, they are still at risk.

Studies are beginning to show that school-based sex education that includes condom use as the central message, does not work. A study in a major pediatric journal concluded that the available evidence indicates that there is little or no effect from school-based sex- education on sexual activity, contraception, or teenage pregnancy.(2) This study evaluated programs that emphasized condoms. In addition, programs that emphasize condoms tend to give a false sense of security to sexually active students and make those students who are not having sex feel abnormal.

The list of damages from unmarried adolescent sexual activity is long indeed. Apart from the threat to physical health and fertility, there is damage to family relationships, self-confidence and emotional health, spiritual health, and future economic opportunities due to unplanned pregnancy. Condom-based sex- education does not work.

Saving Sex for Marriage is the Common Sense Solution.

The epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases is running rampant in this country and around the world. Diseases such as chlamydia, human papilloma virus, herpes, hepatitis B, trichomonas, pelvic inflammatory disease, and AIDS have joined syphilis and gonorrhea in just the last 30 years. There is no question that the fruits of the sexual revolution have been devastating. I have also shown how our teen-agers are at a greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases than are adults

and that sex-education based on condom use is ineffective and misleading. There is only one message that offers health, hope, and joy to today's teenagers. We need to teach single people to save intercourse for marriage.

Sex is a wonderful gift, but if uncontrolled, it has a great capacity for evil as well as good. Our bodies were not made to have multiple sex partners. Almost all risk of STD and out-of-wedlock pregnancy can be avoided by saving intercourse for marriage. And it can be done.

Statistics show clearly that in schools that teach a sex education program that emphasizes saving intercourse for marriage, the teen pregnancy rate drops dramatically in as little as one year. In San Marcos, California, a high school used a federally funded program ("Teen Aid") which emphasizes saving intercourse until marriage. Before using the program there were 147 pregnancies out of 600 girls. Within two years, the number of pregnancies plummeted to 20 out of 600 girls.(3) As of 1992, San Marcos was still using this program and was still satisfied with it. In Jessup Georgia, upon instituting the "Sex Respect" program, the number of pregnancies out of 340 female students dropped from 17 to 13 to 11 to 3 in successive years.

Delaying intercourse until teens are older is not a naive proposal. Over 50% of the females and 40% of the males between 15 and 19 have not had intercourse. They are living proof that teens can control their sexual desires. Of those who had at least one sexual experience, 20% had sex in the past but were not currently sexually active. Therefore, a minority of students are sexually active.

Condom-based sex-education programs basically teach teen-agers that they cannot control their sexual desires, and that they must use condoms to protect themselves. It is not a big leap from people being unable to control their sexual desires to being unable to control their hate, greed, anger, and

prejudice. This is not the right message for our teenagers!

Teenagers are willing to discipline themselves for things they want and desire and are convinced are beneficial. Girls get up early for drill team practice. Boys train in the off-season with weights to get stronger for athletic competition. Our teens can be disciplined in their sexual lives if they have the right information to make logical choices.

Saving sex for marriage is the common sense solution. In fact, it is the only solution. We don't hesitate to tell our kids not to use drugs or marijuana, and most do not. We tell our kids it's unhealthy to smoke, and most do not.

It is normal and healthy not to have sex until marriage. STDs are so common that it is not an exaggeration to say that most people who regularly have sex outside of marriage will contract a sexually transmitted disease. Our sexuality should blossom within the confines of a mutually faithful monogamous relationship. We need to reeducate our kids not just in what is healthy, but in what is right.

Notes

1. Medical Institute for Sexual Health, P.O. Box 4919, Austin, TX 78765.

2. I.W. Stout, et al., *Pediatrics*, 1989, 83:376-79.

3. Joe S. McIlhaney, Jr., Safe Sex (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 86.

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The Grand Canyon and the Age of the Earth – A Christian Scientist's View

As a Christian scientist, Dr. Bohlin is open to examining the theories of both young-earth and old-earth scientists to explain what we can observe today. The Grand Canyon provides an excellent venue to consider the theories of both groups on how the geological layers were formed and when this occured.

The Age of the Earth and Genesis 1

How old is the earth? How long has this planet been here? Ask most Christians this question and you will likely receive a quick, self-assured answer. All would be well if you could count on receiving the same answer! However, some will very quickly tell you that the earth was created during creation week and can be no more than six to ten thousand years old. Other Christians will tell you, with just as much confidence, that the earth is 4.5 billion years old. This is no minor discrepancy! What adds even more to the confusion is the fact that you can find both opinions within conservative evangelical circles. You can even find both opinions within the ranks of the few Christian geologists with Ph.D.s! Let me assure you that this is just as confusing for me as it is for you.

The age of the earth is a question both of biblical interpretation and scientific investigation. Unfortunately, neither Christian conservative Old Testament scholars nor Christian scientists are in universal agreement. This topic covers a broad spectrum of issues so I am going to try and narrow the focus of the discussion. I will first briefly discuss the biblical aspects of the question, then move on to geology, the flood, and the Grand Canyon.

