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Changes in the Family Through the Lense of Christian Ethics

The family has become the center of significant change in the United States. Christian leaders of different backgrounds have responded by agreeing that families need to change as well as providing potential solutions to these issues. The factors that have influenced changes in the American family include societal influence, overexposure to technology, and the teenager's growing need for independence outside of parental involvement. These factors will be analyzed through the lenses of different Christian authors, scholars, and experts in various other fields. This paper will summarize the major social, economic, and attitudinal changes that have reshaped the American family in the past half-century. It will then summarize the responses of Christian leaders from a broad range of traditions: mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic. Despite their disagreements on many issues of doctrine, these traditions have demonstrated a remarkable similarity both in diagnosing the ills affecting American Families and in prescribing solutions. While these Christian traditions are in broad agreement, their views on the family have been subject to criticism. The final section on this research proposes some possible resolutions to the criticism Christian views have faced.

History of familial change

Birth Control in America

Although birth control has been around for centuries it was not until the late twentieth century that physicians were allowed to prescribe birth control to patients. In 1960, the FDA approved the first oral contraceptive. 1.2 million women in the United States used the pill within the first couple of years of its release (Kao).

From the early 1900s to the late forties, there was a boom in the birth control market. The impact of the Black community was especially important because, “Afro- American women from all classes eagerly attended birth control clinics and endorsed birth control (Rodrique, 130)”. Birth control allowed Black women to change their social status, change their family dynamic, as well as motherhood by giving them more autonomy. Birth control also played a role in economic, health, and relationships between races. Birth control was often promoted through speeches and debates (Peiss, 138). During this time, clinics for Blacks appeared nationwide. These clinics were run and sponsored by local organizations. The concern amongst the Black community organization for the welfare of their societies led the organizations to integrate birth control to the locals. A clinic was established in 1929, in Harlem, backed by the Urban League and the Birth Control Research Bureau, which was supported by local journalists, social workers, and ministers who were not opposed to birth control since they believed that pre-mature pregnancies were caused by ignorance in young girls (Peiss, 138). Harlem was the first place a birth control clinic was established.

After two clinics were established in Harlem, home visits by nurses were added. These visits became more common and spread to other states. Over 4,000 home visits were made in just two years, in Nashville, TN. In South Carolina, eleven times a month, sessions at the clinics were held that provided medical care as well as birth control for women in rural areas; seventy percent

of the women were Black. (Peiss, 138). “The Participation of Negro Home Demonstration Clubs in birth control work is significantly overlooked and potentially rich source for the grassroots spread of birth control in the rural south” (Peiss, 138). In other words, the involvement of the Black population in the South helped to spread the use of birth control to other parts. Birth control became accessible to anyone who wanted it once clinics were opened. It was highly integrated in the Black community since the first clinic offering legal contraceptives was established in Harlem. The spread of contraceptives began in the South and then spread to the rest of the country over time.

Changing Gender Roles

Contraceptives allowed women to have more autonomy over their reproductive choices. During the Great Depression, some women viewed childbearing as a social responsibility (an obligation put on by society) and decided to go on strike. In 1937, some women on the east side of New York stood by city hall stating that they would not have children until they were given the housing they were promised. Women were enabled to have such power because of having contraceptives available to them. Activism for survival (due to the repercussions caused by the Great Depression), by women (such as the one just mentioned) accompanied with high unemployment rates of males allowed for women to have more familial power (Gordon). Women in the working class saw contraceptives as beneficial to them because it allowed them to have children years apart. To the women in the working class, being able to choose when to have children allowed them to budget, parent more effectively, and do housework proficiently (Gordon). This was important because women in less financially stable homes were able to expand their resources further in a time of scarcity, such as the Great Depression. As time went on, contraceptives enabled women to have more power in society.

Contraceptives made way for the women's rights movement to emerge. "The emergence of the women's rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was significantly related to the availability of the pill and the control over fertility it enabled. This capability allowed women to make choices about other life arenas, especially work" (Tyrer). As time went on contraceptives allowed women and men to have a choice in reproductive involvement.

By the late twentieth century, many couples were rejecting parenthood completely, preferring to remain "child free" in order to pursue individual desires; those who employ new reproductive technologies to achieve parenthood similarly claim a right to fulfill individual needs (D'Emilio and Freedman, 5). The change in the roles of women in the twentieth century also transformed the way man (especially in the middle class) functioned.

Scholars now suggest that the early twentieth-century crisis in the middle-class male gender identity resulted from men's narrowing economic opportunities and women's entry into the public sphere. Fearing "feminization", men increasingly defined themselves in opposition to women, a practice that has important implications for the history of sexuality (D'emilio and Freedman, 5).

The introduction of contraceptives changed how the American family had functioned for centuries. Women increasingly began to join the workforce and chose personal freedom over parenting. Men no longer held the complete financial responsibility of the home and, like women, chose not to parent. Both genders began to function differently in the family dynamic.

The changes in the family began with the introduction of birth control, it did not stop there. Economic changes have also affected the family dynamic overtime. Changes in the economy such as depreciation in salaries, higher mortgage rates, and financial instability have all played a role in more recent years.

The Effects of Economic Changes on the Family

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were founded in 1992 with the purpose of providing financial aid to citizens of the United States that could not otherwise afford housing. The government was involved in the project with the purpose of making housing available to families and individuals. These two government-sponsored housing aids set up housing mortgages that were tailored to low- income or middle-class families and individuals. (Schwartz). “These two government-sponsored enterprises play a central role in the US housing finance system, and at the start of their conservatorships held or guaranteed about \$5.2 trillion of home mortgage debt (Frame).” In 2008, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac took a turn for the worse and were knee deep in debt. Once the market crash happened in 2008, the government stepped in to save the two companies. In turn, this allowed the companies to be invested in by wealthy investors, which allowed them to lower their mortgage rates to middle and lower-class citizens. One of the biggest breakthroughs for the company was the 30-year fixed mortgage rates. The government is discussing plans to privatize the companies which could mean that mortgage rates on housing would become too expensive for middle- and lower-class families (The Wall Street Journal).

