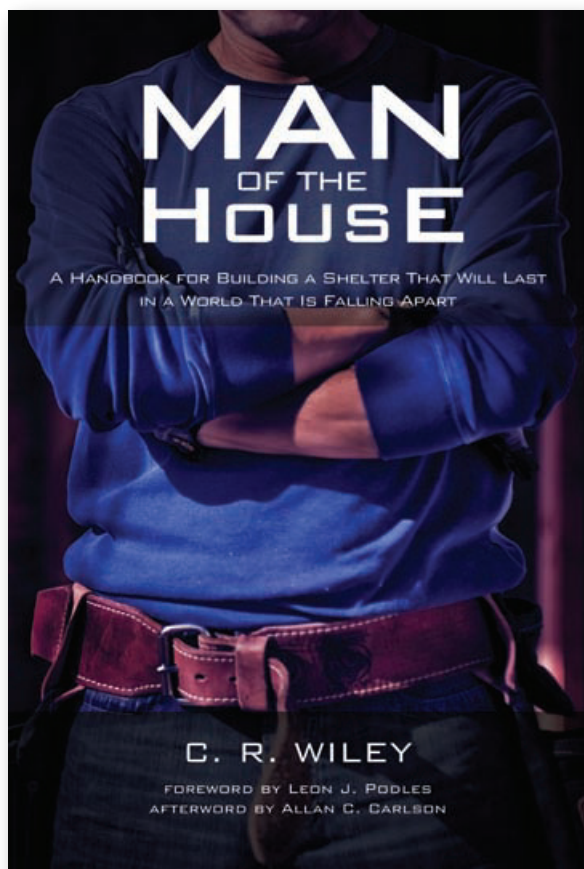


What is your plan for the end of the world as we know it? How will you protect the people you love? What will you leave to them when you are gone?

The good news is this is not the first time the world has ended. What's more, men were made for times like these. And the men of the past—the good ones, anyway—have left us a plan to follow.

They built houses to last—houses that could weather a storm. This book contains their plan.



# MAN OF THE HOUSE

A HANDBOOK FOR BUILDING  
A SHELTER THAT WILL LAST  
IN A WORLD THAT IS FALLING APART

**C. R. WILEY**

FOREWORD BY LEON J. PODLES  
AFTERWORD BY ALLAN C. CARLSON

ISBN: 978-1-5326-1477-4 | 160 PP. | \$21 | PAPER

“With wit and flair and a manly willingness to face the facts of life, Wiley shows us how to have a *real household* rather than a chilly wayside inn, and how to help build again the real local communities that require such households for their existence. Without a recovery of manhood, it is not going to happen. Pastors, this book is for you, too.”

—ANTHONY ESOLEN, Providence College; author of *Out of the Ashes: Reclaiming American Culture*, and *Real Music: The Timeless Hymns of the Church*

**C. R. WILEY** is the Senior Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Manchester in Manchester, Connecticut. He has written for *Touchstone Magazine*, *Modern Reformation*, *Sacred Architecture*, *The Imaginative Conservative*, and *Front Porch Republic*. He blogs for *Patheos* on the Evangelical Channel. His short fiction has appeared in *The Mythic Circle* (published by the Mythopoeic Society) and he has published young adult fiction. He has been a commercial real estate investor and a building contractor. And he has even taught philosophy to undergraduates.

**Media, Examination, and Review Copies:**  
Contact: James Stock  
(541) 344-1528, ext 103 or James@wipfandstock.com

**Orders:** Contact your favorite bookseller or order directly from the publisher via phone (541) 344-1528, fax (541) 344-1506 or e-mail us at orders@wipfandstock.com

# Man of the House

A Handbook for Building a Shelter That Will Last  
in a World That Is Falling Apart

C. R. WILEY

*Foreword by Leon J. Podles*  
*Afterword by Allan C. Carlson*

RESOURCE *Publications* • Eugene, Oregon

MAN OF THE HOUSE

A Handbook for Building a Shelter That Will Last in a World That Is Falling Apart

Copyright © 2017 C. R. Wiley. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Resource Publications  
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

[www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-1477-4

HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-1479-8

EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-1478-1

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

MARCH 13, 2017

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)  
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. ESV® Text Edition: 2016

# Contents

*Foreword by Leon J. Podles* | ix

*Acknowledgements* | xi

*Introduction: How to Build a Survival Shelter* | xiii

## Part I: The Framework of a Household

- Chapter One      Covenants | 3
- Chapter Two      One Flesh | 11
- Chapter Three    The Economy of Love | 18

