

Column

"There is strong evidence that the institution of the family, not only in the U.S. but throughout Western civilisation, is at a crisis." Words which line up closely to what we see going on today. Yet these words are in fact from an editorial printed in the March 24, 1947, issue of Life magazine.

The editorial quotes Harvard sociologist Dr. Carle Zimmerman saying:

"Evidence indicates that our middle-class family system has reached its maximum demoralization (or will very soon) . . . If left alone the family system will break up before the end of the century."

Seventy-three years later Dr. Zimmerman's words appear prophetic. The family system has broken down, and we are reaping the consequences. But is this the first time in history that such a disintegration has occurred?

Dr. Zimmerman would answer, no. The Western family collapsed in Greece about 300 B.C.

and in Rome about 300 A.D. Both times the manifestations were the same: (1) almost universal corruption and disregard of the marriage agreement; (2) vanishing birth-rate; (3) denigration of parents and (4) juvenile and adult delinquency.

Dr. Zimmerman not only raised an alarm, but also explored some solutions. Certain changes in public policy, he said, *might* prove helpful, but he doubted that these changes alone would provide the final solution. Changes of this sort, after all, had been proposed by the Caesars in the last two centuries of the Roman Empire.

"They may work now. They didn't work then." More optimistically, the editorial went on to quote him saying that we have resources the pagan Romans didn't have: "The strongest foundation of Christian society and the Christian family is a Christian conscience and a Christian heart."

The sociologist's analysis still stands. The problems we face today do indeed merit the attention of those in government and public service, but something more is needed.

Only Christ can change human hearts. Only Christ can quell human selfishness and engender self-giving love. Only Christ can turn distrust among races and classes into a harmony that works for the common good. Only Christ can turn houses where multiple people live under the same roof into homes, homes which are havens of blessing and peace. Let us at this dark hour seek our help from Him.

Long before Dr. Zimmerman and Life magazine, the Bible gave a sure-fire prescription for the ills that plague our land: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly, union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling,

one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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