PART ONE

SEXUAL CHAOS

IN THE

CULTURE
SEX AT THE CENTER OF THE MORAL CRISIS

SOMETHING ENORMOUS IS COMING

I had the privilege in February 1991 of bringing my wife and sons, one five and the other two, to meet the first President Bush in the Oval Office. Needless to say it was a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. It was a farewell privilege for serving on the President’s White House staff, and though I had served two years I had never before met personally with the President in his office. It was a place of tremendous dignity, where people met with the leader of the free world by invitation only.

Since we were coming as a family with two young boys, we were very concerned to avoid embarrassment. My wife and I dressed our boys better than ever before, and we carefully instructed them how to behave. But since they were only five and two, there was only so much we could do. We arrived—anxious parents with children—and were ushered into what is perhaps the most dignified office on earth. We felt terribly vulnerable! To our great relief, the president sensed how we felt and, opening a side door, ushered in Ranger, one of the first-family dogs. The boys were delighted, as were we! They with meeting a dog, and we with a gentleman as concerned with preserving our dignity as with his own.

Four years later, Bill Clinton, the next President of the United States, hid from security cameras behind that same door, where he engaged in acts of immoral sex with a White House intern named Monica Lewinsky. The nation was shocked, and many at first refused to believe what they heard. At the start, Hilary Clinton herself said that, if it were true, her husband should resign to preserve the dignity of the presidency.

Sadly, it was true. President Clinton did actually commit acts of flagrant sexual immorality in the most dignified office in the land. But he never
resigned, and Hillary, Congress, the media, and most Americans instead changed their minds on sexual morality. After getting over the initial shock, most simply decided that what Bill Clinton did sexually, even in the Oval Office, was not all that important. Some decided it might not even have been immoral. And even if it was, perhaps sexual morality was such a private thing that others should not believe it affects public dignity no matter what a president does, or where he may choose to do it.

By excusing his behavior and refusing to resign, President Clinton affected moral attitudes on sex in the culture, moving many further along in a permissive direction. Many who before thought such behavior was shocking, decided it was their own shocked reaction, not Clinton’s behavior, that was wrong. But while Clinton’s self-justification and refusal to resign affected many, it was in reality a small part of something much larger. Sexual morality in America has been changing dramatically for decades, and what some called the Clinton factor was itself more a symptom than a cause.

Something enormous affecting sex has been changing American culture, and the cause is something far more powerful and significant than any president, movie, law, political party, celebrity, book, CD, magazine, or video. Like the ripples in the water glass in the opening scene of Jurassic Park, shivers in the moral ground on which Americans stand signal the approach of something enormous. Like tremors rising from deep underground, something seismic is affecting the foundations of our culture. Since we became a nation, nothing so divisive has threatened common life in America, and never have the stakes been so high. In just one generation, we have witnessed a total revolution in the way most people think of sex, and this in turn is creating a demand for monumental revisions affecting every social institution at almost every level.

Pornography in print, celluloid, and electronic forms is exploding, and what shocked our parents is considered standard for entertainment and advertising today. Same-sex relationships are considered normal, and restricting sex to marriage is considered abnormal. Behavior once thought shameful is flaunted now with pride, and praised as daring and courageous. Marriage has never been so uncertain. Sexual identity has never been more confused, and manners expected between men and women have never been more conflicted. Not just the idea of saving sex for marriage but now even marriage itself is under attack, and everything related to sex, gender, and family, whether in law, politics, defense, education, entertainment, health, business, or religion, is being shaken to the core.

The United States Census in 2000 showed that two-parent families now
represent less than 25 percent of all households in America, down from 45 percent as recently as 1960. Over the same forty-year period, the percentage of single-parent families tripled, the divorce rate doubled, the percentage of people getting married at all dropped lower than ever before, cohabitation increased 1000 percent (by a factor of 10), and the rate of illegitimacy (births to unmarried women) rose by more than 500 percent (by a factor of 5). But while this rise in illegitimate births is terrible, the actual rise in illegitimate pregnancy has been at least two or three times higher, because 80 percent of abortions in America (which are not counted in the illegitimacy rate) are performed on women who are not married. No one keeps statistics on the rate of sexual promiscuity, but indications like these show that the rise in promiscuity must be epidemic as well.

Yet impersonal statistics like these tell only part of the story. To understand the whole story we must look past raw numbers and consider how these changes are affecting real people in real life.

First, consider the way changing views on sexual morality are straining the military services. In 1991, a few months after I arrived at the Pentagon as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower, we were shocked by the shameful behavior of Naval aviators attending a professional conference called Tailhook. This annual event had become known for sexual entertainment, which was bad enough. But as the problem unfolded, I was soon more amazed by reactions in official Washington than with what originally took place at Tailhook.

Most politicians and members of the media were not particularly concerned about the rampant promiscuity, marital infidelity, or failure of officers to set an example of virtue. Instead, I found that what shocked and concerned most others around me was the idea that men aroused by sexual entertainment could not at the same time respect the dignity of female colleagues. For most of my colleagues in Washington, it seemed that the problem was not sexual entertainment for military officers but failing to distinguish the entertainers from colleagues while feeling aroused. We had totally different views about moral responsibility concerning sex, and clearly my way of thinking was no longer the majority position.

