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The Age of Polymorphous Perversity, Part One

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In 1930, the esteemed historian Christopher Dawson wrote this: “Western civilization at the present day is passing through a crisis, which is essentially different from everything that has previously been experienced. Other societies in the past have changes their social institutions or their religious beliefs under the influence of external forces or the slow development of internal growth. But none, like our own, has ever consciously faced a prospect of a fundamental alteration in the beliefs and institutions on which the whole fabric of social life rests.”

From the vantage point of 1930, Dawson looked forward to the rest of the 20th century, and he understood what was happening. He was a prophet.

In order to understand the shift that Dawson foresaw and that ultimately took place, it is necessary to look back to 1909, when Sigmund Freud released his understanding of human sexuality. Trying to understand something as powerful as sex, Freud turned to what he called the “infantile” stage of human development, and identified the leading characteristic of infantile sexuality as *polymorphous perversity*. Freud explained: “What makes an infant characteristically different from every other stage of human life is that the child is polymorphously perverse, is ready to demonstrate any kind of sexual behavior, with any kind of pleasure, without any kind of restraint.” He then explained how “civilization” emerges only after this innate, polymorphous perversity is restrained by psychological repression, social form, and custom. Such restraint, Freud felt, was inevitable and indeed necessary, for procreation is necessary for the continuation of the race, and therefore heterosexual coupling was absolutely essential for civilization itself.

Even if we finally reject Freud’s theory, it is crucial that we understand its influence. Freud is no doubt one of the ideological horsemen of the twentieth-century apocalypse, but even he was outdone by those who came after him.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Herbert Marcuse revisited Freud in his book *Eros and Civilization*, mixing his theories with those of Marx in order to develop a theory of sexuality as liberation. The whole problem, Marcuse thought, was the very restraint that Freud believed was inevitable and necessary, the repression that Freud saw leading to civilization itself. According to Marcuse, the only way to achieve liberation is to undo that repression, to reverse that restraint, and thus to unleash in society itself that infantile stage of pure sexuality—of polymorphous perversity.

When *Eros and Civilization* appeared in the 1960’s, it received much attention on college campuses—where such ideas are always met with an enthusiastic audience—but the rest of the culture remained largely unaware of, and untroubled by, the assault that had begun to take place upon the very foundations of civilization itself. Now, in the year 2005, it has become obvious that this ideology of polymorphous perversity is inch by inch—if not yard by yard—gaining ground. Read the daily newspaper, or just review the events of a typical week. Even something as basic as the heterosexual nature of

marriage is now very much under assault. The very idea of normality, or of fixed institutions, is being subverted by the culture and marginalized by cultural elites.

What we now face is the subversion of humanity's most basic categories and institutions—gender, marriage, and family. In the eyes of all too many in our culture, gender is merely a plastic social construct. Indeed, in the postmodern world, all realities are plastic and all principles are liquid. Everything can be changed. Nothing is fixed. All truth is relative, all truth is socially constructed, and anything which is constructed can also be deconstructed in order to liberate.

We are now told that even gender should be seen as a continuum. This means that human beings are no longer categorized as male and female, but as any number of chosen gender options. Furthermore, gender is flexible—at least according to the postmodern prophets of liberation. You can always change your gender if you do not like the gender you were assigned at birth. Interestingly, some surgeons are now even reversing gender transformation surgeries they had earlier performed.

All this represents a denial of gender as a part of the goodness of God's creation. According to the biblical account of creation, human beings were created as male and female, and these categories establish the very basis for human order. This is now dismissed as inherently oppressive and intolerant.

For years, the ideological elites have believed that marriage is repressive and inhibiting. It is, they say, merely a product of social evolution, an institution that developed because civilization needed a way to protect children and to encourage child rearing. But of course, that which has evolved can always evolve further, and the next step, we are told, is to move beyond marriage altogether. This was the goal of the cultural elites in the latter half of the 20th century, and we must admit that they have made great strides toward accomplishing this objective.

If any one institution in human life was most subverted in the 20th century, it was without doubt the institution of marriage. Assaulted by divorce, by lifestyle, by media, by law, by politics, and by custom, marriage was undermined in its very essence. Of course, the attack also necessarily took its toll on the family as well. The very idea of the family as a fixed unit—a husband and wife and their children, together with their extended family—is now seen as an archaic, antiquarian, and intolerant institution, one which must be undone in order that humanity may be liberated from oppression.

The subversion of marriage and the family has extended to law and morality, to authority and to custom. The very habits of human life—the customs and traditions on which civilization is grounded—are now being reversed, marginalized, and discarded in an effort to eliminate all norms by normalizing the abnormal. For those whose agenda is to undermine Judeo-Christian morality and to disconnect Western civilization from biblical norms, there is no better strategy than to subvert marriage, family, and sexuality, and unleash on society an age and culture of polymorphous perversity.

