Family/Sexual Chaos and the Evangelical Faith

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Preface
The Christian community faces an immense pastoral, ethical, and apologetic challenge in relation to the sexual chaos of the twenty-first century. I am tempted to compare the magnitude of this challenge to the magnitude of the challenge from Gnosticism in the second and third centuries, a challenge which threatened to overwhelm the church and its message. It was not only the claims of secret knowledge as the means of salvation that moved Christian pastors and spokespeople to respond to Gnosticism by clarifying the canon of the Bible and developing the great creeds of the church. The sexual practices arising from Gnosticism also required a response.

Two opposite ethical distortions arose because of the way in which Gnosticism and the related Hellenistic religions and philosophies radically separated the human body from the human soul in extreme dualism. Some thought that because the human body was unredeemable and totally evil, Christians should make as little use of the body as is humanly possible. This required, they claimed, the total renunciation of marriage and sexuality in order to try to practice holiness. Some religious leaders even taught married couples to separate from each other so that they would not have sexual relations with their spouses. Others thought that because only the human soul is important, what people do with their bodies, including sexuality, has no moral or spiritual significance. They thought anything related to the human body was not important. This led to extreme moral relativism with regard to sexuality. Christians began to recognize that both results of Gnosticism with regard to sexual ethics were life-destroying distortions that did not correspond with central Christian beliefs. In the early creeds, Christians clarified their affirmation of the goodness of creation, the reality of the Eternal Son of God becoming flesh, and the resurrection of the physical body in response to Gnosticism; they believed these fundamental convictions should compel Christians to practice moral responsibility, i.e., holiness, within sexuality, marriage, and family in a life-restoring manner. Fundamental theology was closely connected to the ethics of sex.

Once again today, fundamental theology is closely tied to the ethics of sex. Building on what our Christian ancestors articulated in the early Christian creeds, we propose that a related set of themes in evangelical theology can provide guidance today. Some of these themes are the relation between law and gospel; the multiple, distinct uses of the moral law; and ethical apologetics which, in previous centuries, was called the use of God’s natural moral law appropriated by means of moral reasoning. We are not offering either a first or a last word on the ethics of sexuality; the first Word came from God in creation, and there is a tremendous need for continuous research and teaching in Christian ethics today. We are offering a framework within which continuing academic, pastoral, and educational efforts can be organized in our minds and ministries. And we appeal to our fellow Christians to study and teach the Bible lovingly and courageously, while those with suitable talents also take up the tools of the social sciences and Christian philosophy to apply that biblical message to a hurting world.
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Sexual Chaos, the Moral Law, and the Gospel

Considerations of marriage, sexuality, and family always strike the core of our being, our most intimate thoughts and feelings. None of us is without both fears and joys, both guilt and gratitude, in relation to parents, siblings, partners, or children. And because these thoughts and feelings are so close to us, they can never be separated from our relationship with God and with the church.

Like many, we perceive pervasive sexual and family chaos across much of our global society. And this chaos is not only outside the church community, “in the world.” Our pastors, teachers, and counselors are engaged day and night shepherding believers through this chaos in their own experience, while countless thousands of new converts to Christ come with wounded hearts from all imaginable sexual sins and abuses. At the same time, the world around us, into which Jesus has sent us, is swirling with ideologies and philosophies, often rooted in extreme moral relativism and a loss of respect for human dignity as created, male and female, in the image of God. Some such ideologies and philosophies contribute to the sexual chaos that is damaging or even destroying the lives of so many.