## Part II: Household Economics

- Chapter Four      Property | 27
- Chapter Five      Work | 39
- Chapter Six       Help | 51

## Part III: Household Polity

- Chapter Seven    Justice | 67
- Chapter Eight    Gravitas | 76
- Chapter Nine     Piety | 87

## Part IV: Outside the House

- Chapter Ten       The Principalities | 103
- Chapter Eleven    Friendship | 114
- Chapter Twelve    Legacy | 124

*Afterword by Allan C. Carlson* | 137

*Suggestions for Further Reading* | 141

## Foreword

*LEON J. PODLES*

WISDOM ASCENDS TO THE heavens, but it begins on the earth. Proverbs is full of sound advice from a father to a son, who warns, “Folly is a joy to him who has no sense” (Proverbs 5:21), and folly is what we are taught by the gods of the marketplace. The sexual revolution promised carefree, pregnancy-free sex for everyone all the time. And now anyone can be a man or woman or anything in between; the body God created is irrelevant. Kipling warned, “we were promised the Fuller Life (Which started by loving our neighbour and ended by loving his wife), Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith, And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: ‘The Wages of Sin is Death.’”

Chris Wiley provides practical advice for a man to live up to his role as father. Even the Romans knew how important fatherhood was; the *paterfamilias* was the foundation of the Roman state. But with Abraham the revelation of the ultimate importance of fatherhood began, and at last Paul proclaimed “the Father, from whom every family (*patria*) in heaven and earth is named (Ephesians 3:14–15). Without a father, there is no family.

The family is a revelation of God’s plan for mankind, and the only one who has a higher claim on our loyalty is God himself. Jesus was not devaluing the family, but implying his claim to divine honors: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). Our

## FOREWORD

ultimate loyalty is to him, the incarnate God, but under him to the union of male and female that he established at the beginning and which he restored in its purity and integrity (Matthew 19:4–5).

Paul repeatedly emphasizes the right order of the family, insisting that a well-ordered family is a model for the church: a bishop “must manage his own household (oikos) well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way, for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care of God’s church” (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

Wiley helps us see what is necessary to manage a household and its economy well, to provide and protect for a family and to ensure its stability generation after generation. Such households provide a space of freedom, the milieu in which a human and Christian life can be lived, a place of sanity and health in a world that seeks to detach individuals from all other connections and make them dependent on the state for everything, to make them denizens of “the brave new world . . . When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins.” But God is not mocked, and “As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn, The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return.”

*Leon J. Podles, father of six, is married to the former Mary Elizabeth Smith, who survived a year at Wellesley with Hillary Clinton. Podles survived Providence College and received his PhD from the University of Virginia in, of all things, Old English and Old Icelandic. He helped found Birthright Charlottesville, was a senior editor at Touchstone, is on the board of BishopAccountability.org and author of Sacrilege: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church. He wrote the pioneering The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity and the forthcoming Losing the Better Part: Why Men Are Alienated from Christianity. He is a member of Mount Calvary Church in Baltimore.*

## Introduction

### *How to Build a Survival Shelter*

EXPERTS IN THE FIELD tell us there are three things you must do in order to survive in the wilderness. They even give us some helpful deadlines—dead being more than a figure of speech here. And here they are, in ascending order of urgency: you have three weeks to get food, three days to find water, and three hours to make shelter.

The clock ticks fastest for shelter because of nightfall, predators, and changes in the weather. You get the point; there are a lot of ways to die of exposure. Death by starvation is just tedious; no surprise to it at all. Exposure, though—that comes with the thrill of the unknown about it.

Now, there are two ways to find yourself in the wilderness. The first is by coming to the end of civilization and just leaving it behind, either on purpose or by accident—as when you survive a plane crash in the south Pacific, or something like that. The other way is for civilization to just end.

This book is about building a shelter to survive the second scenario.

### **Too Big to Fail?**

There has been a lot of talk lately about the end of the world. This is something of a paradox since the world has seemingly been getting safer and more stable for a long time. But thanks to this safety and stability, each of us has grown increasingly dependent upon things beyond our control. And many of those things have gotten very big and the people who run them, very remote. And this makes us uneasy.

## INTRODUCTION

The phrase, *too big to fail* reveals how dependent we have grown. Say it and bank bailouts come to mind. If we lived at another time we might consider the term a vote of confidence. Today it is just the opposite: it is a rallying cry to do whatever is necessary to prevent failure, even if it means selling your children into debt-slavery by running up the national debt.

