

St. Joseph at the End of an Age

by Mary Jo Anderson

Marriage is in a vast, global crucible. In Western nations, loosely defined as democratic nations with free market economies, marriage as an institution has entered a free fall. Less Westernized nations still maintain the natural structure of the family. However, erosion of marriage soon follows as these countries join the global marketplace and partake of global communications.

The crushing cultural pressures against natural marriage are reflected in new realities: “More Americans today are living together, marrying at older ages or not at all, and rearing children in cohabiting or solo parent households. Overall, the U.S. trends are following the far-advanced trends toward non marriage in Northwestern European nations, albeit at a slower and more uneven pace.” (Rutgers University, National Marriage Project, “The State of Our Unions 2007”.)

In-vitro fertilization, for women who opt to be mothers but not wives, is yet another feature of the trend away from marriage.

The reasons given for the decline of marriage as the primary institution of society range from intense urbanization to contraception and abortion. Yet, for Catholics the most persuasive current swirling beneath the social surface of our Western culture is the loss of the Christian world view.

As nations rush toward “secularized individualism” they abandon their heritage as Christian cultures. Sociologists note that this trend is a “central feature” of modernism, thus it is “unlikely to be reversed.”

Everywhere I travel to speak, Catholics ask how they can shield their own children from the ravages of cultural

chaos. How does one prepare teens to enter the real world that lies ahead, yet maintain their Catholic upbringing?

Universally, I have found that even strong Catholic families are victims of the engulfing paganized tide of sexual anarchy. Catholics abort at the same rate as other categories of populations. The divorce rate among Catholics is barely lower than the general public. Unwed childbirth statistics do not spare Catholic families.

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-- Isidore of Isolaniis

Last August, Catholic sociologist Pat Fagan addressed the World Congress of Families in Amsterdam. He noted, “The traditional family of Western civilization is based on lifelong monogamy. The competing culture is polyamorous, normally a serial polygamy both before and after the first marriage, but also increasingly polymorphous in its different sexual expressions.”

Fagan pointed out that the current dangers to the family and the common good were not known in earlier eras of history. This latter observation is worth our pause. One need no prophetic ability to

perceive that we are at the end of an era that thrived under a Christian social structure.

Fagan makes this enormous distinction: in a monogamous structure men are allied with their wives and children through voluntary sexual continence, whereas in polyamorous cultures no sexual restraint of men or women is expected—or even respected. The predictable consequences of setting free a sexually harassing, abusive, abandoning male is covered by an ever-growing (and intrusive) welfare state.

Enter St. Joseph. Recently I discovered an old holy card that depicted the Blessed Virgin asleep in the background, while the foreground features a virile and handsome St. Joseph cradling the baby Jesus in his arms. I searched for more devotions to St. Joseph.

Most of the prayers I’d seen before, and I had known of St. Teresa of Avila’s enthusiastic “go to Joseph!” endorsement of his powerful intercession. I had known that St. Joseph is the patron of families.

New to me, however, was a prophecy by a pious sixteenth century Dominican, Isidore of Isolaniis. “The sound of Victory” will follow the Church Militant “when the faithful recognize the sanctity of St. Joseph... We are inclined to believe that toward the end of time God will overwhelm Joseph with glorious honors.”

If ever there were an era in need of the image of St. Joseph’s male sanctity, it is our era.

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