Our evangelical response has to be balanced, both comforting the hurting with the good news of God’s boundless forgiveness and grace in Christ and clarifying the standards of God’s moral law that provide the boundaries people need to move out of chaos into ordered love. Indeed, it is because God created his moral law into human nature and relationships that people come to us with a terrible sense both of having sinned against others and of having been sinned against by others. Even when God has not yet been mentioned, the presence of God’s good law, making us aware of standards for proper sexual and family life, is what drives people to the gospel of Christ, seeking forgiveness for their own sins and seeking healing for the sins committed against them. In the language of classical evangelical theology, marital and sexual chaos is driving us to consider more deeply the relationship between God’s moral law, given to us both in creation and in Scripture, and grace, the gospel of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Christians and our not-yet-Christian neighbors need to hear both boundary-setting standards (the moral law) and forgiveness (the gospel) from Christian pastors and spokespeople. Our preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and style of life together in the Christian community must embody forgiving grace, which always stands in a complex relation with the moral law.

Martin Luther and John Calvin contributed much to understanding the relation between God’s law, meaning the commands and demands of God, and the gospel, meaning the promise of grace, forgiveness, and justification by faith. They clarified the importance of this relation for personal life, for biblical exposition, for Christian leadership, and for life in society, all of which are important for responding to global sexual chaos. Commenting on some theologians of his era who did clearly distinguish law and gospel, Luther claimed, “This situation has produced a very
dangerous condition for consciences.”¹ This is especially true for the evidence of afflicted consciences we hear every day. Calvin claimed that this distinction, so crucial to the cure of souls, was also central in the Bible itself. “[Paul] is continually employed in contrasting the righteousness of the law with the free acceptance which God is pleased to bestow.”² And Luther saw this as the key ability that qualifies Christian spokespeople. “Therefore whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian.”³ But, with self-critical distance, he also said, “I admit that in the time of temptation I myself do not know how to do this as I should.”⁴

In our preaching, counseling, and worship, we have to repeatedly proclaim the grace of God in Jesus that provides full forgiveness for all our sins. But then the burning question always arises, “What is the purpose of God’s law, if we can only fall at the feet of Jesus, confessing our sin and brokenness?” Since the time of Luther and Calvin, we have had a rich discussion of this topic in evangelical ethics and pastoral theology. In light of this rich discussion, let me suggest that God’s moral law has at least three important functions, all of which must be consciously activated by our preachers, educators, and counselors in response to the sexual chaos of our era. Though we have some diversity of terminology within evangelical theology, I will describe these three uses of God’s moral law as the Doxological Use of God’s moral law, the Convicting Use of God’s moral law, and the Social Use of God’s moral law. The order is not important, but we should not forget any of these three uses. And both the Social Use and the Convicting Use of God’s moral law move us into the realm of ethical apologetics, which is explicitly on the border between the church and the world, for which multiple complementary methods of presentation are of great value.

The Doxological Use of God’s Moral Law

A believer should ask himself or herself, “How should I live a life of worship to God in gratitude for creation and for the gift of salvation in Christ?” This is the question that arises from the assurance and comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ. It is the question addressed in many biblical texts of moral instruction. For example, we read in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

³ Luther, Galatians, 115.
⁴ Luther, Galatians, 115.
In light of having been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus, believers are taught to turn away from sin and to embrace a new life to the glory of God, guided by God-given norms. We can call these norms God’s moral law in its doxological use, describing and guiding the new life of worship to God. The members of our churches need rich biblical teaching on ethical life motivated by gratitude and expressed in worship. In this context, we especially mention biblical teaching on marriage, sexuality, and family life as central dimensions of an entire life of service to God in all the many spheres of life. This type of instruction often refers back to from where we have come: “That is what some of you were.” It often leads to describing and prescribing the future. Ephesians 5:8 exhorts us, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

When we move to the social and convicting uses of God’s law, we are moving into those realms which our predecessor John R. W. Stott described as “ethical apologetics.” And once we are in this realm, it is extremely valuable to employ multiple complementary methods of presentation, including not only exposition of the Bible but also a wide range of tools from the social sciences, philosophy, and the arts, always letting the Bible control and direct our use of the various fields of learning.

