

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

The Day of Reckoning

Recently, the venerable *New York Times* ran an excellent article on the growing role, beyond the all important parenting, of women in the LDS Church in part because of the increasing number of women going on missions now that the age has been lowered from 21 to 18.

Like the young men who go on the two-year mission, many learn the importance of persistence in the face of rejection, acquire a sense of discipline, and understand the need to continue working in the face of adversity that carries over into their future endeavors.

Many of these young women, according to the *Times*, return with an expectation that they can be more than just a wife and a mother, that they can have a career and they want to be heard within the inner counsels of the LDS Church. The *Times* article credits LDS authorities with trying to be responsive, but like the Roman Catholic Church, another patriarchal oligarchy, it is just on the margins.

While the Catholic Church has a long record of women playing a more prominent role in Church affairs, from congregations of female orders to teaching, to Mother Teresa caring for the poor in India, it is a record of service, not that of shared power.

Both churches have their own rendezvous with destiny as circumstance will force change and adaptation towards a truly equal role for women in the governance as well as the administration of rites, rituals and sacraments.

Few of Idaho's 1.5 million citizens who are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have the perspective to form a real understanding of this uniquely American Church founded by Joseph Smith in the 1840s. Its growth though says that it has something going for it that many people find attractive. Today, it numbers over 15

million members in the United States, according to a recent nation-wide Gallup survey, and is the fastest growing church in the nation at a time when other churches record declining membership.

Almost one quarter of Idaho's citizens acknowledge affiliation with the LDS Church, and though this includes so-called "Jacks" (non-practicing members), it is the second highest percentage outside of Utah, the only state where Mormons constitute a slight majority of the population.

The 2000 year old Roman Catholic Church and the relatively young LDS Church, however, are both on the cusp of having to redefine the role of women in their midst if they are going to continue to grow and thrive.

Neither church is addressing the fundamental issue, *i.e.*, recognizing the female demand for full equality, which many believe will only come when both churches allow women to become priests.

Ironically, the fundamental impediment in both is the historic view regarding the sanctity of marriage, defined as the union of a man and a woman for the purposes of propagating the species, and the importance each places on motherhood and family as the cornerstone of society.

Equally vexing for a majority of women is the attitude both churches take towards a woman's right to choose. Polls show most women, like men, are troubled by abortion on demand, and by abortion after fetal viability. They subscribe, however, to the view that it is a matter of personal privacy and government, as well as churches, should butt out. The mantra of former President Bill Clinton, that abortion should be safe, legal and rare reflects their view well.

We all may agree that the sanctity of marriage, a reverence for life from conception to natural death and the criticality of family as the basic and best unit for a successful society is true, but the fact is these ideals fly in the face of overwhelming demographic evidence that says otherwise. The 2010 Census revealed that the traditional household with biological Dad and Mom and their two kids constitute less than one fourth of the homes in America today, the divorce rate remains above half of all marriages, and the number of babies born out of wedlock continues to climb.

Family Home evening is a wonderful practice, but its benefits are impacting fewer and fewer.

Church traditions appear to be on a collision course with inevitable, inexorable evolutionary change. Forces beyond the control of those holding current authority will dictate adaptation in order to survive. Both will recognize the power that emancipation of women will unleash.

Sometime in the 21st century, for Mormons through a revelation by an LDS Church president, prophet, seer and revelator, and for Catholics, through a Papal encyclical, women will at last be fully integrated as full and equal partners in all church affairs. Both institutions will be just that much more vibrant and relevant as women bring their energy and talents to the priesthood.