Currently, half of the mortgages in the United States are backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Some argue that privatizing or shrinking the government's involvement is important because the private sector should instead be involved. Others argue against shrinking these corporations because with them the middle-class can prosper, and they see it as the government's duty to provide affordable housing. Without these two companies, non-bank lenders would not be able to have low interest rates since they would not have deposits from the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac companies (The Wall Street Journal). The middle class used to make up about 61% of U.S. housing in 1971. In 2021, the percentage of the middle-class has

fallen to 50% and has continued to decrease since then (Kochhar). Not only has housing decreased in the middle class, income for the middle class has also been declining.

The income for the middle class has dropped drastically since the 1970s. The average household income in the 1970s was \$90,131, which by 2021 dropped to \$59,934. Lower income households increased from \$20,604 to \$29,963, over 40%. Higher income households increased 69% from \$130,008 to \$219,572 since the 1970s to 2020. Due to these fluctuations, the gap between the lower and upper classes went from 6.3 times higher to 7.3 times higher. In the case of the middle-class, the gap with the lower class went from 2.2 times higher to 2.4 times higher (Kochhar). According to data collected by the United States Census Bureau, the average individual income in the American was \$74,580 in 2022. The average individual income in 2021 was \$76,330 which is 2.3 % higher than in 2022 (Kollar). In the United States the average home costs approximately \$417,000 in 2023 as opposed to approximately \$23,000 in 1970 (Fred Economic Data). As inflation on housing continues to rise it will be difficult for families with median incomes to purchase a home.

It is reasonable to infer that these rises in market prices for housing and salary depreciation have negatively impacted the family in America. The instability of financial markets in the United States has affected the family significantly. With inflation on the rise in real estate and other markets it has become nearly impossible to be a homeowner. Other implications for the family include having a two working parent household due to the demands of inflation. Factors such as unemployment in a time of financial inflation can be influential to the dynamic and functionality of the home. “Unemployment may challenge the families’ confidence regarding one of their chief functions, which is to provide basic means of sustenance for family members (Fonseca).” Financial stressors that become overwhelming such as inflation in housing can cause families to enter a mode of crisis (Fonseca). These stressors can be related

to daily functions that require financial influxes in the home such as paying bills which can become stimulus for negative psychological impacts on the family (Conger and Conger). This can occur if a family is not able to provide basic needs such as food, water, and electricity, due to lack of finances. As financial situations in the United States continue to become less stable the family will continue to face financial hardships that will change the dynamic function of the family.

In addition to altering housing, income instability can break relationships within families. First, marriages that endure financial hardships are more likely to end in divorce. This is because in most cases, financial hardships are connected to infidelity in a marriage (Lippmann and Lewis). Infidelity is one of the most common reasons for divorce because it breaks the trust in a marriage. Without trust there is not much left in a marriage. Infidelity can start with a simple argument about differing views on finances, but it can develop into more complex problems that can lead to terminating the marriage. Arguments often dealing with money include not having enough, the spending habits of a partner, differing values, and differences in financial goals/aspirations. These differences can lead one of the individuals in a marriage to look for these areas of deficiency to be satisfied by someone else outside of the marriage (Lippmann and Lewis). Affairs are not the only problem that can arise from financial hardships. Financial instability can also impact how children are treated.

Income instability has been connected to the maltreatment of children. One way to measure the effects of maltreatment due to income instability is the involvement of CPS (Child Protective Services). According to a study carried out in Wisconsin that focused on income instability and the connection to CPS involvement, a 30% loss of income increased CPS involvement by about 18%, and as incomes drop the probability of CPS involvement rises to 15% higher (Cai). On the other hand, families that kept a stable income for three months lowered

their CPS visits by 5% less than families that consecutively maintained unstable incomes (Cai). This data was significant in homes that did not receive benefits from the government such as EBT, WIC, etc. Most of the data was linked to physical abuse reports turned into CPS, which were much higher in unstable income households.

Furthermore, families that have unstable incomes are less likely to spend substantial time together. According to Anne Fischel, (a family therapist and executive director of the Family Project), about 30% of families eat together on a regular basis and the number of families that eat together has decreased in the last 30 to 40 years (Anderson). It is probable that most families in the United States do not eat dinner together. In wealthy families the numbers of mealtimes together have gone up; however, in lower-income families the number of mealtimes together has gone down which can be connected to the extra stressors of having to work more than one job, fluctuating schedules, and not having easy access to foods that are healthy (Anderson). In addition, for families that are struggling financially, working more time is one way to make ends meet. However, “These time commitments to paid labor have the potential to directly take time away from one’s family, including spouses and children, and often have the tendency to intrude upon the quality of time spent in the family arena” (Bulanda and Lippmann).

Desire to marry has also been impacted by financial instability. Over the past few decades there has been a significant change in the percentage of people who choose to marry. Although these changes are in connection with other factors such as: ages when first married, race, ethnicity, education, finances are also relevant. A study by the Journal of Marriage and Family followed the several factors that have influenced changes in the family in the United States. The study contains information on marriage and remarriage, divorce, cohabitation, fertility, same-gender union, immigrant families, and child living arrangements. In the section on marriage, it was found that in 1967, 70 % of adults were living with a spouse and by 2018 only

51 % of adults were living with a spouse (Smock). From the years 2005-2010, 80% of women married; whereas, in the 1980s, 87% of women got married (Smock). “Demographers and other social scientists in both the past decade as well as in prior decades have emphasized changes in the economy as a major reason for declines in marriage” (Smock). Marriage can be seen as a privilege that cannot be obtained until financial stability is established.