First, how do the “young-earth” and “old-earth” positions view the Scriptures? Let me emphasize right at the start that both young- earth and old-earth creationists bring a reverent and submissive attitude to Genesis. The difference is a matter of interpretation. Well-known young-earth creationists Henry Morris, Duane Gish, and Steve Austin, from the Institute for Creation Research, interpret the days of Genesis 1 as literal 24-hours days, the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 as consecutive or nearly consecutive generations, and the flood as a universal, catastrophic event. This leaves little room for much more than ten to thirty thousand years as the true age of the earth.

Old earth creationists such as astronomer Hugh Ross of Reasons to Believe see the days of Genesis as long periods of time, perhaps even millions of years. Genesis 1, then, describes the unfolding of God’s creation through vast periods of time. God still does the work, it is still a miracle, but it takes a lot longer than seven days. The flood of Noah necessarily becomes a local event with little impact on world-wide geology. Other old-earth creationists simply suggest that what is communicated in Genesis 1 is a literary form of the ancient Near East describing a perfect creation. Genesis 1 was never intended to communicate history, at least in their view. Personally, my sympathies lie with a Genesis interpretation that is historical, literal, and with 24-hour days in the recent past. But the testimony of science, God’s natural revelation, is often difficult to correlate with this view. The earth has many layers of sediments thousands of feet thick. How could one year-long catastrophe account for all this sediment? The answers may surprise you!

The Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is almost three hundred miles long, a mile deep, and four to twelve miles across. One’s first view of the Grand Canyon is a humbling experience. You truly have to see

it to believe it. I was mesmerized and could hardly contain my excitement when I caught my first glimpse of the canyon. I was there to partake in a six-day geology hike into the canyon with the Institute for Creation Research, a young-earth creationist organization. ICR believes that the strata, the layers of rock in the Grand Canyon, were primarily formed during Noah's flood perhaps only five thousand years ago. Most geologists, including Christian old-earth creationists, believe that the strata were laid down over hundreds of millions of years. What better way, then, to equip myself for the study of the earth's age, than to spend nine days around the Grand Canyon (six of them in it) with ICR geologists, physicists, and biologists. ICR has been conducting these tours for over ten years, so everything runs extremely well. Though I was a member of a hiking group, they also sponsored a group going down the Colorado River in rafts and a group touring the whole area by bus. All were accompanied by ICR scientists. Each day we received mini-lectures from the leaders as we broke for lunch or at points of interest along the trail. Topics included the sudden appearance of fossils, the complexity of the earliest canyon fossils such as the trilobites, the age of the earth's magnetic fields, the role of continental drift in the onset of the flood, where does the ice age fit into a young-earth model, water- canopy theories, carbon-14 dating, and the dating of the Grand Canyon basalts (rock layers derived from ancient lava flows).

We examined many evidences for rapid formation of rock layers, which is essential to the young-earth model. We spent nearly two hours at the Great Unconformity between the Tapeats Sandstone, which is dated at about 500 million years old, and the Hakatai Shale, which is dated at about 1.5 billion years old. These two formations were formed nearly one billion years apart in time, yet one lies right on top of the other. Nearly a billion years is missing between them! The night before entering the canyon for the hike, I wrote these words in my journal:

> *If these strata are the result of Noah's flood and the canyon carved soon afterward, the canyon stands as a mighty testament to God's power, judgment, and grace. Even if not, what a wonderful world our Lord has sculpted for us to inhabit. His love is bigger than I can grasp, bigger—infinitely bigger—than even the Grand Canyon!*

Evidence of Noah's Flood in the Grand Canyon

One of the more obvious formations in the Grand Canyon is the Coconino Sandstone. This prominent formation is found only a few hundred feet below the rim of the canyon and forms one of the many cliffs in the canyon. Its distinctive yellow cream color makes it look like a thick layer of icing between two cake layers.

Evolutionary geologists have described this sandstone as originating from an ancient desert. Remnants of sand dunes can be seen in many outcrops of the formation in a phenomenon called cross-bedding. There are many footprints found in this sandstone that have been interpreted as lizards scurrying across the desert.

These footprints would seem to pose a major challenge to young- earth geologists who need to explain this formation in the context of Noah's flood. Since there are many flood-associated layers both above and below this sandstone, there is no time for a desert to form in the middle of Noah's flood. Recent investigations, however, have revealed that the cross-bedding can be due to underwater sand dunes and that some footprints are actually better explained by amphibians moving across sandy-bottomed shallow water. Perhaps this formation can be explained by sand deposited under water.

This explanation does not entirely solve the young-earth geologists' problem, because it is still difficult to

determine where the amphibians came from and how they could be crawling around in shallow waters on top of sediments that would have to be deposited halfway through a world-wide catastrophic flood. But let’s go on to another flood evidence. Earlier, I mentioned the Great Unconformity. This can be observed throughout the Grand Canyon where the Tapeats Sandstone, a Cambrian formation estimated to be 570 million years old, rests on top of any one of a number of Precambrian strata ranging from one to two billion years old.

