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Going to the depths: learning a lesson from the gender revolution¹

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Good morning, everyone. I thank the organizers of this conference for their invitation. I congratulate all of you on your efforts to try and restore a taste for marriage and the family among young people in Hungary.

The Western anthropological crisis globalizes itself at thunderlight speed. Its scope and depth invite humanity to put out into the deep: to, at long last, tackle the historically distant root causes of the subversive process that has led us to the point we are at now.

My presentation will be in three flashes. In the first, I will evoke the essence of the negation process underpinning the gender agenda. The second will identify, in broad outline, some of the key milestones of the Western anthropological revolt since the Enlightenment. The third will offer a few thoughts about the lessons to be learned from the long process of the Western anthropological rebellion.

1.- In recent decades, the Western cultural revolution has come to a head with the gender agenda. We have now reached the critical point where man, aping the Creator, instrumentalizes language for outright *negation* purposes: to deny our sexual differentiation as man and woman. Through what Judith Butler called *performative language*, social engineers have attempted to “construct a new man” - a man “liberated” from his given nature, from his vocation to fatherhood and motherhood, from his spousal vocation. They have been stirring up gender trouble for now over a generation. A majority of young people, and even *children*, have been

¹ Parts of this intervention draw from previous publications by Marguerite Peeters: notably *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution* (republished by En Route, 2023, published in Hungarian by the Center for Fundamental Rights, 2023), *The Gender Revolution* (republished by En Route, 2024, published in Hungarian by the Center for Fundamental Rights, 2019) and *The citizen and the person. Rebellion and reconciliation* (Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2014, published in Hungarian by Katolikus Valasz, 2019).

profoundly troubled by the gender revolution. An increasing number of them have been *declaring* themselves gender non-conforming, non-binary. They have thereby been performing what David Halperin, a gay activist, adequately called an “*identity without an essence*”². In the light of universal reason, such a Promethean utterance is purely and simply an act of negation of reality: a decision to say “no” to who we are, and to the One who created us as we are.

In this generation, the revolution has reached a tipping point. Twenty years ago, American queer activist Lee Edelman gave an eloquent name to this tipping point: he called it, plainly, No Future. His book *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*³ is a manifesto for a bold, relentless, uncompromising affirmation of the queers’ “antisocial, and future-negating drive”. The child, who “represents the possibility of the future”, is Edelman’s very target. Queers must consciously, willingly decide to reject the sociopolitical order, the universal politics of so-called “reproductive futurism”. They must “accede to their status as figures for the force of a negativity” that Edelman links with “irony, jouissance, and, ultimately, the death drive itself”⁴. At least, things are now out in the open, clear, explicit. The writing is on the wall: no future is where we are heading. The revolution’s current proposal is a wholehearted identification with Freud’s death drive and the cultural murder of the child.

The ideas of a few leading intellectuals have, to a large extent, become culture, affecting critical masses within societies worldwide. Neither contemporary attacks against the child nor the choice of negation come out of nowhere. Let us recall, for example, how for Herbert Marcuse, who is the father of the sexual revolution, the child is not only unwanted but is also unnatural because it is opposed to instinct. The child is the living contradiction of pleasure; it is repressive because of the responsibility that it gives parents. Let us also recall French atheistic existentialism. Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre wanted to make the individual exit (“ex-ist”) from the conditions of existence as established by God so that he could be liberated from them, could choose “freely” and live for himself. To exercise his *right to choose*, the individual must, according to their logic, engage in negating whatever exists outside himself. It was not a matter of passively denying reality and what is given, of not doing anything, but of active *commitment* in this negation. The refusal to commit morally thus contrasts with the demand for commitment in social activism.

2.- The radical proposals of the LGBTQ+ movement are the last bitter fruit of a long western cultural revolution. Let us now go back to its remote historical source, to the Enlightenment.

France and America are arguably the two countries that have wielded the greatest influence over the historical development of Western modernity. In both countries, democracy was born against the backdrop of deism. The *philosophers* who inspired the French revolution, and America’s founding fathers, were *deist*. In deism, god is the supreme architect of the universe who, having created it, takes no more part in it. God stops being a *loving father*, in a living relationship with his *children*⁵. In an act of apostasy, a Christian civilization murdered God’s

² “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence” wrote David Halperin in his 1997 book, *Saint Foucault, Towards a Gay Hagiography*.

³ Duke University Press, 2004.

⁴ See [No Future](#) (retrieved on December 1st, 2024).

⁵ Jean le Rond d’Alembert, co-editor with Denis Diderot (a materialistic atheist) of the *Encyclopédie*, Voltaire (with whom the tsarina Catherine the Great had frequent and friendly relations) and Maximilien de Robespierre, one of the most influential figures of the revolution and leading actor in the Reign of Terror, not to mention Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s deistic affinities. On the American side, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine were deists.

fatherhood *at the very time* modern democracy was born. If God is not a father, then the citizen of modern democracy is not a son, that is, a person engendered by a loving father: he is a mere, undifferentiated *individual*, a secular holder of rights, left on his own to organize the world and his destiny. Not *receiving* his identity, he must *construct* it on his own, relying on his sole reason and power.