The current economic situation in the United States has affected families. If the economy continues to have a negative trend, the family in the United States is likely to lose even more resources, resulting in less stable incomes and less comforting, stable home environments. The economy affects areas of life that are not directly linked to finances, but those areas affected by financial turmoil can change how the family functions.

Technological influences on the Family

Another change that has affected the family is the overuse of technology. In the late twentieth century, by the time a child finished high school, they had watched thousands of hours of television. Most of what they see on T.V. is unproductive and leaves them emotionally stunted. In rare cases, children can develop anxiety and phobias caused by images portrayed in scenes that frighten them (Black and Newman). Furthermore, television exposes the child from a very young age to violent acts done to other people. In the book titled, *Television and Child Development*, research about the relationship between children’s television viewing and how it effects their cognitive, social, and emotional development states that, most of the violence they view is glamorized so that children are not fully aware of how violent the acts they are watching really are. Moreover, at the end of elementary school children who spend time watching just two to four hours a day (of television) will have viewed 8,000 murders and 100,000 different acts of violence (Van Evra). Programming meant for children under twelve was found to be more

violent than any other TV shows (Van Evra). Through the exposure of violent acts, children themselves can sometimes respond with violence to their peers.

A cross national study including Israel, Poland, Australia, Finland, and the United States researchers discussed the effects of television viewing and aggressive behavior. In the section discussing the United States, television violence and aggressive behavior showed that both boys and girls who viewed television violence had a correlation with peer-nominated aggression in the first to third grade. The most aggressive behavior was found in third graders, as their viewing selections generally included more violence (Huesmann and Eron). The over exposure to television can also limit the emotional intelligence of a child. For example, violence on television (which is often depicted as not harmful, funny, and is a rewarded behavior), can be seen by children as a method of solving conflict (Vessey). The continual exposure to violent acts on television can lead to impulsive emotional reactions which can then lead children to develop insensitivity towards someone experiencing an act of violence and a reluctance to act when a victim is being attacked (Vessey). This same aggressive behavior could be present when reacting to discipline in the home. Television is not the only overused form of technology that has modified functions of the family.

Other devices have played a role in the disconnect of family life. Technological devices such as mobile phones, iPads, video game consoles, computers, and more have joined television as continual concerns for families. Electronic devices occupy the time that families used to spend doing activities together. A survey by a *N.Y. Post* reported that parents spend approximately five hours daily on electronic devices, which is an hour more than the time spent in intentional activities with their children. Technology is not bad and has alleviated some of the problems families face from being apart, such as work from home options; however, overuse of technology can negatively affect the intentional time families spend together.

The changes that have taken place in the family in the United States have been discussed by the Christian Community. The following sections explore the attitudes towards most of the changes mentioned previously in view of Christian Ethics from three subgroups of the Christian Community. First a representative of the Methodist Church. Secondly guest speakers for Focus on the Family, an organization representing the Evangelical Church. Lastly, the input from various leaders in the Catholic Church.

Christian Attitudes towards Changes in the Family

Hazen G. Werner was a Bishop who conducted family life conferences in fourteen different countries around the world. He was chairman of the National Committee on Family Life of The Methodist Church from 1948-1964. Werner wrote many books focused on family. One of Werner's books, *Look At The Family Now*, discusses various changes that have occurred to the family up to the 1970s, some are still applicable to today's issues in the family. The changes in the family structure have continued to evolve. The dynamic between parent and child has also changed. Where there once was generally respect and understanding in authority, it has become evident that many children no longer see their parents as capable of being the ultimate authority of the home.

Werner claims that our public sickness (the lack of morality) correlates with the sickness in our homes, that a disordered society is the outcome of a disarrayed family, that defiance of public authority stems from defiance of parental authority, and that youth gone wild is to be expected in view of the overindulgence by parents (Werner).

Werner discussed several causes he believes have contributed to the decline of morality in the family:

1. The use of vulgar language spoken publicly with little to no filtration.

As mentioned before, television is one of the venues for exposure to things that children should not see. Werner states that for a “disturbed child, scenes of hostility, violence, and sadism seen on TV may infect the child with dangerous ideas” (Werner, 57). and that parents should evaluate what children see based of Christian ideals (Werner, 58). Cartoons which are seen on TV have been further studied since. As time goes on, little- to- no vulgarity is being filtered out of children’s cartoons which are the most commonly watched source of entertainment by children. A study that focused on the positive and negative values of popular children’s cartoons from ages 4-6, found that there are negative values shown in children's cartoons. The method consisted of evaluating cartoons based on language, image, values, violence and music. To analyze this data, researchers utilized the present or absent method. The language category was studied using two sections which were positive and negative. To quantify the values of positive and negative language two researchers compiled their data using the formula of (agreements/ agreements + disagreements) also known as content analysis. The agreement coefficient was .90 since anything above .70 is considered sufficient, in research. To get the data needed for the analysis, both children’s drawings of cartoons and parental input on six popular cartoons were converted to frequencies and percentages to quantify the positive and negative qualities of cartoons.

First, *Scooby Doo* 95 %, with a frequency of 8 in negative language (Basal, 492) Phrases such as “For the French speakers out there, Shaggy says to Mary Jane: ‘Voulez-vous couchez avec moi,’ meaning ‘Do you want to sleep with me (Scooby Doo).’” Not only is this vulgar, but it also introduces sexual innuendos to children even before they know what sex is. Another cartoon that is also quite popular among children is *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* at a rate of 70 %, with

a frequency of 8 in negative language (Basal, 492). One character frequently says damn and hell in the last half of the movie” (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem). These are just a couple of examples of how children’s cartoons contain vulgarity.

Cartoons are just one form of children’s entertainment that has been exposing younger minds to vulgar language. It is likely that in the future entertainment, for children will continue to become more vulgar, as creators and writers become less concerned with preserving children’s innocence.