Banks aren't the only things we consider too big to fail. We could throw in automobile manufacturers, Social Security, or any other really large institution without which we cannot imagine living. We built these things to shelter us. They shelter us from harm, from the vicissitudes of life, even from high prices. And because of their capaciousness, we enjoy more freedom (of a kind) than ever before. They even shelter us from personal responsibility. I suspect this is a secret reason we can't imagine life without them: they not only shelter us from things beyond our control, they shelter us from our own moral failings.

## T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I!

Every once in a while something happens to remind you just how bad things could get if the things that are too big to fail were to actually fail: a hurricane washes a city's infrastructure away and people run through the streets looting; a subprime mortgage crisis nearly sends the global economy into a depression; Social Security goes insolvent—oops, jumping ahead on that one. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

I think you can see that if these things collapse many people will be left exposed and vulnerable.

It is enough to turn you into a "prepper". In case you've not heard of them, preppers are people who are preparing for, *The End Of The World As We Know It!* (or, T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I! for short).

You could say this is a handbook on prepping; but if you're familiar with other books on the subject you'll notice this one is different. Whereas other prepping books prepare you for a sudden end, this one is designed to help you survive a long slow one. I am convinced that the world as we know it is like a drunk that just won't hit bottom. When things get bad, it sobers up a little and promises to change its ways—then when things get a little better it's back to binge-drinking again. But there will come a day when we find the old boy comatose and gone for good. If we work at preparing for that day we may find that we are more relieved than saddened by the end.

## INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, prepping has an up side and a down side. On the down side: like every doomsday cult, prepping thrives on bad news. If you want to ruin a prepper's day, just mention that the unemployment rate has gone down. There is something untoward about that.

On the up side, prepping stresses self-reliance. Just take a quick glance at the literature and you'll see everything from tips on cultivating heirloom seeds to how to defend yourself with a box-cutter. If prepping amounts to nothing else, it has helped to revive the yeomanry.

But even self-reliance can have a down side. For many people, when the topic of self-reliance comes up, Henry David Thoreau and his little cabin on Walden Pond come to mind. But a couple of things have always bothered me about Thoreau and his little experiment.

The first thing is that Thoreau borrowed his tools. It isn't so much the borrowing that bothers me. I just wonder if he ever bothered to say thank you. It may not be fair, but Thoreau just doesn't strike me as a grateful person.

Those tools didn't invent themselves, you know. The life they make possible, even a solitary one, is a gift. The saw, the chisel, the hammer—these were developed, and their forms were perfected, by nameless craftsmen over generations. Gratitude is called for. And those tools were not the only things Thoreau borrowed.

The other thing that bothers me about Thoreau is the cabin was too small: it was a one-man cabin. I've often wondered if his self-reliance didn't have a little misanthropy mixed in. If it did, there was a little self-delusion in it too. We can't live without others—at least not for long. Our shelters should be large enough to include other people.

### *The Curmudgeon: Alone in the Wilderness?*

When it comes to level of difficulty it is hard to beat Dick Proenneke. At the age of fifty-one, Proenneke took his tools and his woodcraft skills and moved to Alaska. Single-handed, he built a cabin in the wilderness and then lived alone in it for the next 30 years. Fortunately for the rest of us, Proenneke documented his experience on film. That film is entitled, *Alone in the Wilderness*. Compared to Proenneke, Thoreau was a sissy. But even Proenneke was never truly alone. He took the traditions of woodcraft and wilderness survival with him.

## Archeology as Self-help

This book is about building a survival shelter you can share with other people. While I wrote the book, I didn't invent the structure. I discovered

## INTRODUCTION

it. I should say I rediscovered it. I think a generous librarian could even classify this little handbook as amateur archeology. The shelter I describe in it was very common once. Its ruins are all around you. Once you have an eye for it, you can see it everywhere.

By studying the ruins, and by reading about it in old books, I have been able recover the principles used to build these shelters. They are not too difficult to understand. When you see how they're put together, I hope you'll feel an urge to build one for yourself. To help you see how this structure is often hiding in plain sight, let's begin with a familiar story.

### **The Three Little Pigs**

You remember the plot. Once upon a time three piggy brothers left to make their fortunes. The first pig built a straw house, the second built one of sticks, and the last made his house with bricks. Then along came a wolf. The wolf blew the first two houses down without a problem, sending pigs one and two running on their chubby little legs to the house of pig number three. The story reaches its climax when the frustrated wolf, huffing and puffing and unable to blow the brick house down, climbs up on the roof in order to get at the juicy pigs through the chimney. The pigs hear him coming, and with marvelous speed they whip up a fire. Then they set an enormous kettle of water on it and down splashes the wolf right into it. On goes the lid and, *voila*—wolf stew!