The Convicting Use of God’s Moral Law

This use of God’s moral law has also been called the converting use of the law, since it should convert us to see our need for the gospel by means of showing us our sin. Martin Luther sometimes called it the theological use of the law, since it so directly relates to God, whereas the civil or social use of the moral law is more closely related to life in society. He wrote, “Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate, and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God.” Or in the language of the apostle Paul, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” (Romans 3:20) The convicting use of God’s law should drive us to cry out, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (See Luke 18:13.)

The convicting use of God’s law can strike our conscience directly from the Bible. The prophet Malachi quoted God: “I hate divorce.” (Malachi 2:16) For the sake of seeing the relation between law and gospel, we should simultaneously remember Jesus’ gracious discussion with the woman at the well in Samaria. (John 4) God hates sin, but he sent Jesus as the Savior of sinners. In the

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5 John Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Pickering, 3rd edition, 1999), 62. Stott explains, “In social action . . . we should neither try to impose Christian standards by force on an unwilling public, nor remain silent and inactive before the contemporary landslide, nor rely exclusively on the dogmatic assertion of biblical values, but rather reason with people about the benefits of Christian morality, commending God’s law to them by rational arguments.” P. 61. Such efforts should consciously presuppose that God’s general revelation of his moral law, the natural moral law, is constantly impinging on human life and experience and provides the possibility of moral reason.

6 Luther, *Galatians*, 309.
way Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman in discussion with himself, God Incarnate, we see the gospel implemented. The woman knew that God hates divorce, but now she learned directly from Jesus that God loves, forgives, and restores divorced people. We need to remind people of God’s moral law, even saying that God hates sin, but with the purpose of drawing those people to the loving embrace of Jesus, since a purpose of God’s law is to bring people to the gospel by making our sin painfully obvious.

Our confrontation with God’s law in its convicting use comes not only by means of encounter with the Bible, in reading or preaching. People also have a direct awareness of God’s law and demand as part of their general, direct awareness of God, traditionally called the sensus divinitatis. In this way, people can directly perceive the rightness of family loyalty and the wrongness of betrayal and faithlessness. Such conviction of sin in the realm of marriage, sex, and family can also drive its way into our consciences by means of observing the results of sin, whether these be the results we see in ourselves and in people we know, or through the more theoretical means of the studies coming from social scientists documenting alternately the consequences of faithfulness to spouse and children or the consequences of abandoning spouse and children. God uses complex and complementary means to bring us an awareness of our sin and fallenness.

Unfortunately, confrontation with God’s law in its convicting use does not end when we come to faith in the gospel. Though we all wish it were different, sin clings to us even when we have been washed by faith in Christ. Repeatedly we return to the gospel to embrace and to be embraced by God’s forgiveness, and not only for sins of the distant past. That is why we talk about the justification of the ungodly; there is no hope of eternal life if God does not, by faith alone despite our repeated sins, justify such ungodly people as ourselves. And that is why we need the exhortation of the apostle Paul to continually put off the old self and to regularly put on the new self, created to be like God. (See Ephesians 5:22-24.)

The Social Use of God’s Moral Law

This proper use of God’s moral law has also been called the political (arising from the Greek word polis, meaning community) or the civil use of God’s law. It refers to the way in which sin can be partly restrained from reaching its full destructive consequences by means of a package of social institutions, including wise law enforcement based on wise laws, moral and character development of children in the family and in schools, policies in business and government which promote responsible behavior, good role models, professional codes of ethics (even if God is not directly mentioned), and even mutual criticism of each other in society which makes many want to prove they are good neighbors. For some people this moral restraint might be an external burden, but some people, regardless of faith, may genuinely want to be good neighbors and good citizens. Of course, the moral teaching of Christians and churches, including basic Bible teaching, plays an important role in this social use of God’s moral law, distinct from the way Christians and the Bible declare the saving gospel of Christ. Some recognize the Bible as “The
Good Book” even if they do not yet trust in Jesus for salvation. And numerous moral themes from the Bible have become parts of many cultures, such as belief in human dignity and love of neighbors, illustrating the role of the Bible in the social use of God’s law. The ultimate background for this use of the moral law is God’s continuing activity by which he declares his moral will through creation (including the creation of humans) in order to care for and sustain his creation.