2. Urbanization which keeps people mobile and washes out individualism.

Werner believes urbanization has played a role in washing out individualism by keeping people on the move. According to Werner, urbanization invalidates the significance of “personal identity” (Werner, 19). He then states that urbanization shifts focus away from integrity, which was the driving force that fueled the family’s virtues and beliefs that led the family to rely on God (Werner, 19). Some attributes of urbanization mean that families are increasingly mobile, women have jobs, families are split by divorce, teens are increasingly rebellious, and families immersed in communal activities (Werner, 32). Changes brought about through urbanization also include the social acceptance of split households, and destigmatizing children born out of wedlock (Werner, 36). Werner concludes that urbanization has had a primary role in the changes to the traditional family structure.

3. Affluence which has delimited the need for the spiritual values and the sensitivity to God.

There is a drought in the spirit of the American Home that is continually being filled by temporary distractions. The home is occupied by mechanical, materialistic routines that drain the

occupants of any lasting satisfaction, and which fuel anxiety as the result of the drought. In the words of Werner, “Man needs more than man can give” (Werner, 49). It is imperative that Christian homes not shield themselves from the outside world; instead, Christians should openly interact with the outside transforming the boundaries set for the lost and the hopeless (Werner, 50). Werner believes that Christians should not be afraid to spread their beliefs to those outside their homes.

Werner believes, the first way to involve children in society is to raise them in faith where they pray for children in their neighborhoods, schools, and other countries. Then as they get older involve them in local missions such as helping out with food drives in their communities. As adults they will continue to be mission-minded and act out of selflessness and reach out to those around them with active concern for humanity at large, which is what God requires from Christians (Werner, 50-51). One issue that is common is racism. Werner states, “Younger parents can settle the present-day struggle regarding race by liberating their children to have a respect for persons on the basis of the Christian ideal of the dignity and worth of all individuals. You can set your children free from prejudice” (Werner, 50). This same attitude should be passed on to the generations to come, so that they too will have an unwavering love and respect for people without prejudice and without seeking self-sufficiency over lasting, worthwhile relationships with people. Sticking to values and faith and passing those values down will help children to love those around them and be kind to people in general (Werner, 18-20). This change begins in the home.

The home is important for cultivating values in the family. “This is usually where the ethics of ordinary life is played out, where daily decisions that impact the shape and progress of the world are made (Rubio).” The home is where children and parents alike build a system of beliefs and practices that then shape society through the spread of said beliefs and practices

which are shared from child to child in public, such as in schools. “The family is still the means of transmitting values from one generation to another- values that are embodied in the offspring, affect the public mores” (Werner, 21-22).

The trends identified by Werner half a century ago seem to have persisted. For example, one way that the home is being affected internally is the decline in quality time spent together. The home functions much like a factory with routines turning stale and families confined to repetitive cycles: “9 out of 10 of them (homes) may be neat as a pin and cozy as a nest, but empty of real interest for the grown as well as the growing young” (Werner, 23). There is a simple routine in most American homes. The mother and father wake up in time to rush out the door to work while the kids rush out the door to school. Both parents and children spend most of the day out in the public sphere. It is generally common for the family to not sit down for dinner or to spend time doing other activities together. Children are often occupied with sports or other events that keep them busy while parents work to keep the homes. Time spent at the workplace can bleed into the time spent with the family and spouse, and the stressors caused by work can affect the intentional time with family.

This continual cycle has stretched the family past its limits and has eroded the unity that once glued the family together: “The feeling of needing one another and of belonging to one another and together trusting God- these are the things that bind the family together. It is that unique presence, a family feeling, which we must never lose from the home” (Werner, 25). Societal change will not come until the family transforms itself. In modern society, “Mothers of children 6 to 17 years of age employed outside the home constitute 48% of the total adult female population” (Werner, 37). Fathers are not as present as they once were due to meeting the demands of inflation and its effects on the income of the family. Some Fathers are obligated to

take jobs away from home; while still attempting to know their children and discipline them. However, discipline for past actions in the present cannot change the outcome of the past.

As time goes on, more of the population in the U.S.A. is made up of the elderly. The total US population in 2020 was 331,449,281 (Bureau). The number of adults over 65 was 50 million in 2022, and is estimated to expand to 82 million by 2050. This will increase that group's total population from 17% to 23% (Mather and Scommegna). "We cannot look at the new form of family life without giving serious consideration to ways in which continuity can grow between the old and the young" (Werner, 46). For a home to be Christian, parents and elders must be respected equally and treated compassionately. In this way, the home can function harmoniously. The purpose of this strategy is to "Provide a supportive environment for the old" (Werner, 47) and the young alike without interference of growth, which will require co-operation and active listening.

Many of the youth in America over time have become deaf to their elders and do not see any gain from learning anything from the adults. There is a loss of respect for the older population, and part of the reason is because their mindset does not couple well with the youth's mindset. This difference in perspective is what has created isolation among the differing age groups. As stated by Werner, the divide between generations is not a newly existing concept; instead, it has always existed (Werner, 73-75). The difference now is the way the younger generations treat their elders without respect.

Furthermore, according to Werner, the lack of morality in society has trickled down to the family via the adolescent. Adolescence is a drama about the teenager with his/her time, going for convenience or virtue, and with parents as part of the impeding past. "In the process of becoming a person, a youngster involves himself in a struggle, a struggle between love and

alienation, the desire to remain a child and the desire to be free” (Werner, 80). The teen years are years full of confusion. Teens are caught between discovery and comfort. Teens in America feel a need to become independent of their parents to achieve autonomy. Some are not comfortable enough to allow their parents to love them like they did when they were children, so they often isolate themselves. Most of the hostility of teens comes from parental judgment and the perceived patronizing they receive from parents and other adults. Teens need “assurance” to grow freely and lovingly (Werner, 81). Parents often argue that they never acted that way as a teen and forget their misbehaviors while shaming their teenagers for how they act. Being a teen is difficult in the sense that they are neither child nor adult so neither lifestyle suits them. Most teens turn to their peers because they can relate to each other without judgment (Werner, 79-81). Teenagers need to understand their parents’ flaws and not feel like they are the problem.

