

IS OUR CULTURE IN SUDDEN DEATH?

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Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation, made quite a splash in February when he announced that our culture was irretrievably lost. "The culture we are living in," wrote Weyrich, "becomes an ever-wider sewer." With certainty, he wrote that "we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportion," and that is why he said "we need to drop out of this culture."

Weyrich's resignation came in the wake of the Clinton "victory" over the Senate. Now it is true that most Americans responded to the Clinton scandals more with indifference than outrage, but this, I believe, was more indicative of their exhaustion than approval. After all, we are an impatient people, and just how many months of "we-almost-got-'em" type politics were we supposed to endure before boredom—and moral fatigue—set in?

One does not have to agree with Weyrich's conclusion to admit that our culture is in deep trouble. For example, here's a quick sample of what is featured on daytime TV these days.

"People who believe they were tricked into marriage learn paternity test results." "A guest confronts the woman who slept with her husband and is now marrying her son." "Women who like the challenge of getting a man to sleep with them." "Mother-daughter feuds that have escalated to restraining orders and DNA tests." "Women discover their common lover has been unfaithful." "Former nerds show off their physical improvements." "Teen-age girls and sexual addictions." "Men reveal they've cheated with their girlfriends' best friends."

“Women show off their physical attributes to former tormentors.” “Women who are attracted to bad men.” “Denying daddies react to paternity test results.” “Teens who want to pursue careers as strippers despite parental objections.” “Guests confront the lovers who deceived them.”

Two quick observations: the women are a mess and the public likes to gawk at them (obviously, the men are creeps but it is the women who keep coming back for more). And it is the women who are the ones watching this trash.

At night, we have wrestling. But it’s not like the wrestling of old—today’s brand is obscene. For example, researchers at Indiana University recently discovered that over a one-year period, in the 50 episodes of “WWF Raw” (World Wrestling Federation), there were 1,658 instances where wrestlers grabbed their crotch, 434 spots where obscene phrases were uttered, 157 examples where wrestlers extended their middle finger, 128 simulated acts of sexual activity, 47 instances of satanic activity and 42 instances of simulated drug use.

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If all this is true, why isn’t Weyrich right? Weyrich says our culture is dead, or practically dead, and that is a far cry from saying that it’s sick. Sickness can be cured. Or it can lead to death. Which course it takes depends on what we want to do about it—fight for a cure or quit. For the Catholic League, the only answer is to fight.

Weyrich’s wrongheaded fatalism doesn’t mean that his most ferocious critics are right. Some of them are in need of more than a shower—they need to be sent to the tank to dry out.

The *New York Post* has an editorial page which differs markedly from the one found on the pages of the *New York Times*. Both

papers have well-written statements of opinion and they are generally excellent representations of their respective schools of thought. But the *New York Post* editorial on Weyrich's announcement was downright irresponsible.

The *Post* accused Weyrich of being "anti-American." Call him a quitter, if you like, but Paul Weyrich has spent his entire life trying to make America a better place for all of us. To put him in the same camp with flag burners is an outrage. It also indicates a hubris about the *Post's* editors that is disturbing.

On the other flank, we have sociologist Alan Wolfe. He's glad that Weyrich is hanging it up, branding him a "moral regulator." That invidious term would never be used by people like Wolfe to describe college administrators who force students to live in sexually integrated dorms, or the censors who ban crèches from parks, or the California activists who want to make criminals out of parents who spank their kids, etc. No, for Wolfe the "moral regulators" are always those who seek to repair the culture, not those who want to bring it down.

As we were about to go to press, Paul Weyrich sent me a note saying he's not giving up. This suggests that a sudden death outcome may yet be avoided: we still have a chance to recapture our culture, and recapture it we will.