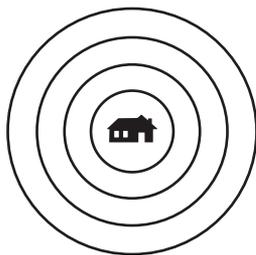


THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE WAR FOR THE COSMOS

Recovering a Christian Vision for the Family



C. R. WILEY



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*For Marla,
For her worth is far above jewels*



FOREWORD

By Nancy Pearcey

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I WAS ATTRACTED to feminism. I scoured the shelves of the local library for feminist books, and always had one or two on my night stand. I read all the feminist classics and thought each was better than the one before.

My flirtation with feminism continued even after I married and gave birth to my first child. *Especially* after I had a child. At the time, I was attending seminary, and having a baby meant having to drop out of school. It seemed that I faced the bleak possibility of never fulfilling my deepest interests and calling. It struck me as

decidedly unfair that men, when they become fathers, do *not* have to face the threat of losing their access to education and a vocation.

That made me wonder, Why do the paths for men and women diverge so sharply when they have children? As I researched the subject, I discovered that it was not always so. Before the industrial revolution, when economic work was performed within the household, both men and women spent most of their time in the home and its outbuildings. Fathers were able to be far more involved in childrearing than today. And mothers were able to be involved in economically productive work without putting the kids in day care.

Work was not the *father's job*, it was the *family industry*. Often the living quarters were in one part of the house, with offices, workshops, or stores in another part of the same house. Husband and wife worked side by side, not necessarily at identical tasks but sharing in a common economic enterprise.

That struck me as a much more balanced arrangement. How did we lose this vision of an integrated household?

The change started with the industrial revolution, which took work out of the home. The household was no longer the center of economic activity. Fathers had no choice but to follow their work out of the household and into factories and offices. As a result, they were simply not present at home enough to continue the same level of involvement in teaching and disciplining their children.



PREFACE

By Anthony Esolen

MAN IS HARD OF HEART AND DOES NOT easily forgive. If only his mind were as tenacious as that. But he finds it easy to forget. It is often to his immediate advantage to do so, because it relieves him of many a heavy duty. So goes that sad song of Shakespeare's:

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot.*

Christopher Wilely is calling upon us to remember that we have duties that go by the name of *piety*, what those

* *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7.

duties are, why they have gone unregarded in our time, how they are founded in our human and bodily nature, and why they are essential for the Christian to practice. He does so in a way that engages the reader regardless of his education, but that is also informed by the best of ancient pagan wisdom, and the truth of the Scriptures. And he is cheerful about it, more cheerful by far than our obliviousness deserves.

This is not a Christian self-help book. Thank God for that. It is a call to wisdom and to action. “But my relationship to Jesus is personal,” you may say, “and I don’t see what it has to do with any other duties you might name.” To be personal is already to be enmeshed in a web of responsibilities, in the duties of gratitude and love. Aeneas carried his crippled old father Anchises on his back, as Wiley shows us, not just because he had a peculiar love for the old man, but because *that is what the pious son must do*. If we lose this sense of filial piety, we might as well cease calling our God by the name Jesus teaches us to call Him: Father. And many a self-styled Christian has done so, Christians daring to imply that they are wiser than Jesus. At which point the faith staggers and falls, and what is left? A social club for old ladies with a taste for spirituality, no more significant than that; a beauty mark on the cheek of a dowager.

But God is our Father, “from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named,” as Saint Paul says. God is the author of nature, and of our human nature, fallen though it

may be through the sin of Adam. It makes no sense to think that we could ever understand the fatherhood of God without human fatherhood as its derivative and its image. Just as we cease to think of God as Creator, losing a strong sense of the ordered goodness of creation the more we ensconce ourselves in plastic and in the contra-natural habits of the sexual revolution, so the Father fades from our vision as patriarchy among us fades. The piety that God demands of us when He says, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exod. 20:12, KJV) is at one with the piety of the first commandment of all: “I am the LORD thy God . . . thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:2–3, KJV).

Piety tells us the truth about ourselves, too, in ways that contemporary man cannot easily recognize. “Honour thy father and mother,” says Saint Paul, is “the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:2–3, KJV). That is fitting. Piety acknowledges the promise, in both directions of time. I am here and I am who I am because my father and mother, and their parents before them, made promises to one another, promises which they kept for one another and for their children. And I in turn have made the same promise to my wife, and that promise is made manifest in our own children and the care we have given to them. Man is not a flea in time. He dwells in a history, even that which goes back to Adam and extends to the end of time itself and its consummation in the heavenly

Jerusalem. Man dwells also in a place, a nation, and owes a debt of gratitude to all who came before him to give him what he, as an individual, can never repay. We are born the receivers of gifts: we are in debt from the start. Every breath we take is lent to us, and gratitude, pious gratitude, is the creature's share in the free abundance of the Creator.