Or, consider the way changing views on sexual morality are affecting students. Cohabitation among unmarried college students is now considered so normal that Yale University, in 1997, could not imagine why anyone would need to be excused from a university housing policy assigning unmarried male and female students to the same dormitory, on the same floor, where they were expected to use the toilet and shower facilities together at the same time.
This went beyond tolerating promiscuity to demanding that even modest students live immodestly.

Four orthodox Jewish students asked to be exempt from Yale’s housing policy because, they explained, it went against their religious tradition and individual moral conscience. But Yale refused. To the university, denying the relevance of gender differences in the most intimate situations was far more important than respecting scruples based on religion, tradition, or conscience. When Yale denied their request, these students filed a suit in court. But the court favored Yale and ruled against the students as well.

Or, consider the way changing views on sexual morality are threatening the freedom of private groups to continue teaching and applying traditional standards. Homosexual behavior is now so widely accepted that the courts are under enormous pressure to move beyond tolerance and to actually deny the rights of groups still convinced that homosexual behavior is wrong. In 2000 a deeply divided U.S. Supreme Court, on a 5-4 vote, denied that the federal government should punish private organizations like the Boys Scouts that teach and apply traditional sexual standards. Although the Court did not change its view of the Constitution this time, it very nearly did. From the way it handled this case, we know the highest court in our land is just one vote away from revolutionizing sexual norms throughout American law.

Or, consider the way changing views on sexual morality are affecting the business world. Top business leaders are moving rapidly to be seen as supportive of the radical effort to redefine what it means to be an officially recognized, morally legitimate member of a family. Businesses are abandoning the idea that being in a family requires either marriage or responsibility for children, and are replacing it with the radical new idea that anyone living in a sexual relationship is a perfectly legitimate family member regardless of marriage or children. As a result, most major corporations, including IBM, AT&T, Sprint, Hewlett-Packard, Xerox, Time-Warner, Microsoft, Kodak, and Disney have been revising company policies on who qualifies to receive employee family benefits. Most major companies in America are now supporting policies that deny any basis for distinguishing between heterosexual marriage and family relationships and all kinds of nonmarital domestic partnerships involving same-sex couples, live-in-lovers, or even just good friends.

Or, finally, consider the way changing views on sexual morality are provoking conflict over sex education. Jane Fonda has become the main spokesperson for a media crusade funded by Durex, the world’s largest producer of condoms, which is aimed at saving America from the danger of gov-
ernment-sponsored programs promoting abstinence. This former anti-
America protester, who made Vietcong propaganda films and played a sex
kitten in the movie Barbarella, is outraged that American tax dollars are being
used to support the view that sex without marriage is not perfectly normal
or safe. In Fonda’s words, “Abstinence until marriage is based on an unreal
world that isn’t there.” And she thinks most people would be shocked to dis-
cover “their tax money is being used for that.”

These are just a few of many examples illustrating the way thinking on
sexual morality is changing the culture. But however much change there is in
the culture at large, nowhere is conflict over sex raising more trouble than
among Christians in the church. Opposing factions are tearing churches and
whole denominations apart. Sexual standards long thought essential are
being denounced as un-Christian, and top officials in the church are in some
cases themselves claiming that the church will die if Christians do not learn
to reject the Bible and take a new, more sensual approach on sex.

I actually believe that never in history has the church been torn by more
serious, widespread controversy. Never has there been such ferment—so
many articles and books; so many denominational reports; so many battles
at convention, or presbytery, or general assembly; so many pronouncements;
so many statements; so many major shifts in official policy—over such criti-
cally important areas of doctrine. In fact, never has there been such opposi-
tion to the authority and relevance of scripture, such demand for revising
everything Christian, or such deep and bitter division between crusading fac-
tions as now being caused by conflict over sex—not when the church was
invaded by gnosticism in the first century, not when the church split between
East and West in the sixth century, not when the church divided over the
Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, not when German higher
criticism infiltrated the church in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century,
and not even during recent battles dividing churches, denominations, and
Christian organizations over the issue of biblical inerrancy.

There simply has been nothing comparable in the entire history of the
church, no other time when turmoil has risen so high or reached so far. The
stakes in the current conflict over sex are more critical, more central, and
more essential than in any controversy the church has ever known. This is a
momentous statement, but I make it soberly, without exaggeration. Conflict
over sex these days is not just challenging tradition, orthodoxy, and respect
for authority in areas such as ordination, marriage, and gender roles. And it
does not just affect critically important doctrines like the sanctity of human
life, the authority and trustworthiness of scripture, the Trinity, and the inca-
nation of Christ. Rather, war over sex among Christians is now raging over absolutely essential matters of faith without which no one can truly be a Christian in the first place—matters such as sin, salvation, the gospel, and the identity of God himself. These are not marginal issues! What is approaching us truly is enormous.

**A DIFFERENT FORCE IS RISING**

In 1971 astronomers discovered the presence of a very different, previously unknown phenomenon called a *black hole*, after noticing that matter and light were acting strangely in some regions of space. Black holes have such enormous gravitational pull that even light cannot escape, which means they cannot be seen. But they have a tremendous effect on everything nearby. They bend space. They bend light. They draw planets, stars, and galaxies into orbit.

Not only is something enormous approaching in American culture concerning sex, but a new and different force is rising that is giving tremendous new power to those attacking traditional morality. And, just as astronomers discovered black holes in space after noticing strange new effects on other heavenly bodies, we can observe sexual morality changing in strange new ways that indicate the presence of something new in the culture—something with enormous pull. Changes affecting sexual morality are occurring these days that cannot be explained on the basis of natural lust and youthful rebellion. They are coming from a source that is far more significant and powerful. There is indeed a dark new spiritual presence in the culture that, like a black hole, is bending morality in a new direction and pulling everything close into its orbit.