Our group observed a location in the Unconformity where the time gap between the two layers is estimated to be one billion years. It is very unusual, even for evolutionary geology, for two layers from periods so far apart, in this case one billion years, to be right on top of one another. It is hard to imagine that no sediments were deposited in this region for over a billion years! Evolutionary geologists believe that the upper sandstone was deposited over hundreds of thousands of years in a marine environment. However, we observed large rocks and boulders from a neighboring formation mixed into the bottom few feet of the Tapeats Sandstone. This indicates tremendous wave violence capable of tearing off these large rocks and transporting them over a mile before being buried. This surely fits the description of a flood rather than slow deposition. We spent nearly two hours at this location and we were all quite impressed with the clear evidence of catastrophic origin of the Tapeats Sandstone.

That the Coconino Sandstone likely had a water-deposited origin and that the Tapeats Sandstone was laid down in a great cataclysm are necessary elements for a young-earth flood geology scenario for the Grand Canyon.

The Erosion and Formation of the Grand Canyon

Perhaps one of the most interesting questions about the Grand

Canyon is how it was cut out of rock in the first place. The answer to this question has a lot to do with how old the canyon is supposed to be. The puzzling factor about the Grand Canyon is that the Colorado River cuts directly through an uplifted region called the Kaibab Upwarp. Normally a river would be expected to flow towards lower elevation, but the Colorado has cut right through an elevated region rather than going around it.

The explanation you will still find in the National Park literature is that the Colorado began to cut the Grand Canyon as much as 70 million years ago, before the region was lifted up. As the uplift occurred, the Colorado maintained its level by cutting through the rock layers as they were lifted up. Thus the Grand Canyon was cut slowly over 70 million years! In recent years, however, evolutionary geologists as well as old-earth creationists have abandoned this scenario because it just isn't supported by the evidence. A major reason is that even at the present rate of erosion in the Grand Canyon, it would take as little as 71,000 years to erode the amount of rock currently missing from the Grand Canyon. Also, all of the sediment that would have to be eroded away during 70 million years has not been located. And lastly, evolutionists' own radiometric dates of some of the surrounding formations indicate that the Colorado River has been in its present location for less than five million years.

Some old-earth geologists have tentatively adopted a new theory that requires a few rather strange twists. This theory suggests that the Colorado River flowed through the area of the Grand Canyon only recently. The Colorado originally was forced in the opposite direction of its current flow by the Kaibab Upwarp and actually flowed southeast toward the Gulf of Mexico. This ancestral Colorado River may have occupied the course of what is now the Little Colorado River, only in the opposite direction of its current course.

This theory further suggests that about five million years ago

a westward-flowing stream began to erode, upstream or towards the east, over what is today the Grand Canyon, through the Upwarp and capturing the ancestral Colorado River! If this sounds a little fantastic to you, you're probably right. In a recent volume on the Grand Canyon, a geologist, while maintaining this theory to be solid, admits a lack of hard data and that what evidence there is, is circumstantial. Into this controversy step the young-earth creationists, who need to explain how the Grand Canyon was formed, strata and all, in less than 5,000 years. They suggest, quite reasonably I think, that the canyon was formed when the Kaibab Upwarp acted as a dam for three lakes occupying much of Utah, Colorado, and northern Arizona. These lakes catastrophically broke through the Upwarp, and the Grand Canyon was cut out of solid rock by the drainage of these lakes through this breach in the dam. A small canyon was formed this way recently as a result of the eruption of Mount St. Helens. Grand Coulee in Washington state was formed when an ice dam broke at the end of the Ice Age. This breached-dam theory answers a lot of questions the old-earth theories do not, and it needs to be considered.

Uncertainties of Dating the Grand Canyon

I have noted that old-earth creationists believe that the Grand Canyon strata were formed over hundreds of millions of years and that the canyon itself was carved out in less than five million years. Young-earth creationists, on the other hand, believe that the strata of the canyon were formed as a result of Noah's flood and that the canyon was carved out catastrophically less than five thousand years ago. A critical question to ask is, how can we know how old the rocks in the Grand Canyon really are? The usual solution is to date the rocks by radiometric dating methods, which are supposed to be capable of dating rocks billions of years old. Rocks of volcanic origin are the best ones to use in dating rocks this way, since radiometric elements are plentiful in them. The Grand Canyon has volcanic rocks near the bottom and at the

top. ICR has been involved in a project over the last several years to date these volcanic rocks. Their results not only call into question the age of the Grand Canyon but also the reliability of radiometric dating.

The youngest rocks in the Grand Canyon are recognized by all to be volcanic rocks in western Grand Canyon that flowed from the top of and into the canyon. The oldest rocks that have been dated are volcanic rocks called the Cardenas Basalt, a Precambrian formation near the bottom of the canyon. The rubidium- strontium method, however, has dated the Cardenas basalt at one billion years and the lava flow on top of the canyon at 1.3 billion years. This is clearly impossible! Rocks on the bottom of the canyon are 300 million years younger than very recent rocks on the very top of the canyon! These dates were obtained by ICR from samples they sent to several independent dating labs. Something is amiss, either in the interpretation of the rocks, the dating methods, or both.