In addition, it is pivotal for parents to listen regardless of the conversation topic. “The failure in parent-child relations is mainly inattention” (Werner, 83). “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand” (NIV, Matthew 13:13). While listening, it is important to be open-minded, but still be firm. Being firm does not mean acting like a dictator; instead, it is about satisfying the need to be directed while still making a teen feel seen as an individual (Werner, 83). Listening is a simple yet effective way to help teens feel heard and respected as individuals in the family.

Werner is not the only representative of the Christian community to have shared this viewpoint when it comes to the family and its challenges. Other Christian authors, speakers, and even psychologists have added to the conversation regarding the changes that have occurred in the family in recent years. Representatives of Evangelical Christians and leaders of the Catholic Church offer their solutions to issues such as parenting effectively, attitudes towards race and other issues that the family has faced.

Focus on the Family

“You do not need anger to control children... Action is what controls” (James Dobson).

James Dobson was the founder of Focus on the Family (an evangelical Christian organization), in 1977 in Southern California (Focus on the Family). Focus on the Family is devoted to helping families world-wide succeed in all areas of family life, including establishing healthy marriages, the upbringing of children based on biblical values, and shielding the family from negative cultural influence as well as educating children to have positive influences on those around them. Focus on the Family has many outreach ministries including different programs such as the Focus on the Family Parenting Broadcast (Focus on the Family). Many authors, doctors in various fields, and Christian leaders have talked on the Podcast offering solutions to familial conflicts.

In one of the episodes of the Focus on the Family Broadcast, guest speaker Crystal Paine (a Christian author) discussed her book titled *Love Centered Parenting*. *Love Centered Parenting* which puts emphasis on loving parental strategies. According to Paine, the need for control as parents comes from a dysfunctional view of God (a distorted view of God due to sin nature) and trying to appeal to other parents to earn their approval. She says that her reason for exerting control, “... was about reputation not relationship with my kids” (Focus on the Family). Paine explains when parents recognize the lies that are rooted in a dysfunctional view of God by paying attention to what they say/think about themselves, parents can then replace those lies with biblical truths about who God says they are. Then parents can renew their mind to live out biblical truths (Focus on the Family, 2021). Meaning to put into practice the truths that God says about them such as, knowing that they (parents) are God’s children too which can be reflected in parenting with love and not being controlling.

Next, in her book, Crystal Paine explains four choices that can help parents to intentionally parent out of love. The first is to lean in and love. This comes from a posture of letting God's love flow through parents. Paine says, "Until we have a full understanding of God's love, we cannot whole-heartedly love our children. Only when we have this understanding then we can love our children" (Focus on the Family). Parents cannot fail if they choose to remain faithful because faithfulness is more important than perfection. The choices that a child makes do not determine failure for that child. Letting God's love flow through the parent. Inwardly this has to be corrected in order to outwardly show love to children. Otherwise, one is parenting from lies and not from love. One way to show love is extending grace. Teaching God's love through extending grace to children when they do something wrong shows them love. (Focus on the Family). Showing children grace teaches them it is okay to make mistakes.

Secondly, is listening well. To listen well a parent must first come with an attitude of caring. Then leaning in and expressing love to children. To Paine this means that parents come to their children without making assumptions and really taking the time to learn about the situation and the child's involvement or lack thereof (Focus on the Family). Lastly, stop and ask the child questions. This could mean asking the child how it felt at the time that the situation happened and, after acknowledging their feelings, asking them what happened. It is important to take the time to listen to what they have to say to gain a full understanding of what happened, why they did or did not do what they are being blamed for, and to take the opportunity to show them love regardless of the situation. (Focus on the Family). Taking the time to listen will make a difference in the communication between parent and child.

Thirdly, is leading with humility. It's important that children know their parents are not perfect and that children recognize how much their parents need Jesus and that without Jesus their parents could not function. Leading with humility involves having a heart posture of

humility or coming without pride. Having the capability to know when one is wrong as a parent and going to God first, then going to ask your children for forgiveness when you do something wrong. This vulnerability will show to children that they can go to their parents to express their own faults and in turn this will lead them to God in the same way as their parents. Children will learn that imperfection is okay and that as people they are going to make mistakes, and that as long as they are accountable for their actions and apologize with sincerity they will be forgiven and cared for (Focus on the Family). Being humble will allow children to see that making mistakes is okay, and that forgiveness does not have to be earned.

Fourth is letting your child go. This starts in the heart by opening one's arms and resting. In other words, to stop fighting with the changes that the child is having. Trusting in God for His plan with our kids. Not waiting until their later years to give them the freedom of making decisions. Instead, allowing them to make decisions early on in childhood. The issue with parents making all the decisions for their children is that it stunts personal growth as children do not develop decision making skills. Having decision making skills helps to make children successful. Raising children to seek the Lord themselves and to make their own decisions so that they get practice and habitually learn wise decisions (Focus on the Family). Giving children space to grow will help them in the long term.

Like Werner, Crystal Paine points out the importance of active listening to children with the intention of understanding. Both Werner and Paine believe listening is a core practice that can help to alleviate a lot of confusion for a growing child. As children grow, taking the time to listen intently will show children that they are seen as individuals and will help children to grow into their own person with the confidence they need to succeed in life. Active listening will show the child they are respected, which could influence mutual respect for others.

Teaching Children to Celebrate Diversity on Focus on the Family.

Racism is still a problem in the United States. Although racism is no longer as explicitly violent and radical as it was not so long ago, it still exists in more discrete fashions. For example, prior to his election, former president Barack Obama (the first POC to be president of the United States) had extra protection set in place after receiving death threats that were centered around his race. Other examples of racism still being a problem in the United States include the emergence of BLM (Black Lives Matter) a movement that was founded in 2013 as an answer to the racism that the Black community is still facing. There has also been outburst from former president Donald Trump who stated that Mexican immigrants are criminals (Green). Racism is a topic that cannot be ignored and affects how families of different ethnic, cultural, racial backgrounds are treated in society. Focus on the Family believes that the family can play a pivotal role in changing children's attitudes towards racism and choosing to embrace diversity.