A different view on sexual morality, involving a strange new force linking spirituality with what has traditionally been considered sexual sin, was evident in the movie *Titanic*. James Cameron, the director, told viewers the movie was not the usual romance story because it had a morally inspiring religious message. But what sort of *religion* inspiring what sort of *morality*? Rose, the heroine, in the opening scene credits Jack, a fellow-passenger, not only with saving her physically when the ocean liner sank, but with saving her in a spiritual sense as well. In her words, “he saved me in every way that a person can be saved.”

From the story she tells, it is clear that Rose’s inclusion of spiritual *salvation* relates to premarital sex she had with Jack just hours before the ship went down. The claim means that she was saved *spiritually*—reached a higher dimension of spirituality—through what the Bible calls sexual sin. So, the reli-
gion James Cameron recommends is a religion promising salvation through sex, and the morality he thinks inspiring is a morality that treats sexual sin as if it were heroic and salvific.

This very different view of sexual morality—this different view involving a strange new force linking spirituality with sexual sin—was also displayed at a high school graduation ceremony in Vermont in 1998. During the ceremony, a member of the graduating class, Kate Logan, started delivering a speech. But as she spoke, Kate Logan stunned her classmates, their parents, and the visiting dignitaries by taking off her clothes and finishing the speech naked. Afterwards she said it was an effort to express the *spirituality* of graduation. She explained that “When I was up there, it felt natural. It didn’t feel like I was doing anything crazy.” She was not pulling a prank and did not think she had done anything wrong. Rather, she believed it made perfect sense and deserved special praise. Why? Because what she did came from a new and different way of thinking about sex and spirituality. To Kate Logan, disrobing in front of everyone at graduation made sense because she believed unrestrained sex is the one true path to spiritual life.

This different view on sexual morality, involving a strange new force linking spirituality with sexual sin, is also seen at the Burning Man festival held annually at Black Rock Desert, Nevada. This festival of the new counterculture is named for the closing ceremony, in which a large wooden dummy is set on fire. It started on Baker Beach, near San Francisco, in 1986, and then moved to Nevada when the event outgrew the original location. Now more than twenty-four thousand participants attend each year, some from other countries but most from places around central California like the San Francisco Bay area and Silicon Valley.

These are not drifters looking for handouts but are for the most part well-educated, middle-class professionals trying to go beyond conventions and enhance their lives in exciting new ways. Burning Man is a festival for and by a new breed of young, urban professionals whom *Time* magazine has described as “bright young pagans: the computer-programming, anthropologically aware polymaths who have popularized the imaginative role-playing bulletin boards of cyberspace.”

Larry Harvey, who began the festival, says, “It’s about sacred space,” and others say it is about “radical self-expression” or “power to create and direct your destiny.” But however they describe it, attendees all seem to be searching for meaning and trying to either find or enhance spirituality by overcoming conventional barriers like limiting sex to marriage and keeping it separate from spiritual worship. The attendees say, “We are all gods and god-
desses here,” and think spiritual answers will be discovered if you just “trust your soul to understand everything it experiences.” As reported in 1999, one young woman explained she had come because there at the Burning Man festival “I can be free, I can be naked, I can be fat, I can be gay. You can just be whatever it is you need to be, today.”

The festival lasts a week and includes events like a daily “drag” race (men in dresses riding bicycles), a Friday afternoon Critical Bike Ride (hundreds of topless women riding bicycles in a circle around cheering spectators), and a Saturday morning Massive Nude Photograph (thousands of naked people lying around together while photographers take pictures). People take off their clothes, paint their bodies wild colors, and dance. They also wander around visiting theme camps like the “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” (homosexual men dressed like nuns), “Winninbago” (topless lesbians in a Winnebago), and the “Temple of Ishtar” (women giving lectures on the evils of Christianity and turning into goddesses for periods of sexual worship). Clearly the major theme at Burning Man seems to be searching for the best way to enhance spirituality through sex.

This different view on sexual morality involving a strange new force linking spirituality with sexual sin is also seen in a program promoting permissive sex in churches under the guise of sex education. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), founded in 1964 to provide leadership for the sexual revolution, has since grown to be the leading proponent in America for permissive sex education in public schools. Until 1998, the group considered itself secular and avoided religion. But starting in 1998, SIECUS has focused on churches, hoping to change what Christians think and teach about sexual morality. (Note: A full discussion of SIECUS, in a special report by Focus on the Family, is reproduced in Appendix C.)

The new SIECUS thrust linking permissive sex with spirituality began when the organization launched what it called the Religion Initiative. This represents a new strategy in which SIECUS plans to infiltrate churches with sex education materials that take a permissive view on sexual morality, justifying it in terms of nonbiblical spirituality. Basic principles guiding this new approach were released two years later in a document titled a *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*. (Note: A copy of this declaration is included in Appendix B.) The declaration described sexual activity as “integral to our spirituality” and suggested that restricting sex risks “loss of meaning.” At the time, Debra Haffner, president of SIECUS, told reporters her organization believed churches needed a new approach on reli-
tion and sex because, “For too long the only voices in the public square on
religion and sexuality have been the anti-sexuality pronouncements of the
religious right.” She was saying that the biblical approach on sexual moral-
ity was too repressive and that SIECUS was therefore promoting a different
approach for churches—one that affirms spirituality in ways that never deny
sexual desire.