As we have seen, ICR scientists have come a long way in showing that many of the Grand Canyon strata could have formed rapidly, that erosion of the canyon by the Colorado River has not been going on for tens of millions of years, and that there are significant problems with the dating of the canyon.

However, there are still significant questions that remain to be answered if the young-earth model is to be taken seriously by old- earth geologists. For example, why are there no vertebrates among the fossils of the ocean floor communities of the Grand Canyon strata when vertebrates inhabit today’s ocean floors? How did the many different kinds of sediments in the Grand Canyon (limestones, sandstones, shales, mudstones, siltstones, etc.) find their way to Northern Arizona as a result of one catastrophe and become so neatly stratified with little mixing? I raise these questions only to indicate that there is much work to be done. I also want you to realize that when someone asks me whether the flood of Noah created the Grand Canyon, I have to say that I don’t know. And that’s

okay! The creation was a real historical event, Adam and Eve were real people, and the flood of Noah was real history as well. But finding the physical signs of these events can be tricky business. We need to encourage scientific investigation from both a young-and old-earth perspective because the testimony of God's word and His revelation from nature will ultimately be in harmony. It may just be hard to discern what that harmony is right now.

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Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Bohlin looks at the basic tenets of sociobiology from a biblical worldview perspective. Looking at them as a scientist and a Christian, he finds a lack of consistency and obvious paradoxes in this way of looking at our world.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

In 1981 I wrote an article for *Christianity Today*, which they titled "Sociobiology: Cloned from the Gene Cult."(1) At the time I was fresh from a graduate program in population genetics and had participated in two graduate seminars on the subject of sociobiology. You might be thinking, "What in the world is sociobiology, and why should I care?"

That's a good question. Sociobiology explores the biological basis of all social behavior, including morality. You should care because sociobiologists are claiming that all moral and

religious systems, including Christianity, exist simply because they help promote the survival and reproduction of the group. These sociobiologists, otherwise known as *evolutionary ethicists*, claim to be able to explain the existence of every major world religion or belief system, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and even Marxism and secular humanism, in terms of natural selection and evolution. E. O. Wilson, a Harvard biologist and major advocate of sociobiology, claims that scientific materialism (a fully evolutionary worldview) will eventually overcome both traditional religion and any other secular ideology. While Wilson does admit that religion in some form will always exist, he suggests that theology as an explanatory discipline will cease to exist.

The First Paradox

While the arrogance of sociobiology is readily apparent, it contains a number of paradoxes. The first paradox is simply that the worldview of sociobiology offers nothing but despair when taken to its logical conclusion, yet it continues to gain acceptance in the academic community.

Four Foundational Principles of Sociobiology

The despair of the sociobiological worldview and the ultimate lack of meaning it presents are derived from what I consider the four foundational principles of sociobiology. The first principle is the assertion that human social systems have been shaped by evolutionary processes. Human societies exist in their present form because they work, or at least have worked in the past, not because they are based on any kind of revelation.

Second, there is what sociobiologist Robert Wallace called the **reproductive imperative**.(2) The ultimate goal of any organism is to survive and reproduce. Species survival is the ultimate goal. Moral systems exist because they ultimately promote human survival and reproduction.

Third, the individual—at least in respect to evolutionary time—is meaningless. Species, not individuals, evolve and persist through time. E.O. Wilson stated that the organism, your body, is simply DNA's way of making more DNA.(3)

Fourth, all behavior is therefore selfish, or at least pragmatic, at its most basic level. We love our children because love is an effective means of raising effective reproducers. Wilson spells out the combined result of these principles quite clearly in his book *On Human Nature* when he says that

> *…no species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its own genetic history (i.e., evolution)….we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature.(4)*

Wilson is saying that since humans have been shaped by evolution alone, they have no purpose beyond survival and reproduction. Even Wilson admits that this is an unappealing proposition.

Hope and Meaning

Since sociobiologists claim that all behavior is ultimately selfish, that an organism's only goal or purpose is to survive and reproduce, and that it is species survival, not individual survival, that is ultimately required, personal worth and dignity quickly disappear. The responses of sociobiologists when they are confronted with this conclusion have always been curious to me. I distinctly remember posing a question about hope and purpose to a graduate seminar composed of biology students and faculty. I asked, "Let's suppose that I am dead and in the ground, and the decomposers are doing their thing. What difference does it make to me now whether I have reproduced or not?" My point was that if death is the end with a capital "E", who cares whether or not I have reproduced? After an awkward silence, one of the faculty answered, "Well,

I guess that it doesn't matter at all." In response, I asked, "Don't you see, we were just discussing how the only purpose in life is to survive and reproduce, but now you admit that this purpose is really an illusion. How do you go on with your life when you realize that it really doesn't matter what you do? That there is no point to any of it?" After an even longer silence, the same faculty member said, "Well, I suppose that those who will be selected for in the future will be those who know there is no purpose in life, but will live as if there is."