What I've said here is just a part of what Christopher Wiley has said in this book, with all the verve of his manly spirit and the wealth of his experience as a husband, a father, a careful thinker about our social troubles, and a faithful Christian pastor. Read it, and remember that the one economy we are all called to join, the truest and most glorious economy, is that which cheers the pious psalmist's heart: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" (Ps. 122:1).

PART ONE

PIETY

THE DELUGE

THE SEED OF THIS BOOK WAS A TALK that I delivered in 2018 at the annual conference sponsored by Touchstone Magazine on the campus of Trinity University in Deerfield, Illinois. The conference included many excellent speakers, among whom were Nancy Pearcey and Anthony Esolen. I was honored to be included.

It was Nancy who encouraged me to begin this book by repeating some of the remarks I made when I introduced my talk. Those remarks were intended to help my listeners understand the reason for my interest in the things I write about, and on that day, spoke about.

My interest in households arises from the fact that I never really lived in one until I built one together with my wife.

My earliest memories of home are full of tension and sadness. My parents had folded in on themselves; this was the 1960s, when turning inward was encouraged. Things went from bad to worse for the family, and we were downwardly mobile. We moved from rented house to rented apartment, to smaller apartment. Piecing things together, I believe this was due to my father's interest in spirituality. He was a seeker, like the great herd at the time. Everyone was seeking, but few were finding. To our impoverishment my father finally found himself in the Church of Scientology.

In case you have not heard, it is very expensive to be a Scientologist. Soon my parents were broke, and their marriage broke soon after that. Then my father disappeared, and in her own way, my mother did too. By the time I was eleven years old I was pretty much on my own. I lived in a housing project and I had a short stint in foster care. My teenage years were bleak. My only consolations were drawing—I dreamed of becoming a comic-book artist—and my best friend. My friend was a pastor's son. It was through his friendship that I eventually became a friend and follower of Christ.

When it was time for me to become a husband and eventually a father, I thought I should read up on those subjects, seeing as I had had little in the way of day-to-day experience witnessing a man performing those roles. Well, I am sorry to say that I didn't find much worth reading in

the Christian bookstores that I visited. Most of the stuff was pop-psychology with a Jesus gloss.

I wanted to get down to the roots of things. That's how I came to read people like Allan C. Carlson, Christopher Lasch, and Robert Nisbet. But even more helpful have been Aristotle, Xenophon, and Virgil, as you will soon see.

Of course, above them all stands the Bible. Once you know what a household looks like you can see that the Bible is a kind of handbook for households.

THE LEVEE IS BROKEN

I'm not the only person in the world to come from a broken home. The experience is so common these days you could almost say that it is the norm. What started as a crack in the levee of social standards has become a wide breach, and a torrent of chaos has poured through. Our civilization is washing away. Although my parents were too old to be hippies in the 60s, they felt the early effects of the turn away from norms that had seemed so solid right into the 1950s. That solidity was an illusion. We know that now. The foundation of those norms was already deeply compromised by the time I was born.

In the part of Connecticut where I live today we literally have crumbling foundations everywhere. The reason is a mineral that went undetected in a concrete mix from a local quarry. For years this quarry churned out the bad mix and no one knew—not even the owners of the quarry.

In some cases million-dollar homes that look fine from the street stand condemned.

Metaphorically, something similar has occurred in our culture. Western civilization still has curb appeal. Things like economic growth, advances in medicine, and an emphasis on human rights seem to indicate that things are in good shape. But something has been added to the mix that serves as the intellectual and spiritual basis for our society. The institutions at the foundation of our way of life don't seem solid any longer. And the most important of these institutions is the household.

Paradoxically, many of the other institutions in our society that once relied upon the household have turned against it. Everything from multi-national corporations to public schools now dismiss traditional household norms as retrograde and even oppressive. And I am sorry to say that even evangelical Christianity increasingly looks like a fair-weather friend.

Just in case you're tempted to write this off as alarmist, consider the following:

1. Marriage has been reduced to a lifestyle choice.

I can remember when politicians called traditional marriage the "foundation of our society." Hardly anyone calls it that today. Instead marriage is a matter of taste. And apparently fewer people have a taste for it these days, if the numbers can be trusted. Across the world the average age of a person

getting married continues to go up even as the percentage of people getting married goes down. Mark Regnerus, a sociologist at the University of Texas, documents some startling data. Consider this: in 1980 91% of Czech women were married by the time they were 30 years old. Today it is 26%. And it is the same everywhere. In 1980 81% of Australian women were married by 30 years of age, in Finland, 66% of women, in Italy, 76% of women, and in the Netherlands, 81% of women. Today the numbers are between 20% and 30% in each of those countries.

People are also experimenting with marriage. There's so-called "gay marriage"—but that's almost passé. There's polyamorous marriage, and open marriage, and marriage to vegetation (I heard of a woman that married a tree), and marriage to inanimate objects (I heard of another woman that married a bridge). I recently read of a woman who actually married *herself*. I could go on, but that would be tedious.