Finally, this different view on sexual morality, involving linking spiritu-
ality with sexual sin, has been growing among a rising number of celebrities,
social critics, scholars, and theologians who are leading the feminist and
homosexual revolutions and who see themselves on the cutting edge of phi-
losophy, religion, and culture. Because we will discuss many of these people
in the next three chapters, they will not be covered separately here except to
note that what they are saying, writing, and doing is having a tremendous
effect.

BIBLICAL STANDARDS AT THE FLASH POINT

Different approaches on sexual morality are splitting the culture and the
church into opposing factions. The traditional approach to sexual moral-
ity, based on scripture and long believed essential to American society, holds
that sex is for moral purposes beyond the experience of sex itself—moral
purposes that serve to support and fulfill marriage and family duties. These
purposes are fixed. They never change, and are the same for everyone
regardless of what a person thinks, feels, or chooses. Sex is for husbands
and wives, who then become fathers and mothers responsible for raising
children to be productive members of society. Sex is not allowed except in
marriage. Marriage justifies sex; sex does not justify marriage. Serving the
family legitimizes happiness; happiness does not legitimize serving the fam-
ily. Sex is not for everyone, but is a privilege saved for people who promise
God, the community, and each other to use sex only in the right way and
for the right reasons.

With the rise of modernism, an opposing, permissive approach to sexual
morality rose to usurp the traditional approach in American culture. Under
modernism, which denies spiritual life, sex has no necessary purpose or sig-
nificance. Individuals use sex however they choose, and what they choose
does not matter to anyone else. Sex is strictly a personal choice, and the only
thing everyone must accept is that everyone must have sex regardless of
whether or not he or she is married. Sex justifies marriage; marriage does not
justify sex. Families depend on being happy, and no one is compelled to stay
in the family if he or she is unhappy. According to this non-spiritual version
of the permissive approach, sex is actually nothing special. It is just a commodity one consumes without creating or assuming anything beyond the immediate experience.

Starting in the 1990s, however, postmodernism has generated a new version of the permissive approach. Former proponents of the modernist, non-spiritual version decided they could no longer tolerate acting as if sex were nothing special. But neither did they wish to give up permissive sex. Thus a new postmodern version has evolved, one that affirms spirituality while justifying sensuality. According to this version, sex is again profound and deeply meaningful because it enhances spirituality. Sex is not ultimately for love, marriage, or family relationships. Rather it is for connecting yourself with spiritual power running the universe. Sex involves cosmic power without sacrificing human independence. The spirituality of sex is not limited by anything beyond sex, but rather is more like electricity, with everyone controlling a switch.13

Living to please God while engaging the surrounding culture requires knowing how that culture affects you. Real truth as revealed by God never changes. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But the ways real truth is attacked by human culture change all the time, and Jesus severely rebuked those who studied scripture but did not think it important to understand how the surrounding culture of their time was attacking real truth. He said,

> When it is evening, you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.”
> And in the morning, “It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.” You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times (Matt. 16:2-3).

It is important that we know not only what God says in scripture but also how that truth is coming under attack in the culture around us. When we are attacked, we cannot stand firmly on the side of truth if we do not know where the enemy is aiming or from where he is firing. That is what Jesus meant by criticizing religious contemporaries for failing to “interpret the signs of the times.”

Considering what is happening today, the one development (or sign) attacking truth in American culture more severely than anything else is permissive sexual morality energized by nonbiblical spirituality. In other words, the greatest single moral-spiritual threat to truth in our culture these days is a rising fascination with paganism that defines morality as anything spiritual and then reduces it to anything sexual. Richard Land, president of the
Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, was right in 1998 to observe,

The number one battle line now, and for the next decade, for the soul and conscience of America is the struggle over sexuality. The issues are clear and compelling. We must either reassert Judeo-Christian sexual values or be submerged in a polluted sea of pagan sexuality.\textsuperscript{14}

Sexual morality is the most important moral-spiritual issue of our time because it is the pivot on which the foundations of American culture as a whole are being turned from genuine moral-spiritual truth to the complete reverse. And because the future of social and religious life in America, and perhaps even the survival of America herself, is at stake, powerful forces are battling in opposite directions—one using sexual revolution to shift American cultural foundations in a pagan direction, and one resisting sexual revolution to keep the order we have from crumbling.

**Sexual Morality as Pivot Point for the Moral Crisis**

- Leads to eventual social collapse
  - Leads to crime, drugs, murder, suicide, riots, truancy, violence, poverty, litigiousness, and economic weakness
  - Leads to family breakdown, divorce, unwed single parenting, cohabitation, undisciplined children, teen pregnancy, pornography, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, domestic partnerships, prostitution, and gender role confusion
  - Weakens law, government, and family life
  - Destroys respect for life, for self, for others, for community, for truth, for authority, and for accountability
  - Threatens sanctity of life
    - Threatens sanctity of procreation
    - Sex in any form
    - Sex without commitment
    - Sex without consequences
    - Sexual morality
Evangelicals must understand that total sexual revolution in America is not coincidental but is a carefully planned strategy called deconstruction that is being developed by those wanting to redefine, redesign, and reconstruct every institution in America (marriage, family, law, politics, business, defense, entertainment, education, and religion) from top to bottom. They know and understand that once sexual morality changes, the whole social system has to be completely redefined. And the main power energizing this movement is shifting from the mere promise of free sex to sexual indulgence justified as spiritual and cosmic. Like switching from low-test to high-octane fuel, the movement is shifting from natural-lust to natural-lust-energized-by-crusading-spirituality.