Everyone agrees the brick house was best, but this story is not about the merits of brick over other building materials. It isn't even about the prudence of pig number three. If you really think about it, you'll see that this is a story about a fourth house—an invisible one—the brotherhood that shelters the pigs in the end.

### **Nothing More than Metaphor?**

Once upon a time nearly everyone lived in a house of this sort. They not only housed people, they housed their work, and their goods. I know what you're thinking, Wait, people still live in houses! But they don't, not most people anyway. For most people a house is just a place to sleep, watch television, and maybe cook a meal. Once upon a time a house was far more.

To the old way of thinking a *house* was more than a physical building. It's bricks and sticks were a metaphor for something immaterial, but still

---

## INTRODUCTION

very real. It can shelter us in much the same way that a physical building shelters our bodies. And like those buildings, a real house has an outside that it presents to the world, and an inside that its members enjoy and benefit from. This is a household, and it carries some of the same meaning as *stronghold*.

I can almost hear you say, *Ah, you're talking about a family*. But no—no, I am not. While there is some overlap, the two things are not synonymous. You can be a member of a household without being a member of a family; you can even be a member of a family without belonging to a household. A household can even include more than one family. It can also grow quite large. We're told that the biblical patriarch Abraham was able to muster over 300 fighting men from his household alone (Genesis 14:14). Obviously his house sheltered more than one family.

### Home Economics

People in a household shelter each other by working together and protecting each other. It is the working together that makes a household an economy and it is the protection that makes it a polity. We don't think of houses that way any more, largely because the economy has moved out of the house. One thing we can say for modern life is that it has a way of cutting things up. We work downtown, we get our food at the grocery store, we go down the block to learn at school, and we get on a plane to go somewhere and relax. Our lives are divided up among highly specialized institutions. But a household is a general-purpose institution. Before we segregated everything in the interest of efficiency, houses were not only economically productive; they were schools, and nursing homes, and dozens of other things.

This is a book about building an old-fashioned, general purpose shelter—a real house—not a house made out of sticks and bricks. This is a good time to build one too; the conditions haven't been this favorable in a long time.

### The Divisions of this Handbook

This book is broken up into four parts. It follows a logical progression. The first section deals with how a household is established and then goes on to describe its basic framework. The second is about the material basis of a household. The third section is likely to prove the most controversial.

## INTRODUCTION

It is about household politics. And the final section is dedicated to how a household relates to the larger world.

Finally, allow me to introduce you to four personas I will don on occasion. Each will allow me to step outside of the main flow of thought in order to provide commentary. You've already been introduced to one of them: the *Curmudgeon*. Whenever I feel the need to say something biting, I put on his mask. Then there is the *Philosopher*. Whenever something could use a closer look, I'll turn to him. The *Paterfamilias* is closest to the spirit of the work, but there will be times when a subject should be treated but for some reason it can't be made to fit into the natural progression of the text. That's when he will pull you aside for a moment. And last of all there is the *Craftsman*. He goes into more detail on practical matters than can be justified to *Polyhymnia*, the muse of sacred poetry.

Let's begin.

*Part I*

The Framework of a Household

## *Chapter One*

### Covenants

#### **Digging Up the Past**

**Y**ou can learn a lot about life from the dead. This book is designed to help with that. But in order to learn from them you will probably need to get over what C. S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery.”

The chronological snob thinks “new” is a synonym for “better.” Today, most people think the past was primarily populated with stupid people and that this is the likely reason that most of them are now dead. For example, it is commonly believed that people in the Middle Ages believed the world is flat. But this just goes to show how stupid modern people can be. Most people in the Middle Ages knew the world is round, and the learned even had a pretty good idea of its circumference. Fortunately, chronological snobbery has a cure: reading old books. If you do that with intelligence—and that means with sympathy and imagination—you’ll see that many dead people knew more than you do.

#### **But You Can’t Turn Back the Clock!**

I know what you’re thinking: *You can’t turn back the clock!* But that is a moral argument trying to pass itself off as a matter of fact. Now, I am happy to admit that there are many things about our time that I enjoy and don’t want to lose—antibiotics, for instance. But technological progress can mask regression in other areas—the lack of respect for old people in our time, for example. Progress is not a conveyor belt powered by time. Why, the world

PART I: THE FRAMEWORK OF A HOUSEHOLD

we live in isn't even unprecedented. There is evidence of circularity everywhere. As Mark Twain is reported to have said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme." Here's the premise of this book: If our problems rhyme with problems faced by people in the past, maybe the solutions do too.

