

AGAPE PROSCRIBES ADULTERY

Ro 13:8-10

- I. PROSCRIBED, DEVIANT BEHAVIORS** (now selectively praised as admirable *Transgressions* by many secularists)—*evil* because *adulterate* (soil) what's good
- A. Demonstrably non-natural & biblically condemned behaviors
1. Rape (Dt 22:25-28; II Sam 13:12-14)
 - a. Rightly defined (not “micro-aggressions”): “unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman by a man without her consent and chiefly by force or deception”
 - b. Occasionally (if rarely) approved (by barbarians, Darwinists; Muslims)
 2. Incest (Lev 18:6-18): blood-ties; coerced (oft-emotionally); genetic risks
 3. Bestiality: violates created order (Ex 22:19; Lv 18:23); Princeton's Peter Singer (of *Animal Liberation* fame) approves
 4. Sodomy (Lv 18:22; Dt 23:18; Ro 1:26-27)—“sodomites” tarnish society in OT
 - a. Contemporary courts, politicians, entertainers sanction, parades celebrate
 - b. Significant shift in many ecclesiastical circles—accepting, ordaining, providing elaborate “exegesis” to justify behavior
- B. Biologically “natural” perversions, harming both marriage & family
1. Prostitution (Lv 19:29)—yet some prostitutes (e.g. Rehab) lauded!
 2. Fornication/extramarital sex (Ex 22:16-17; Acts 15:20; I Cor 6:18-19)—for many Millennials an “Acceptable Sin” (Tim Keller *et al* concerned)
 3. Adultery (Ex 20:14; Lev 18:20): breaking marriage covenant
- C. Questionable behaviors (debated within Church by theologians & ethicists, generally because biblical data unclear):
1. Contraception: universally condemned until 1930
 2. Divorce: Jewish tolerance; Protestant allowance—Luther, Cranmer
 3. Masturbation: rather sharp Catholic/Protestant views
- D. Questionable personal mental/imaginary pleasures
1. Lust: inner assent to act with specific person, given opportunity
 2. Graphic/explicit art, literature & film (both fictional & non-fictional), “romance novels;” nudity in art
 3. Pornography
- E. Difficult to discern “golden mean” between prudery and licentiousness

II. ASSESSING & RESPONDING to the SEXUAL REVOLUTION

- A. Data: momentous changes in many areas
- B. Consequences:
1. Personal integrity at risk—particularly as children/adolescents develop—Meg Meeker's *Epidemic*; university counseling centers document emotional harms
 2. Family suffering—Maggie Gallagher's *The Abolition of Marriage*
 3. Society declining—Mario Vargas Llosa's *Notes on the Death of Culture*; Pitrim Sorokin's *The Crisis of Our Age*
- C. Response: personal, political, ecclesial
1. Deal with reality of our times—acknowledging certain “standards” of earlier times misconceived (e.g. dress, entertainment, etc.) and other good standards may well be unattainable in our day
 2. Do the intellectual work necessary to establish solid biblical/theological views
 3. Challenge believers to live godly lives—“countercultural” witness; sacramental marriage; fathers rearing children
 4. Exert influence/power as citizens to establish healthy culture

MOTHERHOOD DEFERRED

In *Motherhood Deferred: A Woman's Journey*, Anne Taylor Fleming eloquently discussed some of the most crucial cultural issues Americans confront. A former columnist for *The New York Times*, an essayist for *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*, Fleming weaves together several significant themes: 1) her desperate, late-in-life quest for motherhood; 2) her love/hate relationship with gender feminism; 3) her questions concerning the nature of marriage; and, 4) her *unacknowledged* hunger for transcendence, something beyond herself which makes life meaningful.

