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Is Patriarchy Inevitable? Answers Secular and Religion

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These seem to be hard times for the would-be patriarch. The "family wage" system that formerly rewarded the father as "head of household" has been undermined by equal employment and equal-pay statutes. Title IX rules have mandated that much of the once male dominated athletic world be turned over to the women. Fallout from the #MeToo campaign has discouraged even legitimate male quests to find an appropriate mate. The Boy Scouts organization now produces neutered "Scouts." Ritalin tames aggressive little boys. Feminist propaganda celebrating female steelworkers and combat soldiers alongside male childcare givers and stay-at-home dads—this material fills school textbooks. The military appears to give priority to the principle of androgyny, rather than to victory. The prestige professions of lawyer and medical doctor are rapidly being feminized. The U.S. marriage rate stands at a record low; so too the marital fertility rate. A fair number of the men who do venture into marriage and fatherhood find themselves transformed into the indentured servants of their ex-wives. Contemporary church hymns and liturgies focus on gender justice and power games.

Indeed, the one American journal openly affirming patriarchs has died. Published in the village of Willis, Virginia, Patriarch magazine aimed at "nothing less than a return to patriarchy, a society led by strong, godly men. . . . Each man should aim to be the founder of a dynasty for God," with a full quiver of children. Alas, circulation was probably never more than a thousand or so; and the publisher called it quits in 2004. The aspiring patriarchs of 2018 now have no clear source for inspiration nor guide for action.

All the same, feminist analysts argue that the power of the patriarchs is undiminished; in this view, patriarchs remain clever, devious foes. As historian Heidi Hartmann explains, patriarchy is "a strikingly resilient form of social organization." The philosopher Gerda Lerner finds patriarchy to be "remarkably adaptive and resilient." Feminist political theorist Sylvia Walby argues that "for every victory won by women there has been a patriarchal backlash in another area." She continues: "Patriarchy is a dynamic system. . . . If women do win . . . , then patriarchal forces will regroup and regain control over them in other ways."

Could this be true? Is patriarchy inevitable?

There are answers both secular and religious. Regarding the former, I refer to political scientist Steven Goldberg's 1973 treatise, appropriately titled The Inevitability of Patriarchy. Opposite his title page, this Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York quoted Cicero: "Numquam naturam mos vinceret; est enim ea semper invicta." Translated: "Custom will never conquer nature, for it is always she who remains unconquered."

He defined patriarchy as "any system of organization (political, economic, industrial, financial, religious, or social) in which the overwhelming number of upper positions in hierarchies are occupied by males." Goldberg then argued that "authority and leadership are, and always have been, associated with the male in every society. . . . [Patriarchy] is universal and . . . there has never been a matriarchy." Put another way, he declared that "no society or group anywhere ever associates authority with a female when an equivalent male is available." Feminist assertions that matriarchal societies existed in the past are rubbish, he said: "none of the alleged Amazonian societies has ever existed."

Writing again back in 1973, Goldberg referred to politics, noting that there were then no female state governors or U.S. senators, while a mere three percent of members of the U.S. House of Representatives were women and only five percent of members of state legislatures. Female mayors in cities of over 25,000 population were but one percent of the total. Turning to economics, he held that "there are still fewer women in positions of power and leadership in the financial and business world," except for those who had inherited wealth or businesses from successful men.

So, how well have Goldberg's arguments from 45 years ago held up?

In American politics, at best unevenly. Twenty-three percent of U.S. Senate seats are now held by women, compared to zero in 1973, while the ladies also now claim nearly 20 percent of membership in the U.S. House of Representatives. Numbers are similar in Canada, where 28 percent of seats in Parliament are held by women. Females now also hold 25 percent of seats in state legislatures, five times the number recorded in 1973. Among cities with at least 25,000 residents, 22 percent have female mayors, up from one percent in 1973. Change is less dramatic, though, among governorships: only 6—or 12 percent—of states are led by women.

Might these numbers be reaching a new plateau of about 25 percent? Or will they continue to grow, perhaps reaching equality with men? Or beyond? Elections in 2018, with a record number of new female challengers, may provide an answer.