In this use, a community’s knowledge of God’s good moral law is often obscured by sin and unbelief and even by terrible ideologies, religious extremism, radical nationalism, or institutionalized crime. Such problems reduce or almost destroy the proper social use of God’s moral law, leading to unrestrained sin in society. Christians should speak openly about these problems, offer alternatives, and be careful that the moral authority of the churches not be subverted.

To avoid confusion we must be clear that there is a difference between what we believe to be a sin before God and what should be a crime in the eyes of the state. Many sins should not also be crimes before the state; otherwise whole populations would be in prison. (Think of lust, greed, pride, and hatred.) And many legal requirements in a responsible state merely serve good order without being based on an action being sinful or not sinful. (Should we drive on the right hand side or the left hand side of the road? The state must decide, though neither decision by the state is sinful.) In person Jesus addressed some sins in the realm of marriage and sexuality primarily in a spiritual manner, not invoking government law enforcement. But this example of Jesus must not be distorted to avoid compliance with important laws which protect people from sexual abuse.

**Ethical apologetics**

Especially with regard to the social and convicting uses of God’s moral law, ethical apologetics are necessary. This is the reasoned articulation of biblically informed moral convictions in public life. Obviously, this is closely related to the entire apologetic task given to Christians, to give a reason for the hope that we have (See 1 Peter 3:15.), but there is a distinction between explaining why we believe in the gospel and explaining why murder is wrong. This is part of the distinction between law and gospel. And in parts of global society, some themes in Christian ethics are seen as irrational or as contrary to human wellbeing; this is especially true with regard to biblically informed ethics of marriage, sexuality, and family. The task of ethical apologetics is urgent to bolster the entire credibility of the Christian faith in private and on the global stage, to improve the Christian contribution to the social use of the moral law, and to assist with regard to the conviction of sin for those seekers on the way to the gospel. And it is a help to believers to hear that their response to the law of God is supported by good facts and reason.

Within the evangelical community, we have multiple models of ethical apologetics that we see as complementary, not as contradictory. There may be more models of ethical apologetics that
should be developed and applied. In the following appendices, we offer three models of ethical apologetics related to the ethics of sexuality, marriage, and family. The first uses a method of correlation, answering one of the philosophical questions that stands behind some of the sexual chaos of our time. Other philosophical questions could be addressed in a similar manner. The second appendix uses a method of direct or intuitionial perception of moral duties and moral values. This method can also be used in other areas of ethical apologetics related to sexuality and relationships. The third appendix uses a social science method that seeks to document the social consequences of different policies and principles. This method is especially suited to application to government policies, but it can also be applied to a wide range of questions and situations.

We offer these three models to inspire fellow Christians toward greater efforts in this area, not as a final word on these subjects.
What Makes Sex So Special?

The Question: What’s So Different about Sex?

“What shalt not commit adultery.” Exodus 20:14

“Why shouldn’t sex be treated like any other activity? Why should we consider it moral to play tennis with somebody we don’t love but immoral to have sex with somebody we don’t love? Why should we consider it moral to eat lunch with somebody of the same sex but immoral to have sex with that same person? Why should we be permitted to go to a movie purely for pleasure but not have sex purely for pleasure? What’s so different about sex that it requires such special rules?”

To be fair to Olen and Barry, editors of the book in which this declaration occurs, we must acknowledge that they are attempting to articulate the ideas embodied in the so-called Sexual Revolution of the late twentieth century. They may not fully agree with these ideas, but they have nicely summarized some very common opinions and questions of our time. People are asking, “Why should we think traditional sexual ethics are anything but arbitrary, irrational taboos?” Someone else will add, “Didn’t modern contraception set us free from all this crazy nonsense about keeping sex within marriage?” A third voice might say, “If you think your God wants to keep sex inside marriage, it shows that your God is not very nice or has a bad sense of humor. Does your God just want to take all the fun out of life?”