The daughter of Hollywood actors who divorced when she was five, she breezed through school, absorbing the sexual mores of the '60's, embracing the new-found freedoms espoused by prominent feminists of that era. Following a cohabiting period with him, at the age of 22 she married Karl Fleming, a journalist 22 years her senior. She was determined to succeed as a writer—and she did. But vocational success failed to satisfy the hungers of her heart, for she discovered that she needed a child to make life complete. Her husband had brought two step-sons to their marriage, but step-mothering has its built-in, less-than-fulfilling limitations. At 38, Fleming was overwhelmed with the desire to conceive a child of her own. She was: “giddy, hopeful, lonesome, a babyless baby boomer now completely consumed by a longing for a baby, a feeling akin to heartbreak when you can't breathe but for the sensation of loss” (p. 13).

Alternating chapters tell the medical details of the assorted treatments she tried in the failing endeavor to get pregnant. In the process, Fleming revisited the feminist literature which had shaped her convictions as a young woman. In her college days she'd eagerly embraced the architects of gender feminism (Simone de Beauvoir; Betty Friedan; Germaine Greer) as well as revolutionary social philosophers such as Rousseau, Marx and Marcuse. Their words, their ideas, were heady stuff! Enthralled with it all: “The world was coming deliciously unglued and I was part and parcel of it there on my wooded campus [U.C. Santa Cruz]. Armed with my contraceptives and my fledgling feminism, I was on the cusp of a fabulous journey. My sisters and I were the best and the brightest. The luckiest young women on earth. Everything was before us. With our birth control pills and the exhortations of the feminist foremothers to urge us on, what could stop us? Who could? We were the golden girls of the brave new world, ready, willing and able to lay our contraceptively endowed bodies across the chasm between the feminine mystique and the world the feminists envisioned. Strong, smart, educated, we were the beneficiaries of unique historical timing when the doors were opening, the old male-female roles were falling and the world was ours to conquer, to be part of, to matter in, the world of men, of lawyers and doctors, astronauts and poets. I wanted in that world. I wanted to matter. I wanted to be somebody. I wanted to send dazzling words out into that world. Babies didn't cross my mind, there in my sweaty aerie among the redwoods” (p. 15).

She lived out the fondest fantasies of her feminist leaders. She made it in a man's world. She rose to the top. She resisted having children, even when her husband suggested it. “So after all those years of sex without procreation,” she wrote while in a fertility clinic, “here I lie, engaged in this procreation without sex. It is a stunning reversal, a cosmic joke. It contains my history, that arc—all that sex to no sex, a lifetime of trying to be somebody, my whole own woman in the latter half of twentieth-century America, a lifetime of holding motherhood at bay” (p. 16.). She the questioned the truthfulness of feminist rhetoric. She'd been one of the most articulate advocates of “women's liberation.” She still supports the “movement.” Yet she wonders if it's told the truth. She wonders if she's championed an illusion. Her honest struggle with the ideology which had structured her life makes *Motherhood Deferred* a trenchant treatise: a feminist testing the truth-claims of feminism, her “faith” (p. 254) as she calls it.

What Fleming finally discovered surprised her: “I didn't want equality; I wanted something more, some delighted mutuality between men and women. . . . I wanted to be reconciled to my sex, to revel in it” (p. 155). That's what she failed to find in her professional success. Now and then Fleming drops hints as to her heart's deepest hunger, a covertly religious longing in an overtly irreligious woman. Early on, while furiously determined to have a baby, she noted that what she and others like her feel, as they approach 40, is not the steady ticking of “our biological clocks” but, instead, the darkening face of “the mortality clock” (p. 31). Beginning to sense the reality of death, she wanted something on earth to outlive her. That her step-sons cannot do. She longed to leave some of her genes, a child, when she dies. She wanted “to put a foot in the future by having a baby” (p. 180). The hunger for immortality she hoped to satisfy with a child can finally be found in the Risen Lord Jesus.

WE CANNOT BE SILENT

Heading toward the White House Barack Obama pledged to “fundamentally transform” America. And he clearly has! Yet in many ways he has simply consummated a process launched 50 years ago by the ‘60s Generation. And one of the most significant transformations—the sexual revolution—has most deeply affected us all. Signaling what was to come, one of the leaders of the ‘60s generation, Michael Lehrner, celebrated his 1971 marriage to a teenage girl with a wedding cake inscribed with these words: “Smash monogamy!” Those words were also embraced by the Weatherman faction of the SDS, led by Obama's friend Bill Ayers. (Interestingly enough, Hillary Clinton in the 1990s dubbed the self-ordained Lehrner her “personal rabbi”—though she obviously has resolved to preserve at least one more-or-less monogamous union.)