Many churches are eager to bless all of this. Since God loves us unconditionally, He (or She, once you start thinking this way) blesses everything. And even ostensibly conservative churches focus more on emotional satisfaction than on the functions that marriage once performed. If you don't know what I mean, pick up just about any book on marriage from an evangelical press.

WHATEVER BECAME OF PIETY?

WHY DON'T PEOPLE TALK ABOUT PIETY these days? In the circles where the word was once common currency it is kept locked up, perhaps waiting for the day it will be valued again, although I doubt that this is the intent. I suspect it has more to do with embarrassment, or perhaps puzzlement, like when you've come across some odd tool in your grandfather's garage and you have no idea what it is for.

I have a friend that collects old tools, manual drills and such. Some of them are quite exotic. When I'm at his place and I see them on the wall I make conversation by speculating on their former uses. To imagine what they were for, you have to enter a lost world, and sometimes my guesses

make my friend smile. Other times he's just as puzzled by the tools as I am.

Piety is like that. For some people anything that seems old-fashioned is dismissed with an indifferent shrug. The more literate may sense its religious connotations. But just what it was good for is anyone's guess.

Providentially, as I was working on this chapter, I was sitting in the lobby of an automotive repair shop waiting for my Jeep to finish its emissions inspection. I was writing in a notebook and next to me sat an elderly woman. "What are you writing?" she asked. I looked up and forced a smile. "A book," I said, thinking that would be enough to allow me to go back to my writing. It wasn't. "Oh, about what?" she said, moving to the edge of her seat. "It's about piety," I replied, again thinking that this would be the end of it. If the subject of religion can't end a conversation, what can? I was wrong again. "What's piety?" she asked.

Think about this for a second. Here was a woman who looked to be in her seventies and she didn't know what piety is.

"It is something related to religion," I told her. At last, the conversation ended. Then the guy behind the desk said my Jeep was ready.

I am old enough to remember when preachers promoted piety—particularly those whose vocabulary had been formed by reading 18th century evangelists like John Wesley or George Whitfield. In the old days people believed in the meanings of words, and they stuck with them.

And if a person didn't understand a word, you defined it for them. And if he didn't like its meaning, you'd try to help him see the value of the word anyway. Imagine that.

I can recall when people changed their minds about the word *piety*. Younger men began to prefer younger sounding terms. The word *devotions* was popular. Later, more sophisticated people preferred the term *spiritual disciplines*. Publishers really ran with that for a while. But folksy youth pastor types liked *Quiet Time*, QT for short.

There has been something of a downgrade here, even with *spiritual disciplines*. Can you detect it? Words retain an aftertaste, even when the old meanings are lost. Originally, piety said something like a mode of life. QT is for your to-do list.

This reveals something about the state of religion in our time. Now, *religion* is another word that has fallen out of favor. The Latin root, *religio*, means to bind. Is it any wonder that the apostles to popular culture now insist that "Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship"? You may have heard that slogan somewhere. But is it so? Does that do religion justice? The reason for bringing this up is what has happened to piety has also happened to religion. Both have been downgraded.

As wonderful as a personal relationship with Jesus is, the people that show the most enthusiasm for it do not give much thought to all the things that have to be in place in order for it to be possible. Take the Bible, for instance,

or the sacraments, or the creeds, or even prayer. All of these things must be in place before you can even imagine having a personal relationship with Jesus. Without archivists, and translators, and publishers, we wouldn't have Bibles that tell us about Jesus. Then there are Church councils that gave us the creeds which summarize what the Bible says about Jesus and His divine nature. And this is just a start. Even beyond those things, just consider all the ways that the Christian religion has influenced Western civilization for the good. Think about how the arts, the sciences, and our laws, customs, and holidays wouldn't even exist in their current forms without the Christian religion. No, you cannot reduce Christianity to a relationship; it is bigger than that. *Religion* really is a better word than *relationship* for describing what it is.

And I believe that the same goes for piety.

EVERY WORD MATTERS

If you ask someone to define the word *synonym* the definition you get will probably be something like, "a word that can substitute for another word." But there really aren't any true synonyms in this sense. Each word has its own history, and subtle things about it that distinguish it from similar words. *Relationship* doesn't really substitute for *religion*, and *devotions* won't do as a substitute for piety. The drive to find substitutes for old-fashioned words unintentionally eliminates meanings. We can see how it works it in

the book *1984*. There we have a fellow named Syme speaking to another fellow named Winston about the glories of “Newspeak” and their labors together at the Ministry of Truth:

It’s a beautiful thing, the Destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn’t only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word, which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take “good,” for instance. If you have a word like “good,” what need is there for a word like “bad”? “Ungood” will do just as well—better, because it’s an exact opposite, which the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of “good,” what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like “excellent” and “splendid” and all the rest of them? “Plusgood” covers the meaning or “doubleplusgood” if you want something stronger still. Of course we use those forms already, but in the final version of Newspeak there’ll be nothing else. In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be covered by only six words—in reality, only one word. Don’t you see the beauty of that, Winston? It was B.B.’s idea originally, of course,” he added as an afterthought.*

* George Orwell, *1984* (1949; New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 49.