Questions of this type are extremely important to many people, and important questions deserve honest, thoughtful answers. As a Christian I believe that our truly big questions are answered by the Bible. This means that in regard to understanding our sexuality, we should look for answers that are informed by the Bible. However, before jumping to answers, it may be wise to ask a counter-question – really a question about the questions. This counter-question should be as follows:

Observers of modern secularism point out that, because of secularization, people are often left with a reductively naturalistic interpretation and experience of life. The “naturalistic” part of this refers to thinking and talking as if all that really exists is that which is natural, material, or physical. The “reductive” part of this phrase refers to the way in which a naturalistic worldview tends to be reductive or to reduce our understanding of our own life experience. If all that exists is what is natural or physical, the only experiences one expects to have will be physical.

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experiences. The Sexual Revolution was closely tied to the development of secularism.\textsuperscript{8} The Sexual Revolution proclaimed sexual freedom; however, wasn’t the real result quite different – a reduction of sex to an empty, shallow physical experience? The best support for this counter-question or critique of the Sexual Revolution comes from reading the writers and philosophers who were supporters of secularism and the Sexual Revolution.

One of the most articulate philosophical supporters of the Sexual Revolution was Alan H. Goldman, especially his article “Plain Sex.”\textsuperscript{9} Goldman pointedly rejects any “means-end analysis” of sex; that is, he rejects any understanding of sex that connects sexual activity to another purpose, whether “reproduction, the expression of love, simple communication or interpersonal awareness.” To understand sex properly, he claims, it must be “plain sex” – without other associations. Sexual desire is nothing more than desire for contact with another person’s body. Goldman thinks false views of sexual morality arise from the silly idea that sex is properly something more than physical contact, whether love, communication, or anything else.

I am not the only person who thinks Goldman put the wrong title on his essay. If sex is what he thinks it is, a better title might be “Empty Sex” or “Sub-Human Sex.” Because Goldman is a naturalist, his understanding and experience of life are dramatically reduced. He has a reductive understanding of sexuality, meaning his understanding and experience of sex are reduced to much less than sex was meant to be. His philosophy would support what many call sexual freedom, but the cost of this freedom is astonishingly high: the loss of everything human about sex. I find this price far too high. Might there really be something so different about sex that it requires special rules?

The secularist loss of an understanding of sexuality is also evident in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre.\textsuperscript{10} He wrestled with how to create meaning in a meaningless world. According to Sartre, if God does not exist, there can be no “essence” of human life that comes before the “existence” of particular people. This means there is no proper pattern or scheme of life that people should follow or that gives meaning to life; we are forced to choose freely how we want to live. In the realm of sexuality, this means it is impossible to say that monogamy is better than polygamy, polyandry, or constantly changing relationships. We are condemned to freedom. However, this does not close the topic. In his novel \textit{Nausea}, he shows that people use love and sex as a way of searching for meaning in life, though this effort is not always successful. For Sartre knows that love and sex can easily become meaningless, manipulative, or boring if meaning is not brought into the relationship.

\textsuperscript{8} This interpretation of secularism is dependent on Thomas C. Oden, \textit{Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America & Russia} (Intervarsity Press, 1992).
\textsuperscript{9} Contained in Olen and Barry, pp. 86-97.
\textsuperscript{10} This interpretation of Jean Paul Sartre is dependent on C. Stephen Evans, \textit{Existentialism: The Philosophy of Despair & the Quest for Hope} (Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.)
The terminology of Sartre is entirely different from that of Goldman, reflecting different philosophical traditions. However, their overall perspectives are remarkably similar regarding sexuality. They agree that sexuality has no necessary meaning or distinctive content that would lead to particular moral rules governing sexual relationships. They also agree that there is no fixed pattern for responsible sexual activity, whether heterosexual monogamy, homosexuality, polygamy, or continuous fluctuation. In this way, they would both support the Sexual Revolution and reject any traditional Christian perspective on sexuality. I am left wondering if the quest for sexual freedom has cost us a large part of our humanness.