Before I get down to work I need to say something about my method. First of all, I cherry-pick. This is not a history book. It is a plan of action. I've selected things that I think are helpful for meeting the challenges we face today, and I've tried to adapt them. The

*The Philosopher: Mining the Past*

When it comes to looking to the past for help, some assume that to praise the part is to praise the whole. Why should it? You can be selective. Making distinctions is a mark of intelligence. Use judgment, discriminate, sort the wheat from the chaff—the good from the bad.

past is a big place and some things from the past should just stay there. Second of all, I'm a Christian minister and the Western tradition is what I know best. You won't find anything about the Aztecs here or mating patterns in Irian Jaya. If you're okay with that, then this book may prove helpful to you.

### Sympathizing with the Dead

One of the reasons we don't sympathize with the dead is we take too many things in our world for granted. But if you strip those things away one by one, the world begins to look very different.

Years ago I discovered just how much I took for granted when I found myself in the middle of the Navajo nation with a group of teenagers. Back in those days anything resembling a cell phone was only owned by the very wealthy, and we were one hundred miles from the nearest highway. One of the first things a Navajo elder said to me was, "Don't let your girls out of your sight. One of our boys could ride up on a horse and take one of them off to the mesa. You wouldn't want that." He was right; I didn't want that.

I had come from a world that I had seldom thought about. I had left a kind of bubble, but it was such a large one that I had mistaken it for the world itself. The Navajo nation was outside that bubble and I felt exposed and vulnerable there.

The wilderness today seems benign, even vulnerable. But that wasn't the wilderness our ancestors knew. Today we work to save the wilderness—setting up boundaries to preserve it from the ravages of strip mining, or even worse, strip malls. But the boundaries our ancestors set up were

## COVENANTS

intended to keep the wilderness *away from them*. We have succeeded in walling out the wilderness beyond their wildest flights of fancy.

The shelters we live in now are propped up by the immense power of an industrial civilization. To our way of thinking, the stuff they used to keep the wilderness out seems laughably flimsy. Their methods were made up almost entirely of customs, rituals, and symbols. But those things have proven amazingly durable, so durable we can still see their outlines today.

### **Blood Covenants**

The Middle East is a troubled place; but once upon a time things were even worse. It had rampaging armies and bands of thieves. There was regular famine and drought (which helps to explain the warfare and the highway robbery). It was a hard-scrabble world without convenience stores or even refrigeration. You made your own food there, and it was right outside your tent or your window. And if you wanted to keep it you had to defend it.

The fear those people lived with is impossible to appreciate. How did they reassure each other in a way that was strong enough to still their fears? They needed exceptionally strong bonds. Paradoxically, they got them by cutting covenants.

When a covenant was made it was said to be cut. The Hebrew *karat berith* means “cut a covenant.” You may have heard that a covenant is a contract. Well, it is in a way, but by comparison a modern contract is a bloodless thing.

Men were always called to witness the cut. What they cut were one or more animals, usually as many of them as were needed to feed the crowd. (Barbaric, right? Wait, it gets worse.) The animals would be cut in two. Then the halves were laid on the ground side by side—joined only by lines of blood in the sand. Then the parties to the covenant made their promises. One might say, “Before God most high and these witnesses, I will be bound to you. When you call, I will come. Your enemies will be my enemies . . .” and so on and so forth. Then the other man would say something similar. Then they would walk the bloody way, getting the blood on their feet and on the hems of their robes. And as they did so the witnesses would shout their approval. Then a cookout would break out.

What was it all about? Why couldn't they just shake hands like civilized people and be done with it? The reason is these agreements had to have some bite. Here's why. When rumor has it that ten thousand Midianites

PART I: THE FRAMEWORK OF A HOUSEHOLD

*The Paterfamilias:  
A Covenant with God*

There is a description of an unusual covenant in Genesis. One of the parties is the Lord of heaven and earth and the other is an old and childless Bedouin named Abram. When we are introduced to him his name seems somewhat tongue-in-cheek. But it also seems pregnant with promise because it is a clue that something unusual is about to happen to him. The reason? The name Abram means *exalted father*.

According to the story, the Lord tells Abram to cut a covenant. After Abram does this, he falls into a trance. Then two objects appear suspended in the air—a burning torch and a smoking pot. Then the Lord makes a marvelous promise to the old Bedouin. He promises to make him the father of a great house. After that the torch and pot then pass between the halves.