In another episode of the Focus on the Family Broadcast, Danny Huerta and Trillia Newbell spoke about embracing diversity. Danny Huerta is the head of Parenting and Youth for the Focus on the Family organization, a psychologist, and a licensed social worker. Trillia Newbell is an author, speaker and editor. The interview focuses on Trillia's book *Creative God Colorful Us*, a book that is centered on teaching children to celebrate differences with everyone based on biblical truths about people being made in the image of God. Dr. Huerta starts the conversation by stating that children are naturally inclined to see differences. According to Dr. Huerta, natural stimuli from a child's environment can cause a child to see other children as enemies. Trillia Newbell then adds to the conversation by stating that a child's negative associations with differences in people stems from learning said attitude from behaviors/ reactions showcased in their parents and community along with the brain's natural prejudgment

as Dr. Huerta said. When asked how parents should respond when a child points out or asks about a difference in another person, Dr. Huerta stated that the brain is naturally wired to judge prematurely to save time in the thinking process. (Focus on the Family). Allowing children to point out differences without negatively reacting will allow them to appreciate the various cultures and ethnicities that they encounter throughout life.

According to Dr. Huerta, it is important to teach kids that the mechanism that judges prematurely is not negative and that there is no need to shame children for asking about or pointing out a difference; furthermore, to embrace the differences and to understand what makes this person different does not need to be negative (Focus on the Family). Dr. Huerta also pointed out that the attitude of premature judging also matters, if it comes from a clean heart or a place of pride? This makes a huge difference in the attitudes a child develops toward the differences they see in other children and as an adult how they see people in general. If a man or a woman sees another person as less than themselves, it is most likely stemming from roots of pride, which would be a negatively developed attitude towards others.

Mrs. Newbell then points out that parents should acknowledge the differences their children point out with the goal of honoring and respecting those differences, instead of reacting negatively and making the difference out to be an offense. This is important because it opens opportunities for children to learn about other people whether that be culture, race, ethnic background, religion. Dr. Huerta then talks about how parents often react to the possible offense that the person being asked about might take to the child's question instead of trying to understand why the child asked instead of seeing it as an opportunity to educate their children. Dr. Huerta expresses the idea that instead of reacting to the possible offense it could cause the other person, parents should take those moments as teachable moments for them and their

children (Focus on the Family). Coming from an open-minded posture, parents will help children develop an understanding of the differences among the people they meet without being negative.

Dr. Huerta, Trillia Newbell, and Werner believe that racism is wrong and can be helped by teaching children to have equal respect for all persons which is rooted in Christian theology that all people have equal value. They also believe that to change negative attitudes towards race, it starts in the home, and it starts with biblical truths set in place by God.

Attitudes in Catholicism towards the changes in the Family.

The Catholic Church is one of the core branches of Christianity. Along with the mainline Protestant and evangelicals discussed above, the Catholic church has expressed what they think about the changes that have occurred to the family: “The bishops of Vatican II, like many others, characterize modernity as an age of industrialization, urbanization, technology, change, and advancement, but they also focus on spiritual poverty, false notions of freedom, and flawed understandings of the self”(Numrich). These are some shared ideas that can be connected to Werner’s attitudes towards changes in the family. Having this position towards modernization is common among the leadership in the Catholic Church.

The modern Catholic Church leaders did embrace the changes that they thought to be positive such as embracing freedom of individualism, upholding women, and focusing on the integrity of marriage. However, pope John Paul II, believed that modernization was the cause of a growing separation between spouses, parental authority diminishing, and “a truly contraceptive mentality” (Numrich) or a self-centered mindset. All of which, according to Pope John II, is rooted in a dysfunctional view of freedom apart from truth and finding excuses to be selfish (Numrich, 2015).

John Paul II, much like Werner, also believed the elderly still have a role to play in the family and society. In one of his speeches, John Paul II addressed the elderly and stated that they too had a mission to accomplish; he pointed out that they should not view themselves as part of the outskirts of the church: “You are not and must not consider yourselves to be on the margins of the life of the Church, passive elements in a world in excessive motion, but active subjects of a period in human existence which is rich in spirituality and humanity. You still have a mission to fulfil and a contribution to make” (Justice and Peace). John Paul II pointed out how important it was and is for the elderly to continue being active family members. He is not the only popular Catholic leader to have openly advocated for the elderly.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, once said at a meeting titled, *The Blessing of a Long Life*, “The day is based on the assumption that old age is not a shipwreck but a vocation...” (Familia, Pontificium Consilium pro). Archbishop Vincenzo’s address to the elderly pointed out that they are not an issue that needs to be fixed rather they are worthy of their occupation in the world. He also stated that the elderly have a responsibility to the church in that the elderly have a culture of their own to offer that can be passed on to the younger generation. “Moreover, also in connection with advanced age, there are all the civil aspects, a culture that older people can convey, with particular care to conceive the weakening of life not as a final tragedy but rather as a testimony of hope in the hereafter (Familia, Pontificium, Consilium pro).” He continues his speech by adding that the elderly need the help of others to succeed.

Archbishop Vincenzo calls on the younger generations to care for the elderly and tend to them respectfully. He believes that in a time where the world is discarding the elderly and not taking care of them that women and men not just in the church but worldwide should strive to make a helpful environment for the elderly. “... It is essential to rethink globally the way in

which society supports the elderly men and women, in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, to live serenely the last part of their life” (Catholichealthassoc). Furthermore, the Archbishop states that as people age, it is not a time to discard them but to draw near to them. He also agrees that homes need to be supportive of the elderly. Families should not take the elderly out of their homes and put them in nursing homes (if it is not a necessity). In the words of Archbishop Vincenzo, “It is like uprooting a tree and planting it in a land that is not its own” (Catholichealthassoc).