Recently I was moved to tears by a reality show on a German television station. Young unmarried couples with children were offered paternity tests to see if the mother’s current partner was the biological father of the woman’s child or children. A young mother was “sure” her current partner was the father, though she acknowledged it could possibly be either of two men, given the week of conception. On live television, the couple received the report from a genetics laboratory that her current partner was not the biological father.

The tears the young couple shed were not just the result of the foolish choices of immature people. Their foolishness and immaturity were supported by a culture that says sex should be treated like any other activity, not much different from having lunch with someone. Their lives embodied a message we hear all around, in schools, in books, and in the media. Might we be ready to receive some wisdom from the past and from on high? Is there no better way?

*The Answer: What Is So Different about Sex!*

The Bible gives profound answers to the question of what is so different about sex that it requires special moral rules. I would explain those answers in these terms: Sex can best be described as an “interpersonal sacrament” which should properly occur within marriage, a “creation order,” because there is a close correspondence between the meaning of the interpersonal sacrament and the creation order. The biblical commandments about sexuality are not arbitrary rules from a fun-hating deity; they are designed to protect our humanness. This perspective leads to a much richer understanding and experience of the closest human relationships. This is a very substantial alternative to the reductive naturalism that says that sex is only about physical contact. This alternative says that there is a created pattern or “essence” of human life, and following this pattern is one of the steps that gives us meaning in everyday life.

How is having sex with someone different from having lunch with that person? Briefly stated in other words, sex requires special rules because God created us in such a way that marriage and sex fit together in a particular way. This is what we see in the pages of the Bible and in everyday experience. A crucial biblical text is Genesis 2:15-25.
“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’

“Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

“The man said,

‘This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called “woman,”
For she was taken out of man.’

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

We are told in this text describing the origins of the human race that a man will “be united to his wife,” or as our older translations read, “a man will cleave to his wife.” The Hebrew word translated “cleave,” dabad, is a very interesting way of describing the sexual embrace, for it brings together two meanings of the same word. On the one hand, this word means to cling physically to something. This word is used when a person’s tongue clings to the roof of his or her mouth (Psalm 137:6) or when a man’s hand clings to his sword in battle (2 Samuel 23:10). On the other hand, this word is used to describe tight bonds of loyalty and affection. During a time of intense uncertainty and fear, King David’s army was described as clinging to him (2

11 Quotation from the New International Version.
Samuel 20:2). Clearly, this word is describing deep, heartfelt commitments of loyalty and affection that endured through good and bad times.

In Genesis 2, it is not immediately obvious if this word refers to Adam and Eve physically clinging to each other or emotionally bonding to each other. Nevertheless, this is not a question that needs a simple either/or answer, especially if, as I think, we are reading sacramental language. In relation to God, we should understand a sacrament to be a symbolic action instituted by God that serves as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace between God and his people. A sacrament confirms both His grace to us and our faithful loyalty to Him. Sacramental language has a distinctive feature; because of the close association between the symbolic action and the meaning of the symbol, the names of the action and the meaning of the action are freely mixed and transferred. In the Old Testament, the term “circumcision” could refer either to the symbolic action or to the covenant relation symbolized by this action. Something similar happens in the New Testament regarding Holy Communion and Baptism. (Standard biblical examples are Genesis 17:10; Matthew 26:28; and Titus 3:5.)