To address this transformation R. Albert (Al) Mohler, Jr., the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and one of America's most distinguished evangelical thinkers, has published an important treatise: *We Cannot be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong*. (Nashville: Nelson Books, c. 2015). Acknowledging the impact of the “vast moral revolution” which has swept “away a sexual morality and a definition of marriage that has existed for thousands of years,” he both analyzes the upheaval and offers Christians a way to deal with it, noting that Flannery O'Connor “rightly warned us years ago that we must ‘push as hard as the age that pushes against you.’ This book is an attempt to do just that” (p. 1).

The cultural revolution launched in the 1960s has profoundly reshaped our world. To Roger Scruton, an astute contemporary philosopher “The left-wing enthusiasm that swept through institutions of learning in the 1960s was one of the most efficacious intellectual revolutions in recent history, and commanded a support among those affected by it that has seldom been matched by any revolution the world of politics” (Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left). Consequently, says Mohler: “We are facing nothing less than a comprehensive redefinition of life, love, liberty, and the very meaning of right and wrong” (p. 1).

While the Supreme Court's recent (2015) redefinition of marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*) has vividly illustrated the sexual revolution, Mohler insists “it didn't start with same-sex marriage.” Indeed: “Any consideration of the eclipse of marriage in the last century must take account of four massive developments: birth control and contraception, divorce, advanced reproductive technologies, and cohabitation. All four of these together are required to facilitate the sexual revolution as we know it today. The redefinition of marriage couldn't have happened without these four developments” (p. 17). Though Evangelicals have generally avoided the implications of at the first three of these four, Mohler devotes separate chapters to each to demonstrate the validity of his thesis.

At the dawn of the 20th century eugenicists such as Margaret Sanger began promoting birth control as a means to purify the race—“More from the fit, less from the unfit.” Though contraception had hitherto been condemned by all major branches of Christianity, accommodating modernity was in the air and the Church of England led the way by endorsing birth control (within marriage) in 1930. Most all Protestants quickly followed suit. Indeed, by 1960 few evangelicals even considered it a moral issue. Nor did they pay much attention to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1965 decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that granted married Americans the right to purchase contraceptives. Issuing that decision Justice William O. Douglas admitted that nothing in the Constitution justified the decision, but he insisted, there must be somehow somewhere therein a “right to privacy, including the right to access to birth control, in what he defined as ‘penumbras’ that were ‘formed by emanations from those guarantees that help give them life and substance’” (p. 20). The Court's rationale in *Griswold* would soon be wielded first to justify abortion in *Roe v. Wade* and then same-sex marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. “Erotic liberty” was declared a constitutional right!

Along with contraception, divorce had been “inconceivable for most Christians throughout the history of the Christian church” (p. 22). But during the 1960s no-fault divorce—first signed into law by then governor Ronald Reagan in California in 1969—soon made it easier to terminate a marriage than to dissolve a business partnership. The disastrous results—broken families and fatherless children—were clearly unintended but ultimately momentous. But most churches failed to either anticipate or deal wisely with it. “No-fault divorce is a rejection of the scriptural understanding of covenant that stands at the very heart of the Christian gospel. Nevertheless Christian churches generally surrendered” to the culture “and abdicated their moral and biblical responsibility to uphold marriage in its covenantal essence” (p. 24). Indeed, by failing to strongly resist no-fault divorce evangelicals lost “credibility to speak to the larger issue of sexuality and marriage” (p. 25). In yet another realm—reproductive technologies—few evangelicals have showed either understanding of or sensitivity to the ethics involved. So just as the Pill allowed sex without babies so too in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and other technologies allowed women (independently of men) to have babies without sex.