It is all very mysterious to readers today—but it wasn't for Abram (not for the reason it is for us, anyway). Abram knew what a covenant was.

are coming your way because a plague of locusts has wiped out their crops, and your neighbor between them and you calls for help, what could possibly keep you from turning the other way and running for your life? A handshake? Perhaps—if you are an exceptionally principled man. No, what you need to steel your nerves at that moment is the threat of blood-vengeance. And that's what the covenant promised. When men walked the bloody way they declared, in effect, "If I fail to keep my promise, you may do to me what we have done to these animals." Keeping the promise was life; breaking the promise was death.

In our cosseted world that seems a bit over the top. But if you spend a few nights in the desert without your cell phone even our world can begin to look a little different.

We tend to look back at those Bedouins with contempt and think that the world they lived in is too small for

open-minded people like you and me. But we flatter ourselves. We live in a bubble, an immense bubble that we have confused with the real world. Covenants sheltered those people. True, they lived in smaller shelters than we do, but at least they could still step outside and feel the real world, with all its fearsome power and immensity. Ironically the men of those days were actually larger than we are in many ways. They had to be to survive.

### Law and Covenant

We tend to think of laws as indifferent or even cruel. If they serve our interests at all, it is only when we have to take someone to court. We never think of them as things to love, or as a way to love someone. Compliance is all that anyone can or should expect.

---

## COVENANTS

The making of laws has been compared to the making of sausage. Scraps of disparate interests are pressed together in an unappetizing process called legislation.

But in a covenant ceremony we see a different way to make a law. Covenant promises legally bind covenanters. The bloody mess is somewhat like the bloody mess that accompanies a birth. And like a birth, it calls for a celebration—a big raucous party—because the law and the covenant serve the people that are bound by them. They make the covenanters stronger and more secure. And there are human faces there at the covenant, smiling at each other over a roasting sacrifice.

### The Covenant of Marriage

A marriage is a kind of covenant. In fact, if you've heard the word covenant at all it was likely applied to marriage. In a marriage covenant a husband and his wife promise to give each other shelter. You can hear in it clearly in the traditional vows "for better and for worse," and "til death do you part." Sometimes the bond is painful to bear. But historically people relied on it for a great deal and they considered its demands reasonable. And the covenant binds the man and wife so completely it changes them and they receive new names. A woman traditionally took her husband's name in order to show that she was bound to him; and a man was given a new title, *husband*—which means *house-bound*—*hus* for *house*, and *bund* for *bound*. And here—in the man's new title—we see how one thing leads to another. Marriage makes shelter; it establishes a household.

We have arrived. This is the foundation of a household. A household is established through binding promises made in the presence of witnesses. It isn't the result of two people moving in with each other. It isn't even a contract written in ink. It is a matter of life and death.

A caveat should be added here; it was common sense once, but isn't so common anymore. In the ancient world covenants were usually imposed from above. They bound sovereigns and subjects. A kingdom, for example, was made up of many households bound to a ruling house. You could say a kingdom was a household of houses. The reason this is important to keep in mind is that the work of sheltering each other is not evenly distributed. The responsibility falls primarily on the sovereign. Subjects are supposed to support and defend the king, of course, but primarily it is his responsibility to defend them. The same thing goes for households, naturally. The

*The Curmudgeon:  
Shacking Up*

There are many bad excuses for not getting married, but here is one of the worst: *We can't afford it.*

Everyone knows that two people sharing expenses live more cheaply than two people living separately. What these people mean to say without saying it is: *We can't afford the big wedding we want to have.* There is another possibility, one that's worse and goes unstated: *We want sex without commitment.* So, as the euphemism puts it, they *shack-up*.

What these people want is the benefits of marriage—but they want them on the cheap. And the structure that gets built is cheap; it is as flimsy and unstable as a shack. That's why calling it *shacking-up* is apropos. It seldom occurs to them that they devalue what they have by going cheap. But maybe worst of all, they sleazily assume that love is somehow more authentic when it doesn't have all the legal stuff thrown in. This usually comes out when the guy says (it's always the guy): *Hey man, a marriage license is just a piece of paper; what's the big deal?* Well, if it is just a piece of paper, why not humor everyone and get one?

husband shelters his wife and their dependents, and they in turn support him. That's why this book is entitled *Man of the House*. (I suppose I have now lost the few remaining gender egalitarians who have stuck with me this long.)