The story is very different in the realm of business. For several decades, feminist writers beat a steady drum, condemning glass ceilings and other patriarchal barriers to the movement of women into the corporate Chief Executive Officer suites. And in truth, change came slowly. By 2007, among the Fortune 500 companies, only 13 of them—or 2.6 percent—had female CEO's. Then the number started to climb, reaching 32—or 6.4 percent—in 2017. However, this year, 2018, a kind of catastrophe hit. The number tumbled by 25 percent, down to only 24. And of these, most are concentrated in one sector: food products, companies such as Sara Lee, Campbell Soup, and PepsiCo. Feminists now complain about a "glass cliff," where women are more likely to be chosen to run failing companies, where they are doomed to lose.

This is certainly untrue. Business was once an old-boys club. Yet, while modern market capitalism has many flaws—I write about them myself at times—it has one relevant virtue: it is immune to irrational ideology, be it racism, feminism, socialism, or some other. For a contemporary Fortune 500 company, there is only one measure of CEO success: the value of a share of its stock. Anything that impedes its rise must go: anything that supports rising stock valuation is embraced. It's that simple.

If women CEOs were temperamentally and existentially superior to men in raising stock values, every Fortune 500 company would have one. Outside the domain of food preparation, though, this has not proved to be so. The 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week schedule required of a CEO simply seems unsuited to the bio-rhythms of most women. The world of publicly-traded corporations remains overwhelmingly patriarchal.

This becomes blatantly obvious when we turn to the contemporary growth engine of the world's economy: the companies clustered in Silicon Valley. This is an overwhelmingly masculine world. Both the hardware and software discoveries driving the digital revolution have come from men. This is as true now as it was at the dawn of the digital age 50 years ago. As Emily Chang of Bloomberg TV writes in her new book, Brotopia, "From its earlier days, the [computer] industry has self-selected for men: first, anti-social nerds, then, decades later, self-confident and risk-taking bros." Indeed!

In the 1960's, it was "techie" patriarchs who designed the Apollo program that landed men on the moon. The film Apollo 13 captures perfectly that time: not a single woman in the control room, let alone in the space capsule. The women were at home. In 2018, it is patriarchs again who design the devices and write "the Code" that puts a smartphone in every hand and the entire sum of human knowledge but a computer click or two away. Occasionally, some poor fellow within the trade—often an Asian computer engineer untrained in the art of creative lying about gender—he notes the patriarchal nature of the Digital Revolution, only to be pummeled by the thought police. Activists now call for "smashing the Silicon Valley patriarchy." However, their prospects for success seem dim.

Going back to the Goldberg thesis, then: Why this disconnect between the realms of politics and business? Why are women rising in the one, but fading in the other?

A possible answer actually comes from feminist writers themselves. Sylvia Walby, for example, argues that feminist-inspired "progressive reforms have been met with patriarchal counterattack." She shows how civil rights laws that opened higher education, the professions, and other jobs to women, when combined with welfare benefits such as subsidized daycare and semi-nationalized health insurance, produce a strange result:

> While [women] lose their own individual patriarch [a husband], they do not lose their subordination to other patriarchal structures and practices. Indeed, they become ever more exposed to certain . . . patriarchal practices.

Walby holds that patriarchy has just "changed in form, incorporating some of the hard won [feminist] changes into new traps for women."

Another feminist theorist, Frances Fox Piven, provides the specifics. An ever-declining number of women are in traditional families, she notes. For men, this has actually resulted in a kind of liberation "from their obligations under the moral economy of domesticity." [Think Hugh Hefner here.] An elite of women now achieve success as doctors, lawyers, and professors. Most women, though, wind up in the low-pay service sector. More promisingly, Piven notes, "women have . . . [also] developed a large and important relationship with the welfare state as the employees of [its] programs." Indeed., American women now hold over 80 percent of the social service jobs found at all levels of government. Piven calls this "public patriarchy."

A recent study by Israeli sociologists of this "public patriarchy" found that advanced welfare states—especially those in the supposed feminist paradises of Sweden and Denmark—actually "channel women in disproportionate numbers into feminine occupational niches" such as childcare, elder care, nursing, and elementary education. The odds of a woman holding a job in a classically "female" occupation are actually highest in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, with the United States not far behind. In short, most women still do classic "women's work"—childcare, cooking, cleaning, and so on—but they no longer do this for their "private patriarch," or husband and children. Rather, then do it now for the collective, for the state, for the "public patriarch."