Only when dealing with the fourth of Mohler's factors—cohabitation—have evangelicals seemed alert to the sinful nature of the sexual revolution. But on this score they now occupy an increasingly small segment of the culture. What was once condemned as “living in sin” or “shacking up” has become widely accepted in America. Most women under 30 who now bear children do so while still unmarried. Thereby they virtually insure their children's failure in

We Cannot Be Silent

many important areas, and they represent what Tom Smith says "is a massive change in one generation, a change that is so great that the majority of parents of young children today were raised in a different type of family than they live in today" (p. 3).

Having scanned the historical components of the sexual revolution, Mohler turns to the recently rapid successes of the homosexual movement, culminating in the redefining of marriage itself. Though in 2004 eleven states passed defense of traditional marriage initiatives, less than a decade later "not one effort to define marriage as the exclusive union of a man and a woman succeeded" (p. 34). Younger people in particular approve same-sex relationships and activities. A monumental moral revolution, fueled by the entertainment industry, is in process. Its success was carefully grafted and implemented by cunning activists who especially worked within academic disciplines and liberal churches to validate their cause. Remarkably: "'Homophobia' is now the new mental illness and moral deficiency, while homosexuality is accepted as the new normal" (p. 41). Liberal churchmen now declare it not sinful but an optional lifestyle, and many evangelicals (e.g. Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo) who are all too frequently biblically compromised and anxious to be compassionate, have joined the chorus supporting the new morality which is now established in the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Consequently, Christians committed to a deeply-biblical and traditional ethic must now awaken and begin patiently responding to the revolution. So, Mohler reminds us: "In the Christian understanding, same-sex marriage is actually impossible so we cannot recognize same-sex couples as legitimately married" (p. 54). Christians must remember that no government can create or define marriage—that's already been done by God and revealed in both Nature and Scripture. "Evangelical Christians, in particular, should recognize natural law as a priceless testimony to the comprehensive grace God, a testimony that displays his glory and pattern for human flourishing" (p. 63).

Turning to the latest expansion of sexual rights, the "transgender revolution" promoted by Oprah Winfrey et al., Mohler notes that "an entire civilization" has been turned "upside down" by severing "gender" from "sex." Decades ago the politically correct establishment decreed that though there are only two biological sexes there may well be a variety of self-selected genders. So some schools now ban gendered nouns (boys and girls) and pronouns (he and she). This is because they assert, as Katy Steinmetz explains: "'There is no concrete correlation between a person's gender identity and sexual interests; a heterosexual woman, for instance, might start living as a man and still be attracted to men. One oft-cited explanation is that sexual orientation determines who we want to go to bed with and gender identity determines what you want to go to bed as.'" (p. 68). Reality is whatever we want it to be! And we now face an "omnigender" collage that includes "Queer/Questioning, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Transgender/Transsexual, Bisexual, Allied/Asexual, Gay/Genderqueer"! Just whatever!

Amidst all this confusion, defenders of traditional marriage face a daunting challenge! Fortunately, the Bible provides a solid basis for beginning to rebuild families that nurture healthy children within the context of a divinely-blessed, lifelong, monogamous covenant. There is, in fact, only one way to live rightly together as men and women! Whatever transpires in the surrounding culture. God's people have been given clear commandments regarding sexual relations. And we must also struggle to preserve the legal "right to be Christian" in an increasingly anti-Christian country wherein "Erotic liberty has been elevated as a right more fundamental than religious liberty" (p. 124). It's important to listen carefully when President Obama and his administrative enforcers shift from the language of the Constitution—the "free exercise" of religion—to the freedom to "worship" which can easily be confined within the walls of a "house of worship." Certainly we must always speak the truth in love and seek to reach all men and women with the grace of the Gospel. But to "bear witness to Christ and the gospel in contemporary culture," as Robert George says, means "to make oneself a 'sign of contradiction' to those powerful forces who equate 'progress' and 'social justice' with sexual license.

