

Patriarchy From Athens to Today

It may be one's lot in life to live in the midst of a patriarchal society. Many converts in the New Testament did. Does patriarchy exist today? The roots of Christian patriarchy follow out of the world's patriarchy, so it is good to trace its path.

Last time we saw that Aristotle's ideas dominated society for most of the past two thousand years. This influence lasted because it had order and it was efficient. Order is a good thing. Groups of people that are trying to work cooperatively for overall benefit need a certain organization, and a ruler emerges. Even the nation of Israel needed judges and later had kings for good order. Human depravity makes organization and leaders necessary.

Aristotle's hierarchy was different from the typical nation organized with kingly rulers, an army, and the citizens. Through his unique but spiritually blind use of logic, he believed that the physical differences of people and the social order of animals taught him that the whole society should have a hierarchal order to it. He believed and taught that this order included the right and duty of rule to be given to the physically and mentally superior people of the land. In Athens these were going to be the wealthy, educated Greek people and mostly men. Roman culture admired the Greeks and was highly influenced by them. The Romans adopted Aristotle's social order, and it did provide a certain kind of peace and increased prosperity. It also justified to the Greeks and Romans the spread of their control over other lands. They believed they were destined to take over those weaker, less urbanized, and 'inferior' people. Greek-Roman territory grew to include North Africa, the Mediterranean and eastward through Iran, north through the Netherlands and west through Europe and the United Kingdom. Aristotle's social order of patriarchy accompanied their control in these territories. The human depravity that requires order is also the very thing that makes this patriarchal hierarchy turn into a problem with very bad results. The elite at the top of this system soon do everything they can to preserve their position. The peace never lasts and the oppressed of the system eventually martial their strength and rise up. Patriarchal order is effective because it includes a form of racism, subjugation of the lowly, and the preferential treatment of the elite. These three things are condemned in the Bible.

With Aristotle's social order of superior over the inferior, slavery had taken on a racial component. It also locked in the future generations to more slavery. Previously most slavery was brought on by poverty, personal debt, or being a captive in a war; one's state of slavery had not always been permanent. Slavery prevailed on and off throughout most lands. Race, and later on religious difference, was now also a reason for slavery. Slaves were mere items to be owned. The women and children of slaves could be sold off separately at any time. Slaves could legally be killed.

Near the end of medieval times the British and Dutch Empires grew. The expansion of colonial exploitation around the world began, and white male patriarchy found revival in Europe. Slavery, especially of Africans, made a comeback in the Netherlands with her colonies. Soon Britain, her colonies, and a few other countries joined this slave trade. The business of trading African slaves to their colonies for the goods produced by slaves in those colonies further enriched the growing British and Dutch economies. Slavery was justified by claiming that these people were barbaric savages, without laws or religions, and therefore not fully human. It was claimed that slavery was actually a good thing for these people because they could acquire civilization on the plantations in America and other British and Dutch colonies. Around 1770 some Christians began to question prevailing interpretations of the Bible that taught that slavery was a good and even commendable activity. They began to work towards abolishing slavery.

The British elite of the pre-Victorian era totally embraced patriarchy. They valued their lineage and protected the continuity of their family lines and elite social position as well as their wealth, power, and control. They believed they were born to rule by divine right. Strict obedience to the male leaders was expected. They saw their society as family and themselves as the father. They believed it was their duty to guide society like one would guide a child. They protected their traditions and power with laws, including laws according to which the first-born male inherited everything. Patriarchy also grew in the Netherlands as its Dutch Empire grew during the same era. The link between men and fathers to the rule of God the Father was abused to sanction further the idea of father rule, male dominance, and of patriarchs who govern. With this concept, the Dutch patriarchal fathers could infuse themselves with supreme authority and extend it to the ruler who was

perceived as the symbolic father. Those in power often abuse the Bible and religion to justify their actions and ideas and retain their power. Father-son relationships were celebrated to honor the lineage. Patriarchal practices of exchanging women from elite families for marriage that benefited both parties were common. Family heads controlled whom their daughters married according to the needs of the family or aspirations of the father.