Perhaps this explains the determined movement of a clear majority of women into electoral politics. At the federal level, for example, three-quarters of women in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are Democrats. This is the Party which avidly supports the feminized welfare state; it is the defender of the "public patriarch," the new breadwinner and protector. Might their actions be seen as a sort of consummation of growing female dependency on government, a kind of "marriage" to their "public patriarch"?

Frances Fox Piven accepts this end as the best option available to women, certainly better than ties to "private patriarchs." Sylvia Walby retorts that while women "are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth," they now "have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited." Another feminist theorist, Carole Pateman, agrees. Under public patriarchy, she writes, "[t]he power and capriciousness of husbands is being replaced by the arbitrariness, bureaucracy, and power of the state, the very state that has upheld patriarchal powers."

So: Is "public patriarchy" a modest blessing? Or a curse? Feminists disagree on that. However, they do agree on one key point: Patriarchy has triumphed again! Whether private or "public"—it remains inevitable.

Turning now to religious examples, is Patriarchy also inevitable? Among the three great mono-theistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the answer at first seems self-evident. All three look to a common earthly ancestor—the great Patriarch Abraham—for guidance and inspiration. The Abrahamic faiths are, by definition, patriarchal.

At another level, though, distinctions must be made. Christian patriarchy is different in kind from that found strictly in the Old Testament or in the Koran. The patriarchy of the ancient Hebrews as well as that of the Muslims actually resemble in key ways the patriarchal Honor/Shame code of ancient Roman paganism. In such patriarchal systems, women are held to strict standards of chastity and fidelity. Men, though, are in practice allowed to wander sexually, among servants and slaves, concubines, prostitutes, and/or multiple wives. For men, unilateral divorce is easy; for women, difficult or impossible.

Jesus of Nazareth introduced a radically different sexual economy, a revolutionary marital ethic then refined by the Pauline and Pastoral epistles. Patriarchy continues in this new order. Male headship of a family is confirmed, but in a radically new way, where the monogamous husband must focus on his wife's well-being. Headship requires self-renouncing sacrifice on the husband's part, identical to that of Christ for His church. The wife's submission looks to the reconciliation of all things—including marriage—to God (Ephesians 5:23-28). In a revolutionary break with the whole of prior human experience, the new Christians also condemned male, as well as female, promiscuity. And I Corinthians 7:2-7 lays out an unprecedented symmetry in conjugal rights, one that elevated both the value of marriage and the status of Christian women.

This Christian patriarchy also reflects the Trinity. The "fellowship of love" between husband and wife rests on spiritual equality, yet also involves the willing submission of wife to husband, through which they find unity. In a similar way, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who with their unique roles are coequal with the Father, find their origin and unity in submission to the Father.

In short, Christian Patriarchy is profoundly different from the patriarchal systems that came before or have come since. And yet it "falls short" of feminist aspirations toward a pure equality. As theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther at least had the integrity to admit, "Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Christian Bible." Feminist Christianity must have a new canon, or fail.

Again, the New Testament message is clear: leadership within the Christian Church is patriarchal—men shall lead Christian households. And men shall hold the positions of ecclesiastical, theological, and pastoral leadership.

On these matters, nothing important has changed over the last 2,000 years. Every significant Christian body was and remains patriarchal in governance. In the spirit of John Adams, who remarked that "facts are stubborn things," let us briefly recall the obvious:

- The Roman Catholic Church is a Patriarchy guided by a Holy Father, selected by an all-male College of Cardinals, and served by an all-male priesthood.
- The autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches are each headed by a full-blown "Patriarch"—that's his title—who also presides over an all-male clergy
- In addition, Evangelical bodies faithful to the great 16th-century reformers remain true to paternal headship of Christian homes, a theme summarized in historian Steven Ozment's excellent book with an accurate title, When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe. An all-male clergy has also been the rule.

Even among non-Trinitarian denominations also appealing to Jesus Christ, patriarchy is the rule. The foremost example in our own land is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which claims a priesthood of all male members and a highly refined patriarchal governance structure, with a living male prophet at the top.

Yet, the skeptic will retort: Did not female preachers break out of the box in the 20th century, claiming a new

popularity? Have not several important Christian denominations found new direction and life with female clerics and matriarchal ecclesiastical leadership?

