

A couple of weeks ago I saw an article in The Wall Street Journal, about a mansion for sale. The paper has a weekly section filled with stories of properties worth tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. But what struck me was that the owners were described as a “throuple:” three gay men living together in a three-way sexual relationship. I don’t know if the newspaper was pushing an agenda by giving the relationship coverage – or if the author didn’t see the arrangement as noteworthy at all, just another set of New York homeowners.

But it made me think: “The times they are a-changing.” And nowhere as much as in the state of the family.

On this Feast of the Holy Family, I want to begin with an influential lecture given some years ago by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. The lecture was entitled, “On Creative Minorities.” Sacks addressed how Christians might deal with their developing minority status in western society. He was a Jew, of course, and therefore spoke from thousands of years’ experience on

the subject. (And, and as aside, it seems to be happening again.

Antisemitism and violence against Jews are growing. We must resist this ancient mind-virus) The Jews have been minorities in Christian and Islamic cultures for centuries, and yet they have survived and continue to influence the world.

Rabbi Sacks started with a quotation from Jeremiah, chapter 29. The Prophet had warned the Israelites not to resist the Babylonian army, but to turn to God and trust in Him. They refused. As a result, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the Jews were sent into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah wrote to the Jewish exiles, telling them to build houses in Babylon, marry, increase their families. Only after 70 years would God bring them back to rebuild Jerusalem.

Sacks says Jeremiah was aiming to form a “creative minority.” He says there are four ways for a religious minority to respond to exile. First it can assimilate to the dominant culture. That leads to its disappearance. The Jews are aware of this possibility. Many Jews

throughout history have assimilated into gentile culture. This is why religious Jews are so opposed to intermarrying with non-Jews.

The second response can be violent resistance to the dominant culture or ideology. Sacks is perhaps thinking here of radical Islam. But the Maccabees are an example of a Jewish military resistance to oppression.

The third possibility is to withdraw into protected enclaves: live in a ghetto, so to speak. Jews have often done this – have often been forced to do so in the past, including by Catholics and other Christians. Sacks sees some merit in it, but this response has the disadvantage of reducing the religion's chance to influence the larger culture.

The fourth way of exile is to become a “creative minority” which means maintaining strong self-identity while at the same time keeping strong links with the surrounding culture. This is the most difficult to pull off, the Jewish Rabbi says. It has great risks. Staying true to one's faith while dialoging with a sometimes hostile or uncomprehending

culture is difficult. But if one can pull it off this can offer the best chance to do God's work in the world despite's one's minority status.

I thought about these choices for Catholics in the West when I read today's Gospel passage. The Flight into Egypt by the Holy Family means exile. For years Joseph, Mary, and Jesus will live in a foreign land. That means Joseph and Mary taught Jesus the Jewish customs and law amid a people who worshipped pagan idols. Mary and Joseph were faced with the question, how does one remember Nazareth while living in Egypt? That is a question we 21st century Catholic Americans should also be asking, because our society has radically different visions of the family and the common good.

It's not just "throuples." The Catholic teaching on marriage, sexuality, gender, family, and parental roles, is increasingly foreign to many Americans. In fact, it can appear evil or harmful to them.

But the truth of the Faith, is simultaneously attracting others looking for the permanent. There is a great need, not only to be able to

defend the teaching intellectually, but also to live out the beauty of it -- for the sake of the curious. For every person rebelling against what is seen as outdated threats to individuals' right to choose their own happiness, there is another person, looking for the structures and forms of the Tradition in a culture where things seem to be dissolving.

Can we reach them as a creative minority -- share the Church's teaching about marriage, or the theology of the body, in a way that can move them enough to counteract the world's description of it as simply mean-spirited rules?

This is just one example of what is an increasingly common reality for Catholics and other Christians. But it should lead us to being very intentional in thinking about our strategies in trying to raise holy families. What will we choose? Assimilation? I see a good deal of that happening. Is it happening to your family? Violent resistance? I hope and pray not. Separation? I think an element of that is now necessary. Exiles need a community of like-minded believers for support. Almost

certainly, the Holy Family settled in one of Egypt's Jewish neighborhoods. A creative minority requires at least a minimum level of tolerance in the majority culture. Does that exist today? I think so. As I said, there are an increasing number of young people who are curious about the Church precisely because of its stability. But it's fluid situation.

Like Mary and Joseph, we will have to teach our children the ways of faith in the middle of foreign ideas and cultural norms. Are we up to that task? Will we, desiring to raise holy families, remember Nazareth while living in Egypt?