To say the least, I was stunned by the frankness of his response. He was basically saying that the human race will be forced to live with a lie—the illusion of hope and meaning. What was even more unsettling, however, was the fact that no one disagreed or offered even the most remote protest. Apart from myself, everyone there accepted evolution as a fact, so they were forced to accept this conclusion. (I would find out later that at least a couple of them didn't like it.)

A professor of philosophy at a university in Minnesota recently answered my challenge by saying that maybe there are two different kinds of hope and meaning: hope and meaning in small letters (meaning survival and reproduction) and Hope and Meaning in capital letters (meaning ultimate worth and significance). We all have hope and meaning in small letters, and maybe there just isn't any in capital letters. So what? But that was precisely my point. Hope and meaning in small letters is without significance unless Hope and Meaning in capital letters really exists.

Three Responses

Over the years I have noted three responses of evolutionists to the stark realization that their worldview offers no hope or meaning in their lives. The first is strong disagreement with the conclusions of sociobiology without strong reasons for disagreeing. They don't like the result, but they find it

difficult to argue with the basic principles. As evolutionists, they agree with evolution, but they don't want to believe that a meaningless existence is the end result.

The second response is simple acceptance. These evolutionists agree that there is no purpose or meaning in life. They just have to accept it, as the professor in the story did. Their commitment to an evolutionary worldview is total. I find this attitude most prevalent among faculty and graduate students at secular institutions. There is an almost eerie fatalism that stoutly embraces the notion that one's dislike of a theory is not sufficient cause to raise questions about it, especially when it is based on "sound" evolutionary principles.

The third response is an existential leap for meaning and significance when both have been stripped away. This leap is aptly illustrated by evolutionist Robert Wallace at the end of his book, *The Genesis Factor*. He writes:

> *I do not believe that man is simply a clever egotist, genetically driven to look after his own reproduction. He is that. But he is at least that. He is obviously much more. The evidence for this is simple and abundant. One need only hear the Canon in D Major by Johann Pachelbel to know that there are immeasurable depths to the human spirit….I am sorry for the person who has never broken into a silly dance of sheer exuberance under a starry sky: perhaps such a person will be more likely to interpret the message of this book more narrowly. The ones who will find it difficult to accept the narrow view are those who know more about the joy of being us. My biological training is at odds with something that I know and something that science will not be able to probe, perhaps because the time is now too short, perhaps because it is not measurable. I think our demise, if it occurs, will be a loss, a great loss, a great shame in some unknown equation.(5)*

What Wallace is saying in this passage is that something is missing, and it can't be found within the confines of the evolutionary worldview. So look wherever you can!

Some may argue that those who have trouble with the loss of hope and meaning are taking all this too seriously. I don't agree. On the contrary, I believe that they are being very consistent within their worldview. If everything has evolved, and there is nothing outside of mere biology to give meaning and significance to life, then we must live in despair, denial, or irrational hope.

Sociobiology is gaining in popularity because of the scientific community's strong commitment to evolution. If something follows logically from evolutionary theory, which I believe sociobiology does, then eventually all who consider themselves evolutionists will embrace it, whether it makes them comfortable or not. They will have no other rational choice.

The Second Paradox

In reflecting on the notion that all human societies and moral systems should have characteristics that seem to have evolved, I am led to a second paradox for sociobiology. The first paradox was that, despite the loss of hope and meaning in the context of a completely naturalistic worldview, sociobiology has continued to grow in influence. The second paradox involves Christianity. Since Christianity is based on revelation, it should be antithetical to or unexplainable by sociobiology, at least in some crucial areas.

It is not unreasonable to expect that some aspects of Christian morality would be consistent with a sociobiological perspective, since Christians in small and large groups do work for the betterment of the group as a whole, and the argument could be made that the survival of individuals is thus increased. However, if Christianity's claim to be based

on revelation from a transcendent God is true, I would be surprised, indeed extremely disappointed and confused, if everything in Christianity's moral standards also made sense from a sociobiological perspective. What little I have seen in the way of an evaluation of Christianity from E.O. Wilson and other sociobiologists is a poor caricature of true Christianity.

I would like to offer a few suggestions for consideration. William Irons, in a discussion of theories of the evolution of moral systems, comments that nepotism is a very basic prediction of evolutionary theory.(6) Humans should be expected to be less competitive and more helpful towards relatives than towards non- relatives. He cites numerous studies to back up his claim that this prediction, more than any other sociobiological prediction, has been extensively confirmed.

To be sure, the New Testament holds to very high standards concerning the importance of the family. Church leaders are to be judged first by how they conduct and relate themselves to their families (1 Tim. 3:12; Tit 1:6). Yet Jesus makes it quite clear that if there is any conflict between devotion to Him and devotion to our family, the family comes second. He said,

> *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:34-39).*

In other passages Jesus gives promises that if we give up our families and possessions for His sake, then we will receive abundantly more in this life and the next, along with persecutions (Mark 10:29,30). Jesus Himself preferred the company of those who do the will of God to His own mother and brothers (Matt. 12:46-50). The clear message is that, while our families are important, our relationship with the living God comes first, even if members of our family foce us to choose between God and them. Sociobiology may respond by saying that perhaps the benefit to be gained by inclusion in the group will compensate for the family loss, but how can the loss of an individual's entire genetic contribution to the next generation be explained away by any evolutionary mechanism?