In the early 1800s a more ugly side of Aristotle's hierarchal mindset emerged through some English scholars. Charles Darwin, his half-cousin Francis Galton, and a contemporary, Herbert Spencer, developed their ideas. Darwin's book on natural selection, Spencer's coined phrase, 'survival of the fittest' and Galton's expansion of Darwin's studies had a new ability to rank races and maintain patriarchy's idea of the superior controlling the inferior. The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* had a chapter called 'Variation Under Domestication' which concerned the breeding of domestic animals, and this changed Galton's life. He explored the variety in human populations and its implications for society. He developed a system of defining a family's genetic merit. He promoted early, youthful marriages between qualifying families. Finding a 'proper' spouse really meant finding a genetically preferred spouse. He encouraged government incentives for qualifying couples to have children. Galton invented the term *eugenics*. This is the practice of improving the genetic quality of a population, and he lectured in Europe about it. It advocated a higher reproduction level of people with desired traits and the reduced level of reproduction by people with less desirable traits. The methods used were restricted or regulated marriages and forced sterilization. The traits deemed unfit to be carried into the next generation included mental and physical disabilities, criminals, deviants and dis-favored minority groups. One of these traits in your broader family would really make marriage into an elite family impossible. The fear of negative stigma concerning one's family genetics contributed to the practice where families quickly stashed away their physically and mentally disabled members into an institution and rarely spoke of them openly. It also discouraged interracial marriages.

Herbert Spencer, a follower of Darwin, advocated the idea that 'the survival of the fittest' could and should be applied to society. He also encouraged the careful oversight

of which people had the right to bare children and who would be restricted as unworthy. His ideas were later called Social Darwinism. Spencer's applications of 'survival of the fittest' appealed to the elite who were already in power. It fueled the elitism, greed, and unbridled capitalism in Britain and the U.S. at that time. He argued that social welfare programs only interfered with natural selection to the detriment of humankind. Social and religious leaders hotly debated these ideas. Later, a truly dark side of patriarchy, eugenics and genetic cleansing reached a terrible climax in Nazi Germany.

The early American settlers had come from England, bringing with them their patriarchal mindset. Many considered the native people of this land to be inferior and even non-human because they were barbaric and savage. We know that they were very ungodly and steeped in pantheism, but they were not inferior as humans and should not have been viewed as such. Later, when the Irish, Italians, and Asians came to America in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they also were considered lower humans and discriminated against. The founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, who came along about 100 years after Darwin, fully embraced Galton's eugenics. In her *Plan for Peace*, she promoted the eradication of the poor, the feebleminded, and the Negro. She believed that the over-running of society with inferior minorities and poor that she called 'human weeds' would lead to the end of humanity.

Patriarchy exists in many Arabic, Asian, and Indian societies and women are often considered property as well as less than human and sometimes even less than animals. There are no penalties for someone who assaults them and in some countries there is even legal protection for the men who assault any woman including their own wives. The Chinese for many years have killed their infant daughters.

Prior to the mid-1800s, most legal systems worldwide accepted wife-beating as a valid exercise of a husband's authority over his wife. In 1866 the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed. It predated the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, established in 1875. Both predated any organization aimed at preventing cruelty to women. Although wife-beating was made illegal in all states of the U.S. by 1920, it was the 1970s before concern about wives being beaten by their husbands gained significant attention. The feminist movements throughout the 1900s challenged the patriarchy in America. Their use of unlawful, blatant

rebellion was wrong. Yet this does not make some of the things that they accomplished automatically sinful.

Psychiatrists today trace patriarchy back to pre and early Victorian times and back to Aristotle. To most experts, patriarchy is the explanation for how a small number of men managed to dominate and control the growing wealth and power of the British Empire. Patriarchy was and is a very universal social format. Psychiatrists understand how patriarchy leads to much oppression and discrimination. Many believe that evolution contributed to patriarchy, and they try to think of ways to evolve beyond it.

There are many books and articles written around the world about patriarchy and how it has impacted people and relationships. The principles of patriarchy encourage pride and arrogance and very often lead to physical and emotional abuse of those who are considered to be inferior. The principle of patriarchy also causes the inferior of the system to believe that they deserve this treatment. Some are so emotionally weakened that they will even allow themselves to be killed or nearly killed because they believe that they have no choice. Women are often unable or too fearful to protect their own children. The need to overcome the effects of patriarchy in peoples' lives keeps psychiatrists busy all over the globe.

The world is full of sin, and the fall of man brought devastation to the animal world. Aristotle's study of animals and society around him was accurate, but his application of what he learned was not profitable for everyone involved. Using these things as a guide for how to live or how to direct society led to a lot of sorrow and more sin. Without God as his guide, man cannot be just or truly loving. Next time we will explore the birth of Christian patriarchy.