When Adam and Eve were clinging to each other, this was not a sign and seal of their relationship with God. However, on a human, interpersonal level, it was a sacramental action signing and sealing a covenantal bond. Their “clinging” to each other was both the sexual embrace and the bonded relationship symbolized and confirmed by the sexual embrace. In this sense, Protestants have historically called sexual intercourse a “holy sacrament” of the covenant of marriage. Stated differently, more psychologically, sexual intercourse communicates much of the marriage covenant and vow nonverbally and symbolically. Because of the way we were created, sex is one of our strongest forms of nonverbal communication; sex is a promise of affection and loyalty, not only to each other but also to the children who may result from the relationship. The physical union is a sign of a more comprehensive union, including spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of life. This is what makes sex so different from casually having lunch or coffee with someone. Sex communicates promises of a very significant nature, whether or not the couple is aware of it. It is not wise to try to separate sex from the process of bonding inside a marriage or from the children who may be conceived through that bonding.

If sex is a sacrament of marriage, obviously one must ask, “What is marriage?” Is it merely a worthless document from a useless government office? Our answer to this question today can easily be prejudiced by our tendency to think that only physical objects can truly be real. Since marriage is not a physical object that one can touch, some tend to think it is not real or a real thing. Without thinking, a person may be comparing marriage to something like a coffee cup, a window, or a streetlight. This is a serious mistake that influences how we act. Moreover, unfortunately, our English translation of the commandment “You shall not commit adultery”

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12 See also Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 27, for the way this theme was taught in historic Reformation theology.

does not immediately correct this mistake. However, the Dutch (niet echtbreken) and German (nicht ehebrechen) translations are a little better, since both of these Bible translations refer to not breaking a marriage. This way of talking has a significant advantage, since it says more clearly that a marriage is something real that can be broken, though obviously the way in which a marriage can be broken is quite different from how one breaks a cup or a window.

So what is marriage, this thing we must be careful not to break? One of the best descriptions is a “creation order.” This means it is a relational structure given by God in creating us that serves our good as well as God’s various purposes. This way of describing marriage invites a comparison with other God-given structures we call creation orders, such important realities as work, government, and worship, through which God organizes our lives. It also means that marriage is not exactly something that we create; it is something that already exists, with some defined rules and boundaries, before we ever enter into it.

The term “creation order” tends to lead us to view marriage somewhat from the outside, as a social structure. We should also emphasize that marriage is a lifetime covenant between a man and a woman, and this covenant is publicly declared so everyone can know that a particular man and a particular woman stand in this lifetime covenant. This is the internal content of marriage: a man and a woman solemnly covenant to become life partners. Those who think marriage is just a piece of paper have confused one part of the public declaration of the marriage (the legal part) with the covenantal reality that is being publicly declared. In the original creation, the only thing that was not good was that Adam was alone. God corrected this deficiency by creating Eve and by creating marriage. Marriage is a creation order with a lifetime covenant as its internal content; sex is an interpersonal sacrament that confirms and communicates this covenant in a nonverbal way.

Though it may be hard for us to think this way, marriage truly is something real, even though it is not a physical object. In addition, it has some enduring characteristics that we cannot change; it is monogamous, heterosexual, and exclusive, and it lasts a lifetime. It can be compared to the law of gravity, which is also very real, though we cannot see it directly. However, the likelihood of people getting hurt by ignoring the reality of marriage is much greater than the likelihood of getting hurt by trying to ignore the law of gravity. Most of us just accept the law of gravity, whereas some try to ignore the reality of marriage.

Once we grasp something of the close connection between sex and marriage, it makes sense to ask about the purposes of sex and marriage together. This really should be one question, rather than separating the purpose of sex from the purpose of marriage. Of course, many people think of the purpose of sex as being pleasure, emotional release, or bonding, while they see the

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14 A covenant is both similar to and different from a contract. A contract is usually very specific, well-defined, and limited in scope, such as a contract to rent an apartment or do a particular job. In contrast, a covenant may not be so well-defined, since we simply cannot know what may come our way in a lifetime. On the other hand, a covenant is also unlimited, since it involves one’s total life, not something as limited as committing to a job or apartment.
purpose of marriage as primarily in the realm of financial/legal questions. This separates matters that more properly belong together.