Common Ground

So far I have concentrated my remarks in areas where a Christian worldview is in sharp contrast with the evolutionary worldview of the sociobiologists. Now I would like to explore an area of curious similarity.

While Christianity should not be completely explainable by sociobiology, there are certain aspects of Christian truth that are quite compatible with it. I have always been amazed by the curious similarity between the biblical description of the natural man or the desires of the flesh, and the nature of man according to evolutionary principles. Both perceive man as a selfish creature at heart, looking out for his own interests. It is not "natural" for a man to be concerned for the welfare of others unless there is something in it for him.

Sociobiology seems to be quite capable of predicting many of the characteristics of human behavior. Scripture, on the other hand, informs us that the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit, that they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). I have wondered if our sin nature is somehow enveloped by biology, or, to be more specific, genetics. Could it be

that some genetic connection to our sin nature at least partially explains why “there is none righteous, there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10,11)? Does a genetic transmission of a sin nature help explain why “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23)? Is this why salvation can only be through faith, that it is not of ourselves but is a gift of God, not a result of works (Eph. 2:8, 9)? Is this why the flesh continues to war in our bodies so that we do the thing which we do not want to do, why nothing good dwells in me, and why the members of my body wage war against the law of my mind (Rom. 7:14-25)?

If there is a genetic component to our sin nature, it seems reasonable to assume that only the Spirit of God can overcome the desires of the flesh and that this struggle will continue in the believer until he or she is changed, until we see God face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; 15:50-58).

I ask these questions not thinking that I have come upon some great truth or the answer to a long-standing mystery, but simply looking for some common ground between the truth of Scripture and the truth about human nature we may be discovering from the perspective of sociobiology. All truth is ultimately God’s truth. While I certainly do not embrace the worldview of the sociobiologist, I realize that there may be some truth that can be discovered by sociobiologists that can be truly captured to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

When I wrote that article for *Christianity Today* in 1981, I closed with this paragraph:

> *To know what to support and what to oppose, Christians involved in the social and biological sciences must be effective students of sociobiology. The popularity of sociobiology has gone unnoticed for too long already. We need precise and careful study as well as a watchful eye if we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”(7)*

Notes

1. Raymond G. Bohlin, "Sociobiology: Cloned from the Gene Cult," *Christianity Today,* 23 January (1981): 16-19.

2. Robert Wallace, *The Genesis Factor* (New York: Morrow and Co.,1979).

3. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge,Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3.

4. E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978) 2-3.

5. Ibid., 217-218. Emphasis mine.

6. William Irons, "How Did Morality Evolve?" *Zygon* 26 (1991): 49-89.

7. Bohlin, "Sociobiology," 19.

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The Decline of a Nation – History and Christian Values

Kerby Anderson considers factors which may lead to the decline of this nation's position as the only world super-power. He points out the relationship between moral and spiritual decline and the decline of society in general. We need to return to godly principles if we are to avoid a descent into irrelevance and depravity.

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Doomsayers for many years have been predicting the decline and fall of this country. And while many of these short-term predictions have proved inaccurate, there is some truth to the prevailing belief that this nation will fall like every great nation before it. Apart from revival and reformation, this nation is destined to decline.

The problem with many of these doomsayers is that while their prognosis is right, their diagnosis is wrong. Yes, the future is bleak. But our problem is not ultimately political, economic, or social, as these doomsayers would have us believe. The decline of this nation (just as the decline of every other nation) is due to spiritual factors. The political, economic, and social problems we encounter are the symptoms of the spiritual deterioration of a nation.

Just as there are spiritual principles that influence the life of an individual, so there are political-spiritual principles that govern the life of a nation. And though we may feel that these are obscure and difficult to discern, in reality they are visible to anyone willing to look at the record of history.

Our problem is that we don’t really learn from history. George Santayana said that “those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.” The philosopher Hegel said, “What experience and history teach us is this: that people and government never have learned anything from history or acted on principles deduced from it.” Or as Winston Churchill said, “The one thing we have learned from history is that we don’t learn from history.”

The refrains that are often heard are: “It can’t happen here,” or “Our country is different.” But the reality is that nations are born and die just like individuals. Their longevity may exceed the average person’s lifespan. But the reality is that nations also die.

History has shown that the average age of the great civilizations is around two hundred years. Countries like Great Britain exceed the average while other countries like the United States are just now reaching the average age.

Each of the great civilizations in the world passed through a series of stages from their birth to their decline to their death. Historians have listed these in ten stages.