**The Real Reason People Don't Get Married Like they Used To**

We all know that the bonds of matrimony have gotten pretty loose. In the old days this loosening would have resulted in anarchy, but it hasn't today. Sure, many people are a mess and we can often trace their troubles to a broken home. But the world has not sunk into utter chaos. If it had, we would be in the middle of a massive recovery of the old morality. The reason that things aren't worse than they are is we've found ways to replace many of the practical benefits of the marriage bond.

That's the real reason many young people don't get married as they used to. They just don't feel the need to set up house. They are sheltered already. Some

folks are married to their jobs; others are *welfare queens* who are married to the Department of Social Services and collect their food-stamps with all the entitlement of royalty. Then there are the trust-fund babies who have never grown up.

And in an appalling reversal, some people actually think an old-fashioned marriage is downright dangerous. Some women fear domestic violence more than a home invasion and some men fear losing their incomes through divorce. For these women, direct reliance on a particular man for protection seems dangerously retrograde and for these men the idea that a wife could be the first acquisition in a pursuit of riches just seems naïve.

## COVENANTS

The irony is bitter; once upon a time the security and prosperity of a political order depended so much upon marriage the state reinforced the bond through the law. Today so little is believed to depend upon it the legal process for liquidating a marriage can be purchased over the internet for a nominal fee. But what can be done? Since our household arrangements seem to serve little more than our personal tastes, how can the state justify holding people to account when those tastes change?

### Preparing for the End

We've lost the felt need for the marriage covenant because the things we've replaced the household with seem almost invincible. What's marriage when you can depend on the corporate economy and the welfare state to shelter you? But things that seem invulnerable can prove to be surprisingly fragile. And things that seem small and insignificant can prove to be exceptionally resilient. What do you suppose a collapse of the banking system or the political disintegration of the nation state would do to the things we rely upon today? If things ever do fall apart my guess is the old logic of the marriage covenant will suddenly look very attractive and so will the old morality.

The problem is most people wouldn't know where to begin. Where household structures still stand they have grown so frail they can bear almost no weight. This is one good reason why you should start working on your own house now. There is another though, one I like even better because it has nothing to do with the prospect of social collapse. Building your own house is a noble and rewarding task; these days, it may even be heroic.

If you long for a greater measure of control over the things that bear most directly upon you, a house of your own is the only way to go. But you

### *The Curmudgeon: Sex in the City*

Conservatives are sometimes accused of being obsessed with sex. But this preoccupation actually keeps sex from becoming an obsession. Conservatives know that sexual passions have to be controlled if a traditional household is to function. Sexual probity protects the interests of both husband and wife and it secures the interests of their heirs. Progressives are obsessed with sex too, but they are obsessed with sex for its own sake. If sex outside of marriage is a taboo for conservatives, for progressives it is the highest good.

Shell games with words are popular to play when it comes to rationalization. The old notion of *liberty* has been replaced by something called *liberation*. Liberty depended upon self-reliance, but liberation is cheaper; it's nothing but a license to do as you please. But doing as you please can get expensive. That's why liberated people depend so heavily on government largesse.

PART I: THE FRAMEWORK OF A HOUSEHOLD

must do your building in a world filled with people who will not understand what you are doing. And the champions of safety in numbers may even question the legitimacy of it. But if the members of your house are truly bound together you will all be better off for it. And you will learn the sweet and the bitter of faithfulness and sacrifice. You will learn the true meaning of love.

## Chapter Two

### One Flesh

**A**nd the two shall become one flesh. You don't hear that much any more, but when you do it's usually written off as poetry. With the low regard for poetry these days, that pretty much relegates it to something fit for a greeting card. It's a metaphor of course, one that points to something that can only be found in the marriage covenant.

Metaphors call for interpretation, but that shouldn't discourage you from looking for truth there. We can judge interpretations; some are better than others. And the old hippie maxim, *You have your truth and I have mine* won't work here. The very metaphor we're looking at is intended to bring people together. That's something relativism just can't do.

#### The Interpretation of Marriage

Marriage today seems to be whatever you want it to be. I recently read a news report about a woman who "married" a tree. (I'm not sure how that's supposed to work, but I'm pretty sure it isn't a union of flesh.) It seems that

*The Philosopher:  
Getting Real with Metaphors*

Since building a house is something like writing a poem, something really must be said in defense of poetry. Modern people just don't believe a poem can tell the truth; biology—sure, even sociology on a good day. But a poem? Hardly.

Once, when people looked at the world, they believed they could see invisible things. When gazing intently at something that they could see, they believed they could discern the outlines of something they could not—like seeing the outlines of a body beneath a sheet. To this way of thinking the whole visible world is like a poem. Every tree is a metaphor. And even people are fantastically metaphorical; they are images of God.