Of course this has been generating tremendous conflict in many areas, and everywhere controversy arises it ultimately has to do with whether biblical truth on sex is indeed true. Is the traditional approach to sexual morality, originally found in scripture, unchangeably true for everyone? Or is it a product of human imagination and nothing more? If the traditional approach was made up by men, then it makes perfect sense to reject everything it restricts in favor of doing whatever people want. But if sex was designed by a creator who assigned rules for how we should use it, those standards apply to everyone, and rejecting them is horribly wicked and dangerous.

The stakes in this battle are growing higher every day, and in every instance biblical standards are at the flash point. We do not deny that the situation is complex, but evangelicals must realize there are now only two main forces dividing the culture and the church over sexual morality. Biblical Christianity is the one main force energizing those who are battling for sexual restraint, and sexualized paganism is now the one main force energizing those who are battling for sensuality. These two moral-spiritual forces are the only ones with enough power to make any difference, and while Christianity has up till now enjoyed the advantage of being the only contestant with spiritual answers, we are entering a new season in the culture in which both major contestants are offering spiritual solutions.

Seismic Shifts Resulting from Modernism

Attitudes about sexual morality have changed dramatically in America since the 1960s sexual revolution. Naturally this did not happen in a day, but change has occurred rapidly. And even though some have stood their ground, no one denies that most people are now taking a radically different approach to sex from even a generation ago. What change we have seen in the culture has actually taken place in two stages, with the first led by modernism and
the second by postmodernism. While the influence of modernism on sexual morality has taken different directions—depending on whether people focus on affection, enjoyment, or a sense of fulfillment—the main emphasis of modernists has always been denying spiritual life, arguing that morality is a matter of private taste and therefore biblical standards on sex have to be kept from influencing public life.

Modernism has produced major changes in the way most Americans think about sexual morality, and these include the following:

1. There has been a shift from thinking sex should fit moral standards, to thinking moral standards should fit sex.
2. There has been a shift from thinking sexual morality depends on something greater than sex, to thinking sexual morality depends on nothing but sex.
3. There has been a shift from thinking sexual morality is beyond individual choice, to thinking sexual morality all depends on individual choice.
4. There has been a shift from thinking sexual morality is the same for all regardless of how anyone feels, to thinking sexual morality is different for each person depending on how each person feels.
5. There has been a shift from thinking sexual standards never change, to thinking sexual standards change all the time.
6. There has been a shift from thinking sexual standards are public and sexual behavior ought to be private, to thinking sexual standards are private and sexual behavior is public.
7. There has been a shift from thinking sexual discipline is a moral solution, to thinking sexual discipline is a moral problem.
8. There has been a shift from thinking desires for sex should never be trusted, to thinking desires for sex should never be questioned.
9. There has been a shift from thinking sex involves interconnecting dimensions (emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual) that cannot be separated, to thinking sex can be limited to one dimension without affecting other dimensions.
10. There has been a shift from thinking sex is something personal that necessarily creates a relationship, to thinking sex is nothing personal and therefore has nothing necessarily to do with relationships.
11. There has been a shift from thinking marriage is necessary for sex, to thinking sex is necessary for marriage.
12. There has been a shift from thinking sex is a privilege reserved for people committed to certain goals, to thinking everyone is entitled to sex unrelated to commitment or goals.
SEISMIC SHIFTS RESULTING FROM POSTMODERNISM

Since the 1990s, sexual attitudes in the culture have been moving past modernism into a new, postmodern direction. The main difference is that, while modernism denied spiritual life, postmodernism affirms it, and nowhere more strongly than in relation to sex. But the sort of spirituality affirmed is pagan, not Christian. It approaches spirituality in a way that views it, not as something beyond but rather as something under human control, and this makes sexual morality even more radically permissive. And even though postmodern paganism is radically permissive, its affirmation of spirituality is causing it to infiltrate parts of the church even more swiftly than it infiltrates the broader culture.

The influence of postmodern paganism on sexual morality in both the church and the culture is causing radical new changes in the way many people think, including the following:

1. There is a shift from theologies of sex, to sexual theologies. In other words, there is a shift from addressing sex in terms of Christian faith and doctrine, to addressing Christian faith and doctrine in terms of sex.
2. There is a shift from thinking sexual passion is best experienced by satisfying God, to thinking God is best experienced by satisfying sexual passion. In other words, there is a shift from thinking a relationship with God affects sex, to thinking a relationship with God is experienced through sex.
3. There is a shift from making sure that sexual experience is consistent with the character of God, to making sure that the character of God is consistent with sexual experience. In other words, there is a shift from measuring sex by God, to measuring God by sex.
4. There is a shift from restricting sexual behavior to keep sex holy, to releasing sexual experience because nothing ever makes sex unholy. In other words, there is a shift from thinking sex is easily corrupted, to thinking sex is impossible to corrupt.
5. There is a shift from thinking salvation frees sinners from what the Bible calls sexual sin, to thinking salvation frees men and women to indulge in what the Bible calls sexual sin. In other words, there is a shift from thinking salvation overcomes bondage to sexual immorality, to thinking salvation overcomes the fear that sex is ever immoral.
6. There is a shift from interpreting sex according to the Bible, to interpreting the Bible according to sex. In other words, there is a shift from applying scripture to interpreting sex and toward applying sex to interpreting scripture.
7. There is a shift from viewing sexual sin as an indulging of desires that alienates a person from God, to viewing sexual sin as a denying of desires that alienates a person from self. In other words, there is a shift from fear of opposing God, to fear of opposing self.