It is true that the Charismatic or Pentecostal Renewal Movement—widely dated to have begun with the Azusa Street Revival in Southern California during 1906—that this has grown into an international phenomenon, claiming hundreds of millions of adherents. It is also true that female preachers—such as the iconic Aimee Semple McPherson—have played a significant role in this remarkable development. Still, an objective examination of the multifarious denominations that have emerged again show the norm of male headship. Indeed, among the charismatic denominations dating from the early 1900's, the clear trend by mid-century was to deny ordination to women, while still allowing them evangelistic or prophetic roles. [This summary comes from historian Joy Langford, writing in the journal, Feminist Theology.] From the beginning, perhaps the more common form of female preaching in the Pentecostal world was (and remains) as part of a husband-wife team . . . where at least informal male headship uually prevails.

It is also true that several Protestant denominations have recently turned over the keys to the feminist theologians and leaders. In the United States, Episcopalian, liberal Lutheran, and "mainline" Calvinist bodies have followed this path, beginning with the ordination of women in the late 1960's and early 1970's, followed by a purging of male dissidents in leading seminaries and congregations, followed in turn by the election of female bishops, and finally leading to the election of female presiding bishops. How have these experiments in anti-patriarchal or—to put it more positively—in matriarchal religious governance, gone?

Even being charitable, they have—by every measure—been organizational disasters. Baptized membership has plummeted—by over 50 percent among Episcopalians, and by 35 percent in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America since its formation in 1988. If you count average Sunday attendance, the ELCA decline is 45 percent. The disappearance of children is even greater, leading to upside-down age pyramids: elderly folks holding onto memories of what their churches used to be like, while marriages between young men and women and infant baptisms become rare events.

Seminary enrollments have fallen by 50 percent or more. The number of actual congregations declines at an accelerating pace. The normal pattern today is to send newly ordained women, of varying ages and with minds filled with feminist and gender theologies, out to already distressed congregations, to—in practice—put them to sleep. Actually, in caring for the aging and weary, these women so dispatched are once again doing classic women's work. Moreover, they commonly face a true "glass cliff" here, doomed to failure. This is clearly not a viable model for a sustainable Christian future.

Yet, perhaps matters are different among those Christians moving toward the old/new Benedict Option. Do these intentional Christian communities reject patriarchal practices and embrace an egalitarian leadership framework?

Rod Dreher's highly regarded book with this title does not really provide a clear answer. Several of the examples he describes of successful new communities—such as the Tipi Loschi group in Italy—seem to have a core of male leaders. However, most of Dreher's examples of new Benedict Communities are fairly loose or limited in structure: home-schooling cooperatives; a group creating a new freestanding Christian school; or families deciding to live in rough proximity to a particular parish, and each other. Patriarchal governance in these settings would be neither useful nor relevant.

However, the creation of intentional Christian communities is not something new. More intense or more all-encompassing versions of Christian communitarianism abound, particularly among the Anabaptists. And all of

these groups base community governance on patriarchal principles: leadership by councils of male elders. For example, the Old Order Amish and the more liberal (or flexible) Beachy Amish and Fellowship communities, hold "that both church and family should reflect a divine hierarchy that positions God over all and man over woman." There is evidence, moreover, that male hierarchies are in practice actually stronger among those Amish groups which are more engaged with the world. The same principle of governance by male councils of elders is found among the Hutterites in the Dakotas, Montana, and Canada. Each community is ruled by six men, normally elected for life by other adult males. Meanwhile, the Bruderhof communities in New York and Pennsylvania—which like the Hutterites adhere to the practice described in Acts of holding all things in common—share the same model. As one commentator phrases it, "the Bruderhof still remains an orthodox patriarchy," governed by men, with women focused on home and children.

Such groups are significant for another reason. These are communities showing high, or even "natural," fertility, where five to nine children in each home is common. No longer fringe groups in forgotten corners of the United States, their numbers are now regionally significant in many places. If compounded over several more generations, these high-fertility Anabaptists, guided by firm patriarchs, may number well over ten million souls: agrarian peoples repopulating the American countryside.

And so, adding all this together, I return to my question at the outset. Is Patriarchy inevitable? The common answer is clear:… Yes!