A certain type of intellectual has been trying to stamp this out for quite some time. He has largely flattened academia, politics, and law, even popular culture. Religion, that great interpreter of the cosmic poem is holding out, but barely.

## PART I: THE FRAMEWORK OF A HOUSEHOLD

### *The Philosopher: The Symposium*

It is possible to find a reference to one flesh outside the Bible, but with a very different moral. It is in the myth of the androgyny as it is told in Plato's *Symposium*.

While in the Bible the story begins with a human being, in the *Symposium* it starts with a monster—a two-headed, eight-limbed absurdity. According to that tale, the thing is so self-absorbed that it offends the pride of Zeus, who decides that he must slice it in two. Now each half longs for the other. (Anyone who has found himself in the presence of two lovers that just can't keep from pawing each other can sympathize with Zeus.)

By contrast, when the Bible speaks of one flesh it begins with a lonely man. The Lord cuts him open and takes a rib. With the donated rib the Lord forms a woman. Then an application is made, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

The moral of each story seems to be the same: sex is reunion. But in the *Symposium* it seems more like nostalgia—a hankering after an original whole—while in Genesis it is progressive, an advance to something new. In Plato, sex is antisocial—a turning away from society, while in the Bible it is the genesis of society. In the *Symposium* the cut is a curse, in Genesis it is a blessing.

we've reduced marriage to one of those games that no one can lose because no one is allowed to keep score. But many children who have had the misfortune of being born into a home where people didn't think you could get marriage wrong know by bitter experience that you can. Sadly, when they grow up many of them want nothing to do with the institution. Maybe worse, when they do give it a shot they miss the target even more wildly than their parents did. People need help. But if they are going to get it, they had better learn to see the truth in a metaphor.

We're not very good at that any more. Facts are the only things people believe in these days. If you can't count it, or in some way measure it, it just isn't true. But human beings are not just bundles of facts. Even when you try to reduce people to biochemistry, biochemistry can't tell you why you shouldn't marry a tree. It can tell you that women who prefer trees to men will be childless—and that if all women preferred trees to men, the human race would die out. But that doesn't tell you why this would be a bad thing. To know why it would be a bad thing you need more than facts.

### **How to See the Truth in a Metaphor**

To see metaphorical truth you need the proper viewing angle. I found a ladder that's excellent for helping with that. It is an old one, but very sturdy. I discovered it beneath a pile of discarded things in the tool shed of Western

## ONE FLESH

culture. Of course it is a metaphorical ladder. What other sort of ladder would you expect?

So how do we use this metaphorical ladder with this *one flesh* business? We start on the bottom rung, the one closest to the ground. From that standpoint it is relatively easy to see that the metaphor *one flesh* is referring to the sexual union of a man and a woman.

At this level one flesh is as simple as joining parts; anyone who still works with real nuts and bolts knows the difference between male and female parts. But even so, joined parts can still come apart. The fullest embodiment of the metaphor is something more, it is the issue of the union—the body of a child. A child is physically, and undeniably, a union of flesh. It's a fact. A man and a

woman each make a contribution. You can't get a child any other way. The sum of it is: *one plus one equals one*.

But this is still only the first rung of the ladder, there are more rungs to climb.

To step up to the second rung you must ask, What *should* come next? When you've asked that question you've stepped up to morality.

Modern people prefer psychology to morality; it makes fewer demands. Morals are so unyielding. Why follow rules when feelings are so satisfying? This is why one flesh has lost any concrete point of reference and has come to stand for emotional intimacy.

Surely emotional intimacy is a wonderful thing, but is that solid enough to build a house upon? If divorce rates and the growth of single-motherhood indicate anything—no, probably not. Feelings come and go; sometimes you don't feel like being intimate, or even talking to your mate; sometimes you just feel walking out. People used to stay together for the kids—but that calls for self-denial, and that doesn't feel good. So, if you want your household to last longer than many do these days one flesh will need to refer to something more than "that lovin' feeling."

Our ancestors knew this—that's why they turned to politics.

### *The Curmudgeon: D.I.N.K.S.*

Back when these interlopers first appeared they were given them a name: D.I.N.K.S.—dual income, no kids. In those days you only found them in big cities. Now they're everywhere. Since they've become the new normal, the name has disappeared.

They used to be considered selfish. What they really are is short-sighted. They tend to think that children are the mistake that people make when they fail to plan ahead. The builders of real houses know better. They agree with every culture around the world, through all of history till five minutes or so ago, that children aren't the result of bad planning. They are the plan.