8. There is a shift from thinking sexual desires need to be disciplined because human nature is fallen, to thinking sexual desires should be unrestrained because there is nothing wrong with human nature. In other words, there is a shift from perfecting human nature by denying the flesh, to perfecting human nature by indulging the flesh.

9. There is a shift from viewing the church as a community of people who submit to God and give up trying to justify themselves, to viewing the church as a community of people who submit to no one and justify themselves by affirming sexual desires. In other words, there is a shift from thinking the church consists of repentant sinners, to thinking the church consists of people who deny having any sin for which they must repent.

10. There is a shift from sex being part of living life for God, to God being part of living life for sex. In other words, there is a shift from sexual life being spiritual, to spiritual life being sexual.

11. There is a shift from the rule of God over sex, to ruling God by sex. In other words, there is a shift from trusting the power of God to control sex, to trusting the power of sex to control God.

12. There is a shift from worshiping a God who became flesh, to worshiping flesh that becomes God. In other words, there is a shift from worshiping God out of gratitude for sex, to worshiping God as sex.

WE HAVE BEEN WARNED OF THIS

Although paganism’s merging of promiscuity with spirituality is new in the West today, it is not new in other parts of the world nor is it new even in our own history. In fact, sensuality energized by religion has been more typical in human culture over time than the restraining of sexual desires mandated by our Creator. Sexual paganism has not been a force in the West since the rise of Christianity. But now, as the culture rejects morality rooted in scripture and supported by centuries of Christian tradition, nothing remains to restrain the powerful attraction of justifying sensuality in spiritual terms.

So, even though sexual paganism might feel novel and exciting to contemporary Americans, it really is nothing of the sort. Sexual paganism is a very old challenge to Christian morality that in fact never went away. It has been there all along, waiting in the wings for a time when the culture would tire of sexual restraint, lose respect for biblical standards, and seek something
else to replace Christian answers to our need. Evangelical leaders in the past have tried to alert Christians to this danger lurking in the culture, and have warned what to expect should the church lose confidence in God’s moral revelation, or should the culture lose respect for its Christian heritage.

**Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920)**

In 1898, the Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper spoke at Princeton Seminary, where he told students and faculty the ultimate opponent of Christianity is, and has always been, paganism. He went on to alert Christians that paganism was on the move and would again become a major challenge to Christianity in the West. More than a hundred years ago, Kuyper was warning Christians in America that “pagan thought, pagan aspirations, pagan ideals are gaining ground even among us and penetrating to the very heart of the rising generation.” And he was especially concerned that Christians “not forget that the fundamental contrast has always been, still is, and will be until the end: Christianity and Paganism.”

According to Kuyper, the greatest problem we have as finite creatures is relating with the infinite. The ultimate dilemma we have as creatures living in material bodies in a material world is how to gain meaning and significance beyond material existence. In scripture we learn that God has already solved the problem. The Creator, who stands over creation, has made a way for us to connect with him on a personal basis that neither sacrifices his transcendence nor compromises his holiness. But, Kuyper pointed out, the main opposition to this amazing answer is “paganism, which in its most general form is known by the fact that it surmises, assumes and worships God in the creature.” The difference between the two solutions—one offered by Christianity and the other by paganism—is that, while Christianity solves the problem of human significance by linking us with the infinite on God’s terms, paganism claims the problem can be solved by reaching the infinite on our own terms without depending on or submitting to anyone else.

Kuyper feared that, because modernism was leading the culture to reject Christianity, Western culture would again succumb to paganism. And he observed, “Ever since it entered its ‘mystical’ period, modernism . . . in Europe and America, has acknowledged the necessity of carving out a new form for the religious life of our time.” In place of Christianity, he saw that,

a kind of hollow piety is again exercising its enticing charms, and every day it is becoming more fashionable to take a plunge into the warm stream of mysticism. With an almost sensual delight this modern mysti-
cism quaffs its intoxicating draught from the nectar-cup of some intangible infinite.\(^\text{18}\)

Thus Kuyper over a century ago warned there would be a major conflict dividing the culture, with the major contestants being “Christian faith . . . against renewed paganism [which is now] collecting its forces and gaining day by day.”\(^\text{19}\) Kuyper’s warning was general and did not especially address sexual morality. But he knew there would be enormous consequences, and conflict over sexual morality was certainly included when he spoke about renewed paganism offering “intoxicating draughts” of “sensual delight.”

