

“West Virginia has the highest percentage of transgender youth in the nation.”

## Appendix: Further Reflections for Fathers

by Revd Chris Borah

West Virginia has the dubious honor of being the only state where more than half of working age adults don't work [and increasingly, they don't want to] and drug overdose death rates are almost double the rates of the next closest states.<sup>1</sup> While the institutional statistics of the collapse of an industrial economy are bad, it is much worse in homes.

An independent institute based at UCLA, which conducts sexual orientation and gender identity research, the Williams Institute found that “West Virginia has the highest percentage of transgender youth in the nation.”<sup>2</sup> Why? Why are there the *most* transgender youth in a pro-Trump, red state? When I talked with multiple Young Life area directors throughout our state, they were not surprised.

“...many kids [are being] raised by grandparents with little oversight on digital [communication...] *They're digitally feral*. At one point at end of Covid we had 3 trans kids at campaigners and 3 or 4 other LGBT kids, even out here.” (Paul, YL Area Director from the poorest county in the nation)

“...our high percentage of transgender [kids] correlates to our very high percentage of abandonment. Several counties have schools with 50% of the students not having *either* parent as a primary contact on file with a school. One county has 80% of students with neither parent as a primary contact on file... I think the abandonment drives kids to cry out for attention...” (Scott Berg, YL Regional Director for WV/Appalachia)

I know of dozens of children in middle schools and high schools in multiple counties in West Virginia whom identify as “furries,” and anecdotally, it's not the more progressive counties with universities that have the highest numbers – it seems to get worse the *more rural* you get. The structure of households has been destroyed by industrialization and technology. Children are raised by the internet, they're “digitally feral,” and if they do go to church, even there, the fatherless don't have fathers who are present with them in meaningful ways and for meaningful amounts of time.

After I submitted my paper for this symposium, I read an article by Nancy Pearcey published in May/June 2023 issue of *Touchstone*.<sup>3</sup> Pearcey outlines many foolish and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/westvirginia/wv.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/\\_/id/37595150/sources-bob-huggins-take-1m-salary-reduction-anti-gay-slur](https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/37595150/sources-bob-huggins-take-1m-salary-reduction-anti-gay-slur)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=36-03-021-f>

silly fruits brought about by industrialization. As feminism was beginning to respond to the inequalities in our new market-driven world, in the mid-twentieth century, evangelicals responded with “muscular Christianity” – Jesus was “no dough-faced, lick-spittle proposition”... Jesus was “the greatest scrapper that ever lived”... one famous evangelist preached a “hard-muscled, pick-axed religion,” not some “dainty, sissified, lily-livered piety.” Both femininity and masculinity had become problems, and both progressive feminism and conservative muscular Christianity were bad answers.

At the end of her article, Pearcey highlights the research of Brad Wilcox, a University of Virginia sociologist, who concluded, “The happiest of all wives in America are religious conservatives... who hold conservative gender values.” But not *all* conservative households, only a certain kind.

Wilcox found that if a mother and father are committed to gathering with the Church weekly, this is the lowest rate [2.8%] of domestic violence among any demographic in our nation. But – listen to this – the *highest rate* of domestic violence of any demographic group in America [7.2%] – more than secular people who do not claim any religion at all – the highest rate of domestic violence is for “nominal evangelical Protestants who attend church infrequently or not at all.” Pearcey concludes,

“It seems that many nominal men hang around the fringes of the Christian world just enough to hear the language of headship and submission but not enough to learn the biblical meaning of those terms—like skimming the news headlines without reading the actual stories. They cherry-pick verses from the Bible and read them through a grid of male superiority and entitlement they have absorbed from the secular guy code. Then they manipulate Scripture to justify their abusive behavior.”

More than 7 out of every 100 men that claim conservative Christianity on the census but don't go to church, their anger turns to violence *more easily* than secular husbands and fathers. In others words, feminism truly helped many legitimate problems brought about industrialization. The egalitarian, de-masculinized secular society that we live in is *better* than a false headship theology that doesn't gather with the household of God – a Gentile-like “authority” that is divorced from the cross of Jesus Christ is [more] abusive. Better still – households who hold to “conservative gender values,” who gather weekly within the household of God to sit beneath Holy Scripture and to hear the cruciform Way of Life proclaimed in the gospel – this traditional, embodied way of being leads to more flourishing, increased happiness for children, for mothers, and for fathers. We don't have to choose between progressive, egalitarian warmth, and industrial, artificial rigidity. There is a better way – a patristic, gentle fatherly headship, alongside a gentle motherly submission, which daily wages war against principalities within our homes and within the household of God.

A war against feminism is bad. A *holy* war against feminism is much worse. If the secular culture baptizes sexual foolishness and calls it good, people who check conservative Christian on a census but who don't gather to hear the word of God, they baptize false-masculinity, "muscular Christianity" – Jesus is a MMA-loving "pick-axed" man, "the greatest scrapper that ever lived." Men and women must gather weekly and submit to Holy Scripture. For those who do gather on Sunday, we must make small and large steps towards removing artificial separations when we gather. We must increasingly make space for fathers, mothers, and children who gather, to witness sacrificial headship embodied by spiritual fathers embracing, comforting, and catechizing the fatherless, not divided into separate spaces. Young children, grown-up children, mothers and fathers, gathered together in the messy space of the home, an undivided, embodied household that includes every person in the intimate, messy family of God.