THE “DIVORCE CULTURE”

The *Atlantic Monthly*'s cover story in the April 1993 declared “Dan Quayle Was Right” and almost instantly altered the “family values” debate with its proof that children need both moms and dads. The article's author, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, amplified that thesis—and explored its implications—in *The Divorce Culture*. For 30 years we have engaged in a vast social experiment, and we now have a “body of evidence” proving “that the cultural case for divorce has been based on misleading claims, false promises, and bankrupt ideas” (p. 183). In fact: divorce destroys families and endangers children.

For decades before 1960, the divorce rate in America remained rather constant—nine per 1,000 married couples. In 25 years, it skyrocketed to 22 per 1,000 as a new ethos prevailed—a shift from an “ethic of obligation to others” to “an obligation to self” (p. 4). As what Whitehead calls “expressive divorce” became broadly approved, “personal happiness” justified almost anything. Newfound freedoms failed to help the sexes form healthy relationships, however, and “the intimate partnerships between women and men have become increasingly fragile, conflict-ridden, and subject to breakdown. Perhaps never before in the nation's history has there been such pessimism, even cynicism, and about the ability of men and women to live together in lasting marriages and to share a common life” (p. 191). We're more “equal” and less able to live together!

The “expressive individualism” which marks modern relationships underlies the unraveling of American society. Shedding the sense of responsibility to others which typified earlier generations, no-fault divorce promised to ease the malady of personal discomfort. Thus, though it takes two to make a marriage only one is needed to end it. Divorce is now portrayed as a positive first step to liberation rather than a tragedy to be avoided at all costs. Not even children's welfare, it seems, should deter one from self-realization. Instead, divorce “for the sake of the children” became something of a mantra for folks determined to divorce. “Consequently, by 1990 approximately 60 percent of American divorces involved children” (p. 83). In Whitehead's judgment, “Nothing in the history of American childhood rivaled the scale or speed of this change in children's families. In the space of little more than thirty years, divorce went from being a relatively rare childhood event, affecting only a small proportion of all American children, to a collective childhood experience, involving a near-majority of children” (p. 83).

Unfortunately for the advocates of expressive divorce, the hard empirical data has come rolling in. Adults, not children, benefit from divorce! Kids without dads swiftly plunge into poverty. Boys tend to turn violent and anti-social. Girls tend to turn promiscuous. The statistics are overwhelming and persuasive. On all counts, children suffer from their parents' divorce. This is poignantly evident when one listens to the children themselves. The books they read, and the letters they write, amply demonstrate their anguish. It's a “literature of loss,” filled with “anger, fear, sadness, and loss” (p. 124). In part, Whitehead thinks, the divorce culture testifies in the tentative commitments evident in modern weddings. Marriage must be mutually satisfying, at all times, so couples promise to stay together “as long as we both shall love” (p. 142). All decisions are tentative, all promises are revocable! If you weary at the task, give it up and try something else! With such beginnings, it's no wonder many marriages fail to finish well!

More than any other issue rooted in failing marriages, the decline of fatherhood should concern us. It amounts to “the social equivalent of an economic crash” (p. 154). Fathers who never marry their children's mothers, fathers who walk away from marriages, fathers who are pushed away by irate wives, fathers who detach themselves from responsibility for children, are the source of many of today's problems. Sadly enough: “Ten years after a marriage breaks up, nearly two-thirds of the children report not having seen their fathers for a year” (p. 156). Nor do mothers fare much better. “In only a few families did the mother-child relationship in the postdivorce family surpass the quality of the relationship in the failing marriage . . . at the ten-year mark, over a third of the good mother-child relationships have deteriorated, with mothers emotionally or physically less available to their children” (p. 160). Single mothers, quite simply, just don't have enough time and money and energy to do all their kids need—especially the disciplining, mentoring, time-demanding tasks which need two rather than one parent.

Then, for the single dad trying to raise kids, the news is equally dismal. Worse yet are homes where moms and dads remarry! Children just don't thrive with step-parents! One Canadian study shows kids in stepfamilies suffer 40 times the abuse suffered by children in intact families! Is there any hope? Not in Whitehead's treatise! She wants strong families, healthy homes, but the prospect is bleak! Social science, it seems, can take us only so far.