Archbishop Vincenzo, Pope John II, and Werner agree, the elderly have a place not just in the family but in society at large. To ensure the elderly's welfare, the family should embrace the different culture they offer to the family and society. The family should also aid in the prosperity of the elderly in the home and outside of it and treat them with dignity and respect.

Television and Catholic thought

Most Catholics agree that the overuse of television is harmful not just for the body in that it limits the body's control over emotions and thoughts, but that it also has a spiritual component. According to an article written by Eric Flood (District Superior of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter), watching violent acts on television will influence a violent temper. Outside of the physical, the impure scenes on television will cause the viewer to do impure things: “We can think of the good a Holy Hour in front of the Tabernacle does for our soul, and the opposite occurs if we spend unholy hours in front of the television watching inappropriate shows which promote worldly ideas and people as our idols” (Flood). When it came to family and television, Father Eric Flood stated that “Parents, then, have the duty to monitor the television whenever it is turned on, as the life of our children's souls depend upon it” (Flood). He also believes that children should only watch movies and shows that are dedicated to child audiences only because “...movies rated higher than “children only” will have objectionable material in them, these

ratings are the minimum for us (parents) to follow” (Flood). Television is not the only form of overused technology that Catholics agreed is negatively impacting the family.

St. Rose Catholic School Inc. (a Catholic institution comprised of many Catholic schools) wrote research concerning the negative effects of cellphone usage on adolescents and how their social encounters are affected. Short term usage of well- managed cell phone use did not have long-term negative effects. Long term usage was linked with addictive behavior and emotional instability/dysfunctionality. In the study, it was found that adolescents who are introverted and spend more time on their cellphones tend to isolate themselves more than adolescents that are extroverted (Manalo). The overall effect of cellphone usage in teens was also connected to less time families spent together. “This is partly because they spend more time on the smartphone and internet and thus have less time to connect with their friends and relatives” (Manalo).

Eric Flood, and St Rose Inc., and Werner, propose a connection between television and damage to children. The effects of overusing television are widely shown in these sources, to have negative effects on the development of children. They also agree that parents must keep their children from being exposed to harmful material shown on television shows.

Marriage and Catholic thought

Catholic marriages are focused on branching out beyond the home. Marriage in the Catholic religion is service focused, meaning that the marriage serves outside of the home. After two people consecrate their marriage, they are expected to serve their neighbors, community, and society at large (Rubio). Much like other Christian households, marriage is the beginning of a cultivation of ethical and moral standards that are later passed on to the children of the married couple. Catholic marriages are love centered marriages that focus on loving each other and then spreading that love to the rest of the world. These marriages are built on the standard that all

choices made within the marriage have outward social effects. This same principle is taught to children raised in Catholic homes (Rubio). This is because ethical principles are an important part of Catholic upbringing. In view of Pastoral Constitution of the Catholic Church, “The family is the foundational community that supplies the matrix of conditions for the flourishing of the individual and that supplies, as well, the stable foundational community required for the well-being of society” (Hogan). Passing on values begins with the marriage in Catholic tradition and then those values cultivated in a marriage are passed on to their children.

The Catholic leadership and Werner both agree on views of their ethical standards for the family. For example, television overuse is seen as harmful to children that are exposed to violent acts and other age-inappropriate content. Werner and leaders in the Catholic Church also perceive marriage and family as the centers of cultivating positive moral principles which should branch outside of the home into society. Focus on the Family and Catholic leaders alike hold to the belief that family plays an important role in contributing to the betterment of society through spreading values that are cultivated in the home. Although the branches of Christianity that have been mentioned, have addressed many issues that they believe have affected the family, there have been many criticisms surrounding the shortcomings of the Christian community. Christian churches in America have failed to live up to the principles and ethical standards that they advocate for. People outside of the Christian community have specifically pointed out racism and sexual immorality.

Shortcomings of the American Churches’ Response

In an interview, Dr. Sara Moslener, a professor of Religion at Central Michigan University, spoke about the purity culture of the church and its flaws. She was a pastor’s kid from West Virginia but is no longer a Christian. Dr. Moslener directed a study called The After

Purity Project, which focused on racism and discrimination in the United States within the church. She gives the example of True Love Waits, a group that was known for pushing purity culture in adolescents. Purity culture was a movement in the Christian community that taught people to abstain from extramarital sex. True Love Waits was a project that encouraged churches to focus on abstinence based sexual education. This project was led by the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 90s. It was very influential and, according to Moslener, harmed many people (AZ, secular).

The True Love Waits project began after there was a crisis around teen pregnancies that was related to white teenage girls (AZ, secular). The project came from the idea that Christian teens needed to be a model for other teens by making purity pledges. The True Love Waits pledge cards were posed as new; however, purity pledges had been happening since the 19th century. Parents were involved and mock weddings would be performed; instead of vows, pledge cards were made stating teens would agree to pledge purity until marriage. The events were sponsored by Youth for Christ (an evangelistic organization directed towards teenagers) and True Love Waits. This project had so much influence politically that President Clinton, who was president at the time, signed off on abstinence-only education, which received approximately 50 million dollars of funding. Abstinence-only must teach that sexual activity is meant for marriage, that having sex prior to marriage causes psychological and physical issues, and that having a child outside of marriage will have a negative impact on the child, parents and society (Ott and Santelli). The influence developed further and even pop stars started wearing purity rings.

History of the SBC

The SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) started during a debate over slavery. Many Baptists in the South believed in owning slaves and that they could still be church members

while being slave owners (Cohen, 2). Southern Baptists justified this with a misconstrued understanding of the story in Genesis about the curse of Ham. They believed that African peoples or descendants of Africans were created by God to be enslaved. The belief came from Ham being cursed by Noah to be a servant to his brothers. This became part of the framework of what is now known as the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention). The SBC has apologized and says that racism has no part in the church. Racism within the SBC has led to POCs (Persons of Color) as well as leadership, to leave the SBC. (Az, secular).

