

Family: Marriage, Children, and Commitment in the 21st Century

- I. This presentation will examine the challenges** to having a traditional Christian family through
- A. offering an account of where we find the family in the geography of our secular, post-Christian, contemporary culture and the battles in the culture wars;
 - B. presenting the traditional Christian view of sexuality, reproduction, and the family;
 - C. warning about the challenges to remaining traditional Christians and maintaining the Christian family in a hostile, post-Christian, post-traditional culture.
- II. It will remind us that**
- A. A Christian family is first and foremost companionship in the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven: it is the small church, an icon of Adam and Eve.
 - B. A Christian family procreates and raises the next generation of Christians.
 - C. A Christian family is joined together in an ascetic struggle to worship God rightly.
- III. Disparate views of the family**
- A. The family as merely a biologically characteristic association of a male and a female for mating, reproduction, and the raising of offspring.
 - B. The family as an association of two or more persons in which those capable of consent have agreed to join together in a domestic partnership for sexual, social, reproductive, and/or economic reasons. The family is considered purely a social creation.
 - C. The family as the union of a man and a woman in the image of the proper union of Adam and Eve, blessed by God, where alone sexual and reproductive activity may legitimately occur, united in prayer as the small-church in companionship and mutual support to salvation.
- IV. The traditional family transformed**
- A. Out-of-wedlock births

1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2007
5.3%	10.7%	18.4%	28%	33.2%	39.7%
 - B. Marriage is out of style. In 2002, 16.5% of the women living with a man were cohabiting.
 - C. Children are in partially intact families – in 2009 only 67% of children live in a household with both parents married.
- V. Consider why** support for abortion is cardinal to the contemporary, secular life-style.
- A. The support for abortion is widespread, deeply rooted, and often passionate, because abortion supports the secular, post-traditional, careerist life-style of many Americans that encourages both men and women to postpone marriage and child-rearing until they are both economically established. The result of this is that
 - 1. the moral focus is on luxury: on a comfortable, double-income, upper-middle-class way of life with one or perhaps two, but not three or four children;
 - 2. the family image is that of a husband and a wife fully engaged in the pursuit first and foremost of success in their careers, with the result that
 - a. they plan to have one or at most two children,
 - b. they plan to have someone else raise their children (daycare or nanny),

- c. they plan at least implicitly to make their families incidental to their career goals, while all along promising their children “quality time”, while quantity time goes to their careers and the pursuit of “success” and things of this world;
 - 3. the consequence in a secular, post-traditional, hyper-eroticized culture is that persons tend to have numerous sexual partners and delay marriage with the result that
 - a. before they are married, they are at risk of becoming pregnant;
 - b. by the time they are married and ready to have children, they may have lost fertility due to sexually-transmitted diseases and their age.
- B. Abortion protects against the risks of fornication (as well as adultery) or a disabled child
 - 1. Secular moral pre-marital ideal: abortion provides an insurance policy against
 - a. an unwanted pregnancy interrupting educational plans,
 - b. an unwanted pregnancy interrupting career plans.
 - 2. Secular marital ideal: abortion provides for those married a protection against the risk of having their life-plans altered with the birth of a child with disabilities.
 - a. responsible parents avoid having unwanted children in this culture, as well as children with serious diseases and disabilities, even if this involves abortion. The goal is to have children who will place minimal burden on their parents and society.
 - b. prenatal screening and selective abortion (i.e., killing children in the womb) is part of the secular ethos of "responsible" parenting, which asserts obligations to avoid the birth of “defective” children.
 - i. obligations to spouse, other children, and society
 - ii. obligations to child – tort for wrongful life

C. Orthodox Christianity recognizes all abortion to be equivalent to homicide independently of a doctrine of ensoulment (e.g., immediate animation). See St. Basil’s Letter 188. Christianity has always forbidden abortion. “Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not commit sodomy; ... thou shalt not use procure abortion, nor commit infanticide.” *Didache* II 2.

VI. We are no longer a society that shares a common vision of marriage and the raising of children.

VII. Final warning

The dominant culture of the West has become fundamentally different from that of the unchanging Christianity of the Apostles and the Fathers. True Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, does not change, it does not develop new doctrines, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). The Christianity that endures is the Orthodox Church. As His All-Holiness, Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, put it:

“The manner in which we [the Orthodox and the West] exist has become ontologically different. ...the Orthodox Christian does not live in a place of theoretical and conceptual conversations, but rather in a place of an essential and empirical lifestyle and reality as confirmed by grace in the heart [Heb 13:9]. This grace cannot be put in doubt either by logic or science or other type of argument. ... However, the change of man’s essence, theosis by grace, is a fact that is tangible for all the Orthodox faithful. Grace is not only obtained through the transformed relics of the saints, which is totally inexplicable without acceptance of the divine. Grace also radiates from living Saints who are truly in the likeness of the Lord [Luke 8:46].” [Patriarch Bartholomew, October 21, 1997]

Bibliography: for more on the issues sketched above, see H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (M & M Scrivener Press, 2000). For a current periodical addressing many of these issues, see *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality*, a journal published by Oxford University Press (<http://cb.oxfordjournals.org/>).