**C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)**

Fifty years after Kuyper spoke at Princeton, C. S. Lewis warned Christians of much the same thing. He also was concerned that, although Christianity had been the dominant moral-spiritual force in Western culture for centuries, we could not assume that paganism was gone or that it would not return as soon as people lost respect for Christian faith and morality. Rather than paganism, Lewis spoke of pantheism, which he saw becoming ever more popular in the elite intellectual circles of his time. But Lewis was, in fact, addressing the same thing as Kuyper because Lewis’s pantheism included what he called “Nature religions” that “sanctify . . . our whole biological life” and therefore worship the natural “Life-force” by engaging in rituals like sex “with real women in the temple of the fertility goddess.”\(^\text{20}\)

In 1947 Lewis already knew that modern philosophy and modern science were both “quite powerless to curb the human impulse toward pantheism [paganism],” and he believed the growing influence of pagan pantheism was already “nearly as strong today as it was in ancient India or in ancient Rome.”\(^\text{21}\) According to Lewis, people in elite circles who thought what they were doing was new and enlightening were wrong because,

Pantheism [paganism] is in fact the permanent natural bent of the human mind; the permanent ordinary level below which man sometimes sinks, under the influence of priestcraft and superstition, but above which his own unaided efforts can never raise him for very long. . . . It is the attitude into which the human mind automatically falls when left to itself. . . . If “religion” means simply what man says about God, and not what God does about man, then Pantheism [paganism] almost is religion. And “religion” in that sense has, in the long run, only one really formidable opponent—namely Christianity.\(^\text{22}\)
Like Kuyper, Lewis believed that paganism-pantheism was Christianity’s ultimate opponent and that, should the influence of Christianity weaken, it would assure the immediate return of paganism-pantheism in Western culture. Without Christianity, modern culture would not be able to resist the lure of sensual spirituality. And, while Lewis also remained general and did not address sexual morality in specific terms, the brief reference he made to sexual worship shows that Lewis was aware that sex would have to play a major role in the conflict ahead.

**Francis A. Schaeffer (1912–1984)**

In 1970, Francis Schaeffer said that he saw America heading toward a “revolution with repression” aimed especially at removing the influence of Bible-believing Christians in the culture. He urged,

> the church today should be getting ready and talking about issues of tomorrow and not about issues of 20 and 30 years ago, because the church is going to be squeezed in a wringer. If we found it tough in these last few years, what are we going to do when we are faced with the real changes that are ahead?23

And then in 1984, just before he died, Schaeffer again warned evangelicals:

> The titanic freedoms which we once enjoyed have been cut loose from their Christian restraints and are becoming a force of destruction leading to chaos. And when this happens, there really are very few alternatives. All morality becomes relative, law becomes arbitrary, and society moves toward disintegration.24

The reason for the crisis he saw emerging was that modernism was generating a moral-spiritual vacuum that people would not be able to tolerate very long. He said,

> modern man does in fact assume—wittingly or unwittingly—that the universe and man can be explained by the impersonal plus time plus chance. . . . But man has aspirations; he has what I call mannishness. He desires that love be more than being in bed with a woman, that moral motions be more than merely sociological something-or-others, that his significance lie in being more than one more cog in a vast machine. . . . On the basis of modern thought, however, all of these would simply be an illusion. And since there are aspirations which separate man from his impersonal universe, man then faces at the heart of his being a terrible, cosmic, final alienation. He drowns in cosmic alienation, for there is nothing in the universe to fulfill him.25
Schaeffer understood that, by denying any real basis for significance or morality or law, modernism was leaving the culture in a state that people would not be able to endure very long. Something cosmic (i.e., spiritual) would need to fill the void left by modernism, and there were only two options. If it was not filled on God’s terms on the basis of biblical truth, then it would have to be filled on man’s terms by something completely opposed to biblical faith and practice. The void, he said, would eventually be filled by some spiritual “ism” promising to satisfy the human need for cosmic significance and resulting in a very different approach to morality. And, when that happened, there would be a terrible “battle going on—not just a heavenly battle, but a life-and-death struggle over what will happen to men and women and children in both this life and the next.”

Schaeffer saw that what Kuyper and Lewis anticipated decades earlier was actually starting to take place in the 1970s and 80s. For Schaeffer, the crisis was not future but already starting, and he did not think it would be long until the culture was in a state of full-scale moral-spiritual revolution. He said in 1970, “I believe when my grandchildren grow to maturity, they will face a culture that has little similarity to ours.” He saw that modernism had already created the vacuum demanding revolution, and he believed the culture would either not survive or would be completely reconstructed morally and spiritually within two generations.

Schaeffer’s warning to Christians was therefore marked with a sense of urgency beyond the warnings of Kuyper and Lewis. In 1984 he asked,

Sixty years ago could we have imagined that unborn children would be killed by the millions here in our own country? . . . Or that every form of sexual perversion would be promoted by the entertainment media? Or that marriage, raising children, and family life would be objects of attack?

Of course, he expected a negative answer. Kuyper and Lewis had both warned what was coming. But few paid attention, so most evangelicals in America were caught by surprise and had no idea why such radical changes were happening in the culture.

In warning evangelicals of the crisis sweeping their way, Schaeffer did not say it would involve conflict with a force called paganism, nor did he say it would focus especially on sex. But he did understand that the battle forming in the culture was in fact “cosmic,” and he knew the other side was promoting “every form of sexual perversion.”
The only other religions large enough to affect the culture—Judaism and Islam—are comparable to Christianity on sexual morality.