I.B. Wells Southern Horror, Lynch, Laws in all its Phases.

Sexual purity was used to keep whites and blacks from integrating during the Jim Crow Laws. The concept, according to I.B. Wells, arose from the fear that white women would like black men and marry them and have children with them. This concept of purity would push the ideologies that white women would follow and want protection from black males. The Story of Emmitt Till, which for a long time was believed to be a myth, which started with a rumor that a black man sexually advanced on a white woman in a place nicknamed Black Wall Street and the whole street was torn down because of this rumor. In the words of I.B wells (a journalist, activist, and researcher), “they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but it is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women” (Wells). This shows how powerful white sexual purity belief was. (AZ, secular).

By the 90s, none of the racial issues were addressed since the SBC pushed the idea of neutrality that in Christ there is no black or white. So, there was no recognition of the issues historically that came as a result of the teachings of white women sexual purity belief. Due to the SBC not having a well-rounded comprehension of the history of sexual purity, they created a

culture that reflected a lot of gender bias, and racial bias. This opened an avenue for sexual discrepancies to occur in the SBC churches. (AZ, secular).

In the last twenty years over 300 clergy leaders within the SBC alone have been found guilty of sexual assault allegations. “The SBC had been charged with sex crimes since 2008, roughly 380 church leaders faced allegations of sexual misconduct” (Hamilton), and survivors have spoken up about the issue. One survivor named Crista Brown was sexually abused at 17 years of age. She reached out to the churches of the SBC for many years, telling them that something needed to be done about the issue. The SBC responded with laughter and said she was lying. She now works as a lawyer in Texas and has pushed for laws to be put in place that allow churches to expose sexual abuse contentions. Other survivors of sexual abuse include Sarah Stan Cole, who has written a book titled *Disobedient Women*, which advocates for women defying the SBC. Emily Joy Allison started the church too movement as someone who also experienced grooming and was told to keep silent. The SBC is not the only church group that has not taken responsibility for clerical sexual abuse. (AZ, secular).

Possible Solutions to the shortcomings of the Christian Church

The shortcomings of the Christian church can be alleviated with the help of some practical solutions. For example, instead of pushing purity culture, a well-rounded sexual education helps to reduce teen pregnancies, and educates children and teens to have healthy boundaries within relationships. As stated by Sara Moslener, “Whatever we can do to... to encourage, good sexual education, to make those opportunities available to teenagers specially... (AZ, secular). Encouraging church communities to teach age-appropriate sexual education can help to introduce healthy relationships with the opposite sex since purity culture only teaches that opposite sexes should not be physical in any way. With a well- rounded sexual education,

teenagers can learn to set healthy boundaries by being taught not to be fearful of physical contact with the opposite sex, how to behave on dates, when it is okay for someone to touch them, etc. Having a well- rounded sexual education can save children and adolescents from confusion about sex whether that be not understanding their changing bodies or being aroused and feeling guilty about it due to stigma surrounding purity culture.

Another positive factor of age-appropriate sexual education is the reduction of teenage pregnancies. Unlike abstinence only education, teaching adolescents about sex can help to reduce unwanted pregnancies. In a study conducted by the American Journal of Public Health (titled: Funding for Abstinence-Only Education and Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention: Does State Ideology Affect Outcomes?) results showed that, “Federal abstinence-only funding had no effect on adolescent birthrates overall but displayed a perverse effect, increasing adolescent birthrates in conservative states. Adolescent pregnancy–prevention and sexuality education funding eclipsed this effect, reducing adolescent birthrates in those states” (Fox). Although abstinence only has not been the direct cause for increases in teenage pregnancies there is a correlation between teen pregnancies and abstinence only education. There is nothing wrong with abstaining, but it should be a choice and not a forced notion.

Outside from purity culture pushing unrealistic expectations, it makes it difficult for people that experience sexual abuse to speak up about their abusers. To counter this, Christian churches should have parental supervised visits, when clergy meet privately with children and adolescents. Having parents supervise how clergy act with their children, can reduce chances that clergy will be alone with a child or adolescent. Furthermore, children and teens will have the opportunity to have another adult present in case a clergy member tries to touch them inappropriately in private meetings. Without another adult present that the child/ teens know, it is more likely for a clergy member to take advantage of the child/teen. A study by John Jay

College of Criminal Justice, explored the factors involved in clerical sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons, researchers concluded that incidents of clergy childhood sexual abuse have been declining and that this could be related to several reasons. Some of which could be the institution of guidelines to eliminate opportunities for potential offenders to be alone with children, and vigilance by parents. (John Lay College of Criminal Justice). These are just possible solutions that the Christian community can take into consideration going forward with responding to criticism about sexual immorality in the Christian church.

Conclusion

Although the Christian church has not agreed on many subjects in the past, it is evident that there are shared beliefs across the different denominations that were discussed in this research. Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelical Christians have found a common ground in the way they view family morals and values. As changes continue to occur in the family, the Christian community has found unity in staying true to the beliefs that they uphold as essential to the conservation of the family. The Christian church has addressed many issues and proposed practical solutions to these changes such as preserving the innocence of children by not exposing them to violent acts, or age-inappropriate content, upholding all ages as equally valuable members of the family and society, teaching adolescents to be respectful and well-rounded individuals that care for others, and the important role that parents play throughout the lives of their children. However, it would be arrogant to not point out that the Christian community has its flaws. Moreover, going forward the Christian Church should take more responsibility for their shortcomings, especially when it comes to racism and sexual abuse. For Christians to continue to publicly defend their beliefs, they must privately enforce their values and live them out publicly so outsiders can be led by example when it comes to the ethics that they propose are essential to the well-being of the family.

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