The first stage moves from bondage to spiritual faith. The second from spiritual faith to great courage. The third stage moves from great courage to liberty. The fourth stage moves from liberty to abundance. The fifth stage moves from abundance to selfishness. The sixth stage moves from selfishness to complacency. The seventh stage moves from complacency to apathy. The eighth stage moves from apathy to moral decay. The ninth stage moves from moral decay to dependence. And the tenth and last stage moves from dependence to bondage.

These are the ten stages through which the great civilizations have gone. Notice the progression from bondage to liberty back to bondage. The first generation throws off the shackles of bondage only to have a later generation through apathy and indifference allow itself to once again be enslaved.

This is the direction this and every other country is headed. The book of Judges shows that the nation of Israel passed through these same stages. And this country will do the same unless revival and reformation break out and reverse the inexorable decline of this nation.

The Cycle of Nations

In his book *The End of Christendom*, Malcolm Muggeridge makes this powerful observation. He says:

> I conclude that civilizations, like every other human creation, wax and wane. By the nature of the case there can

> never be a lasting civilization anymore than there can be a lasting spring or lasting happiness in an individual life or a lasting stability in a society. It's in the nature of man and of all that he constructs to perish, and it must ever be so. The world is full of the debris of past civilizations and others are known to have existed which have not left any debris behind them but have just disappeared.

He goes on to say that

> …whatever their ideology may be, from the Garden of Eden onwards such dreams of lasting felicity have cropped up and no doubt always will. But the realization is impossible for the simple reason that a fallen creature like man though capable of conceiving perfection and aspiring after it, is in himself and in his works forever imperfect. Thus he is fated to exist in the no man's land between the perfection he can conceive and the imperfection that characterizes his own nature and everything he does.

Nations rise and nations fall. Every nation has followed this progression from bondage to bondage. The nations of this century will be no different. But let us not accept the Marxist notion that these are fixed and intractable laws of history. Christians can point to unusual times when revival has redirected the inexorable decline of a civilization. In the Old Testament, Jonah saw revival postpone God's judgment of Nineveh. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and John Calvin saw a Protestant Reformation transform Europe. And even in the history of the United States the First and Second Great Awakenings changed individuals and our society.

But apart from God's intervention, nations will decline and eventually pass off the scene. Much of the Old Testament records the history of the nation of Israel. It passed through these same stages and so will every country in the world.

As Christians we must recognize that nations will rise and

fall just as individuals will be born and die. Our civilization will not last indefinitely, but will eventually pass off the scene. Only God's Word endures forever. We should not put our trust in the things of this world for they are destined for destruction. Instead, we should put our faith in God and His word.

The Decline of the Family

Nations most often fall from within, and this fall is usually due to a decline in the moral and spiritual values in the family. As families go, so goes a nation.

This has been the main premise of thinkers from British historian J. D. Unwin to Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin who have studied civilizations that have collapsed. In his book *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*, Carl Wilson identifies the common pattern of family decline in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Notice how these seven stages parallel what is happening in our nation today. In the first stage, men ceased to lead their families in worship. Spiritual and moral development became secondary. Their view of God became naturalistic, mathematical, and mechanical.

In the second stage, men selfishly neglected care of their wives and children to pursue material wealth, political and military power, and cultural development. Material values began to dominate thought, and the man began to exalt his own role as an individual. The third stage involved a change in men's sexual values. Men who were preoccupied with business or war either neglected their wives sexually or became involved with lower-class women or with homosexuality. Ultimately, a double standard of morality developed. The fourth stage affected women. The role of women at home and with children lost value and status. Women were neglected and their roles devalued. Soon they revolted to gain access to material wealth and also freedom for sex outside marriage. Women also began to minimize having sex relations to conceive children, and the

emphasis became sex for pleasure. Marriage laws were changed to make divorce easy.

In the fifth stage, husbands and wives competed against each other for money, home leadership, and the affection of their children. This resulted in hostility and frustration and possible homosexuality in the children. Many marriages ended in separation and divorce.

Many children were unwanted, aborted, abandoned, molested, and undisciplined. The more undisciplined children became, the more social pressure there was not to have children. The breakdown of the home produced anarchy.

In the sixth stage, selfish individualism grew and carried over into society, fragmenting it into smaller and smaller group loyalties. The nation was thus weakened by internal conflict. The decrease in the birthrate produced an older population that had less ability to defend itself and less will to do so, making the nation more vulnerable to its enemies.

Finally, unbelief in God became more complete, parental authority diminished, and ethical and moral principles disappeared, affecting the economy and government. Thus, by internal weakness and fragmentation the societies came apart. There was no way to save them except by a dictator who arose from within or by barbarians who invaded from without.

Although this is an ancient pattern of decline found in Greece and Rome, it is relevant today. Families are the foundation of a nation. When the family crumbles, the nation falls because nations are built upon family units. They are the true driving social force. A nation will not be strong unless the family is strong. That was true in the ancient world and it is true today.

Social commentator Michael Novak, writing on the importance of the family, said:

> One unforgettable law has been learned through all the disasters and injustices of the last thousand years: If things go well with the family, life is worth living; when the family falters, life falls apart.

The Decline of Values

There are many factors in the decline of a nation. Certainly a major one is the breakdown of the family. But another potent but less perceptible force is the power of ideas.