The citizen of the French revolution tended to consider fatherhood as an *obstacle* to the democratic values of rights, equality and individual freedom. Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirmed that fatherhood was a social privilege contrary to equality. The goal of the revolution being the abolition of privileges, civic equality built itself on the social cadaver of the father. Honoré de Balzac acknowledged in 1841 that the French revolution had chopped off the heads of all family fathers and that the family no longer existed: only individuals were left⁶.

Karl Marx rightly considered deism to be “no more than a convenient and easy way of getting rid of religion”⁷. History tells us that, indeed, deism produced atheism. Friedrich Nietzsche declared the death of God. He viewed the rise of the superman as the remedy to the despair brought about by the loss of faith and the loss of morality that would logically follow.

Then from 19th century atheism and nihilism, the West moved to the cultural murder of the human father, then of the mother and of the spouse. How did this happen? The immensely influential Sigmund Freud turned the libido principle (pleasure) into the primary motivation for the human act. Psychoanalysis identified the father with the repressor of our individual freedom and sexual drives. In 1955, Marcuse published *Eros and Civilization*, a manifesto for a social revolution that would bring about a non-repressive society, by which he meant a society in which our sexual drives would become political values. The construction of such a society began in the late 1960s. The death of the father was an overriding theme of May 68.

Radical feminism in turn culturally murdered the mother. It dialectically opposed women’s rights, freedom and equality on the one hand, and the complementarity of the sexes, motherhood and feminine identity on the other. Margaret Sanger, the founder of *Planned Parenthood International* and figurehead of Western feminism, wanted, in her own words, to “free woman from the slavery of reproduction”.

It is, finally, easy to see how the sexual revolution provoked the cultural death of the exclusive and lifelong spouse, replacing the spouse with multiple temporary partners. An unprecedented breakdown of the marriage and family institutions followed. Laws, policies and culture shifted to the side of the revolution, celebrating free choice and free love.

This long revolutionary process desertified Western societies from natural and universal human bonds. Who will people this desert? In the 1960s, the void created by the agents of the revolution allowed Franco-American social engineers to undertake a reconstruction project on secularist foundations. The seedbed was ready for the gender agenda, which is all at once secularistic, Nietzschean, Freud-Marxist.

3.- The manifold sufferings caused by broken, dysfunctional families, the « no future » tipping point we have reached provide a historic opportunity to identify what went wrong in the history of Western modernity to produce as bitter a fruit as the gender agenda. Now is the time to engage

⁶ “La révolution a coupé la tête à tous les pères de famille. Il n’y a plus de familles aujourd’hui, il n’y a plus que des individus”: Balzac in *Mémoire de Deux Jeunes Mariées*.

⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels. Soch, 2nd Ed., vol. 2, p. 144.

in healing and reconciliation. The worst of times could become the best of times, to the extent humanity decides to seize the opportunity and make a fresh start. I have identified seven lessons to learn.

Lesson 1: deism produced atheism which in turn produced the end of man and no future. Deism has been one of the original sources that has fuelled Western individualism and a lop-sided anthropology, overemphasizing reason to the detriment of the heart for centuries. We must work at reconciling our view of the citizen with our universal filial, fraternal status, with the person made out of love and for love.

Lesson 2: Freud refounded anthropology on *pleasure* and declared that happiness was no cultural value. We must promote a culture of *happiness* and personal fulfilment through love. The time when love was evinced from the leading cultural synthesis, the Western modern one, should be declared over.

Lesson 3: Freud and the sexual revolution made a caricature of the father and authority as repressive of our sexual drives. This caricature must be deconstructed. We must reconcile our cultural view of fatherhood with an authority driven by fatherly love.

Lesson 4: Second wave feminism has associated women's equality, liberty and rights with contraception, abortion, so-called "free choice", and social power. We must liberate these democratic and universal values from this enslavement and reconcile them with motherhood and the specific feminine genius.

Lesson 5: The leading agents of the cultural revolution have made a willful choice of negation. They chose to be agents of the cultural triumph of the death drive. We must educate the conscience of young people so as to help them to discern the nexus between happiness and personal commitment to what is true and morally good.

Lesson 6: In the gender culture, individuals do not know who they are since they refuse to identify with their given identity. They are strangers to themselves, permanently wandering outside of themselves. We must educate young people to know themselves as human persons made for love and happiness.

Lesson 7: As citizens, we must remind states that they have a sacred duty to recognize, protect and promote the authentic nature of the person, marriage and the family⁸. We must work at reconciling democracy with a citizen who is also and primarily a unique and irreplaceable person, differentiated as man and woman, father or mother, spouse, son or daughter, brother or sister.

Dear friends, if we want to change course, bandage solutions will not do. We must go to the depths. Let us engage in reconciliation, in the advent of a new culture of love and personal belonging. Reconciliation can take place in a variety of ways, but it is clear that adapting the content of public education is key. Hungary is in a privileged position to do it.

⁸ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 52.