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**THE POST-CHRISTIAN, POSTMODERN BATTLE TO FILL THE VOID LEFT BY MODERNISM**

- **Christian Spirituality**
  - Moral-Spiritual Void
  - God-centered way
  - No meaning or purpose
  - Cosmic alienation
  - Created by Modernism

- **Pagan Spirituality**
  - Pulls the other way
  - Sensual, self-centered way
  - Tries filling the void in a sensual, self-centered way

- **Christianity**
  - Pulls one way
  - Pulls the other way

- **Paganism**
  - Pulls one way
  - Pulls the other way

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**TRUE SEXUAL MORALITY**

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**THE POST-CHRISTIAN, POSTMODERN BATTLE**

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**TO FILL THE VOID LEFT BY MODERNISM**
In his final hours, Schaeffer urged evangelicals to wake up and take the emerging challenge seriously. He said,

we must ask where we as evangelicals have been in the battle for truth and morality in our culture. Have we as evangelicals been on the front lines contending for the faith and confronting the moral breakdown over the last forty to sixty years?29

Sadly, he observed, “Most of the evangelical world has not been active in the battle, or even been able to see that we are in a battle.”30 And Schaeffer died believing that the diminished confidence in the Bible and accommodation precisely at points where the culture opposed biblical truth was what he reluctantly called the great evangelical disaster.


Schaeffer may not have used the term paganism for the force rising to challenge the moral-spiritual influence of Christianity in American culture, but Carl F. H. Henry did. A contemporary who responded with Schaeffer to the same crisis, Henry saw the situation the way Kuyper had a century before. The force Henry saw rising to oppose Christianity—the new spirituality toward which the post-Christian, postmodern culture was turning for meaning and purpose and morality—was paganism, or what Henry called neo-paganism.31

So, while Schaeffer urged evangelicals to engage the culture in a battle for truth and morality on a cosmic scale, Henry alerted evangelicals to battle a barbarian invasion aimed at revolutionizing the moral-spiritual foundations on which American culture was built. “Our generation,” he said, is now “lost to the truth of God, to the reality of divine revelation, to the content of God’s will, to the power of His redemption, and to the authority of His Word.” And for this loss, he said, the culture “is paying dearly in a swift relapse to paganism.”32

Instead of following objective moral truth as revealed in scripture and confirmed in nature, Henry said, the new barbarians were returning to pagan ideas, answering the human need for meaning in ways that put man in charge of running the universe and reduced morality to sensuality. He said,

A half-generation ago, the pagans were still largely threatening at the gates of Western culture; now the barbarians are plunging into the . . . mainstream. As they seek to reverse the inherited intellectual and moral heritage of the Bible, the Christian world-life view and the secular world-life view
engage as never before in rival conflict for the mind, the conscience, the will, the spirit, the very selfhood of contemporary man. Not since the apostolic age has the Christian vanguard faced so formidable a foe in its claims for the created rationality and morality of mankind.33

Like Schaeffer, Henry believed the culture was already in a state of moral-spiritual crisis. Paganism was already challenging the influence of Christianity, and the conflict already was causing “a striking shift in sexual behavior that welcomes not only divorce and infidelity but devious alternatives to monogamous marriage as well.”34

Henry also, like Schaeffer, warned American evangelicals to engage the moral-spiritual crisis rising in the culture. But even in 1988 he feared time was running out. He felt that,

Unless evangelical Christians break out of their cultural isolation, unless we find new momentum in the modern world, we may just find ourselves so much on the margin of the mainstream movements of modern history that soon ours will be virtually a Dead Sea Caves community. Our supposed spiritual vitalities will be known only to ourselves, and publicly we will be laughed at as a quaint but obsolescent remnant from the past.35

What is flooding the culture now is indeed enormous. The moral-spiritual crisis we are facing centers on sexual morality and is strategically bent on replacing biblical moral standards with something quite different. This rising moral revolution allows people to reject Christianity while continuing to affirm that sex and life have meaning and purpose beyond the material dimension. We are living now in a post-Christian, postmodern culture in which Christianity and paganism are warring over the moral-spiritual void left by modernism. And the center of this battle, the strategic ground that will decide who wins (at least for now, before Christ comes back) is sexual morality. So, if evangelicals plan to be engaged in this conflict with any intelligence, we must try to understand what the other side is doing.
NOTES

PREFACE

CHAPTER 1
SEX AT THE CENTER OF OUR MORAL CRISIS
1. Lillian Rubin writes, “We know there’s a new vision of masculinity and femininity, but can’t figure out how it fits each of us” (Lillian B. Rubin, Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together [New York: Harper & Row, 1983], 8).
13. This division into three broad categories—traditional, modern, and postmodern—is more general and inclusive than the four counterfeit versions of sexual morality covered in chapters 12–15. Readers should note that the romantic, playboy, and therapeutic approaches to sexual morality are all in the modernist category, whereas pagan sexual morality is in the postmodern.
TRUE SEXUAL MORALITY

17. Ibid., 17, his emphasis.
18. Ibid., 47.
19. Ibid., 272-273.
21. Ibid., 85.
22. Ibid.
23. Francis A. Schaeffer, The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 81.
25. Schaeffer, Church at the End of the Twentieth Century, 15-16.
26. Schaeffer, Great Evangelical Disaster, 36-37.
27. Schaeffer, Church at the End of the Twentieth Century, 81.
28. Schaeffer, Great Evangelical Disaster, 23.
29. Ibid., 36-37.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 15.
33. Ibid., 27.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 19.

CHAPTER 2

THE RETURN OF SEXUAL PAGANISM

2. In The Politics of Women’s Spirituality (ed. Charlene Spretnak [New York: Doubleday, 1982]), forty-five feminist writers urge women to rediscover their sexual divinity through goddess worship. Other recent titles include: Mary Daly, Pure Lust (Boston: Beacon, 1984); Carter Hayward, Touching Our Strength (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); and Riane Eisler, Sacred Pleasure (Boston: Element, 1995).
5. Ibid., 85.