False ideas are bringing about the decline of western culture. Carl F. H. Henry, in his book *Twilight of a Great Civilization*, says:

> There is a new barbarism. This barbarism has embraced a new pagan mentality . . . not simply rejecting the legacy of the West, but embracing a new pagan mentality where there is no fixed truth.

Today we live in a world where biblical absolutes are ignored, and unless we return to these biblical truths, our nation will continue to decline.

To understand how we have arrived at this appalling situation, we need to go back a century and look at the influence of five intellectual leaders who still profoundly affect the modern world. The first person is Charles Darwin (1809-1882). In 1859 he published *The Origin of Species* and later published *The Descent of Man*. His writings blurred the distinction between humans and animals since he taught that we are merely part of an evolutionary progression from lower forms of life. Darwinism, as it came to be called, not only affected the field of biology, but became the foundation for the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

The second person is Karl Marx (1818-1883). He and Friedrich Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* around 1850, and Marx devoted his life to writing about the demise of capitalism and

coming of communism. He understood the importance of ideas. Marx once wrote: “Give me twenty-six lead soldiers and I will conquer the world.” (So did Benjamin Franklin.) The twenty-six lead soldiers are the keys on a typewriter. The pervasive influence of communism in the world today is testimony to the truthfulness of his statement.

The third person is Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Although he may not be as well known as the other two men mentioned, his influence was just as profound. He was a German Bible scholar whose theory on the dating of the Pentateuch completely transformed Old Testament studies.

Wellhausen argued that the early books of the Bible were not put together by Moses but were gathered together many centuries later by several different men called redactors who wove various strands together. He and his disciples established an anti-supernatural approach to the scriptures which is influential in most denominational seminaries today.

The fourth person is Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He merely took the logical implications of what Darwin was doing in biology and applied them to what today is known as psychology and psychiatry. Freud argued that humans are basically autonomous and therefore do not need to know God. Instead, we need to know and understand ourselves since our problems stem from those secret things that have evolved in our lives from our past.

A fifth person is John Dewey (1859-1952). He is the founder of modern education and published his first work, *The School and Society*, in 1899. John Dewey was also one of the co-signers of the *Humanist Manifesto* in 1933.

Dewey, like Darwin and Freud, believed that humans are autonomous. They don’t need to have an authority above them but can evolve their our own system of education. Thus the very foundation of modern education is anti-supernatural.

Ideas have consequences, and false ideas can bring down a nation. The theories of these five men are having devastating consequences in our nation and world. Unless we return to biblical absolutes, our nation will continue its decline.

Spiritual Decline

The decline and fall of nations is usually due to internal factors rather than external threats. Even though some may have fallen to barbarians, their demise ultimately came because of moral and spiritual weakness which manifested itself as military weakness. Historians have listed the stages in the decline of a nation. These should not be too surprising to any student of the Old Testament. The stages of decline parallel the stages through which the nation of Israel passed.

But neither should they surprise a student of the New Testament. In the opening chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he traces a similar progression. In fact, Romans 1 shows the decline of a civilization from a societal perspective. Looking at the Hellenistic world of his time, he reflects on the progression of sin in a nation.

The first stage is when people turn from God to idolatry. Although God has revealed Himself in nature to all men so that they are without excuse, they nevertheless worship the creation instead of the Creator. This is idolatry. In the past, this took the form of actual idol worship. In our day, it takes the form of the worship of money or the worship of self. In either case, it is idolatry. A further example of this is a general lack of thankfulness. Although they have been prospered by God, they are ungrateful. And when they are no longer looking to God for wisdom and guidance, they become vain and futile and empty in their imaginations. They no longer honor God, so their foolish hearts become darkened. In professing to be wise, they have become fools.

The second stage is when men and women exchange their natural

use of sex for unnatural uses. Here the Apostle Paul says those four sobering words, “God gave them over.” In a society where lust- driven sensuality and sexual perversion dominate, God gives them over to their degrading passions and unnatural desires. The third stage is anarchy. Once a society has rejected God’s revelation, it is on its own. Moral and social anarchy is the natural result. At this point God has given the sinners over to a depraved mind and so they do things which are not proper. This results in a society which is without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

The final stage is judgment. God’s judgment rightly falls upon those who practice idolatry and immorality. Certainly an eternal judgment awaits those who are guilty, but a social judgment occurs when God gives a nation over to its sinful practices.

Notice that this progression is not unique to the Hellenistic world the Apostle Paul was living in. The progression from idolatry to sexual perversion to anarchy to judgment is found throughout history.

In the times of Noah and Lot, there was the idolatry of greed, there was sexual perversion and promiscuity, there was anarchy and violence, and finally there was judgment. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel there was idolatry, sexual perversion, anarchy (in which each person did what was right in his own eyes), and finally judgment.

This progression happened throughout the Bible and to Greece, to Persia, to Babylon, and to Rome. And if it happened to these nations, then it can happen today.Unless we return to God’s principles, decline and destruction are inevitable.

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