**Roots of the Breakdown of the Family in America**

These are private opinions, but based on the work and observations of Robert Lewis, Ph.D. and Fr Matthew Van Smoorenburg, LC.

The main thesis is that the breakdown of the family began long before the rebellion of the 1960’s, and can be traced throughout the events of the 20th Century. The breakdown can be attributed in many ways to (a) the reduction of the role of the father, (b) the “outsourcing” of education, away from the family and into institutions, including Church institutions and (c) a failure to respond to the need to reinforce the roles of parents.

Timeline:

1900’s - Agrarian society where the family was naturally tight-knit and where dad and mom educated kids in the most essential skills: those of religion, family relationships, practical skills around the house, and character. More or less, generally, the relational, rational and material needs of the person could be met in this environment.

WWI – Dad is away and for the first time in American society, mom runs the show.

1920’s – “The Roaring 20’s” where a war-trained, rapidly industrialized nation indulged in the “goods” of materialism.

1930’s – Depression, where dad’s role was, of necessity, reduced exclusively to that of bread-winner. He was no longer the “priest” of the family and no less and less an educator.

WWII – Men left again, experienced the trauma and the thrill of war, learned to organize men and give commands through an impersonal system. Mom really ran the show at home and went to work.

Post-WWII America – “The Greatest Generation” came home, having experienced war, having grown up in the depression and perhaps during WWI as well. These men sank all of their time and hearts into building businesses with the now-dominant American dollar, but were emotionally absent with their wives or children. They had learned to run things in the military, in a regimented, rule-based way. Mom resents Dad coming back and simply expecting to be in charge when she had worked herself to the bone to keep the house running. Her husband is a different man and he misses the accomplishment, order, discipline and camaraderie of the armed forces. The family and church and school were basically all on the same page as regards moral values, but underneath, the value of the person was not being recognized and loved apart from a system of punishment/reward, good behavior/bad behavior, which does not reflect the full truth of the human person.

1950’s – No Fault Divorce first legalized. Beneath the “Leave It To Beaver” image of 1950’s America, the family was deeply suffering from an absence of intimate friendships in the family. A large enough movement of frustrated or abused women was able to get the first states to pass no-fault divorce legislation.

1960’s – Though the factors are complex, one perspective on the sexual revolution is a rebellion by the kids born to the veterans of WWII, rebelling against the kind of “fake” (non-relational and emotionally absent) marriage that their parents lived. The kids wanted “real love” which they mistakenly took for “free love.” The pendulum swung from all rules to no rules, from emotional absence to emotional chaos. But the “free love” of the hippies was no more capable of meeting the relational, rational and material needs of the person than their parents’ system of punishment-reward could.

1970’s to present – Radical feminism, contraception and abortion have sealed the deal, further splitting the reality of marriage from family, and distorting these concepts altogether.

Throughout – The institutionalization and outsourcing of education: as the process of breakdown in intimate relationships between parents and their children took place, parents found themselves less and less equipped to raise emotionally healthy kids with solid character. Education lost its basis in the home, where character, religion, and practical life-skills were at its heart. Instead, education was reduced to academic realms and parents were left out of it. Increasingly, education was seen as necessarily and entirely “outsourced” to “experts.” Unfortunately, the Church had not seen this development and has cooperated with it since the 50’s through an *exclusively* institutional focus on CCD and Catholic Schools.

*The most urgent task of the Church, therefore, is to “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse,” (Malachi 4:6) by equipping parents to be good parents.*