One of the first purposes of marriage is companionship. Adam, Eve, and most of the rest of us find it is simply not good to spend our lives alone. Most of us need a life partner. Our work, our toys, and our pets are simply not enough. Companionship is the primary thing we should both seek and seek to preserve in marriage.\(^\text{15}\) Closely tied to this is one of the purposes of sex, that of total-person bonding. We read that Adam and Eve were naked but not ashamed. Their comfortable physical intimacy contributed to a very wide-ranging unity of their lives.

People today are quite aware that sex can be very pleasurable. What needs to be added to that is an understanding that the pleasure of sex is different from other types of pleasure. Some pleasures can be enjoyed almost as much alone as with other people. This is obviously very different from normal sex. Other pleasurable activities, such as a sporting event, a concert, or a movie, are usually shared with other people. Nevertheless, in most of these pleasures, the people with whom we share the pleasure are all together relating to something else, the sport, music, or film, which gives them the shared experience. Our attention, emotionally and mentally, is focused on the sport, music, or whatever brings us together. However, sex is different in the important sense that it is the other person who gives pleasure, not some other entity or event. Our attention is totally focused on the other person. Sex is much more clearly an interpersonal event or experience than are our other normal forms of pleasure. The pleasure, sometimes intense, could be seen as a gift of God specially added to the companionship, a distinct type of pleasure that helps confirm and strengthen the covenantal ties between a husband and wife.

In the wisdom of God, the context in which children should normally come into the world is this context of bonded, loyal companionship and love. The companionship that men and women need forms the right situation for children to get a start in life. We should not hesitate to say that childbearing/child rearing is one of the purposes of marriage and sex. This is not to say that a childless marriage is not a proper marriage. And this is also not to say that sex always has to be intended to lead to pregnancy or even to be open to pregnancy. Nevertheless, it is very unwise for us to separate sex, marriage, and childbearing. There are natural connections among marriage, sex, and childbearing in the biblical descriptions of people and in our lives today.

As I write these words, I am riding on a train from Berlin, Germany, to Prague, Czech Republic. Seated three or four rows behind me is a group of young German men who have been into their beer since mid-morning. If I understand their drunken songs and slurred speech correctly, they are headed to Prague to enjoy the strip show discos and “sex professionals.” While listening to

\(^\text{15}\) We must be careful not to think that marriage (or sex) will provide total meaning or salvation, thereby solving all our problems. As an atheist, Sartre recognized that sex and marriage do not provide meaning; meaning must be consciously brought to the relationship. Christians should say even more clearly than did Sartre that sex and marriage do not provide meaning; they have meaning if received as a way in which we can glorify and enjoy God in gratitude.
them, I have been reminded of the wry comment in Proverbs 6:26, “The prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread.” Very likely, these men will have some interesting sexual experiences this weekend. But they probably have not thought much about what they are missing or how the men themselves are being treated (or how the prostitutes are being treated with the probability that the prostitutes are being held as slaves by highly organized criminals). They are missing the experiences that help bond a man and woman into lifetime partners, and the habits they are developing will make it more difficult for them to experience such satisfying bonding in the future. Very likely, they do not appreciate the way the prostitutes reduce them to something as exchangeable and disposable as a piece of bread; or that hiring a prostitute is dehumanizing in a way that it is not dehumanizing to hire a taxi driver or a dentist.

The ancient words written in stone, “You shall not commit adultery,” do not call us to a joyless, boring existence. By giving us a firm “No” and some unchanging rules, God calls us to a richer, higher, more human type of life. Why can’t we acknowledge that sex is different from other activities – different in a way that requires special rules?
Foundational Values for Family Life and Public Policy

It is a dangerous situation when a philosopher meddles in such practical affairs as government policy and child development. I remember Socrates’ experience when he asked some foundational questions of his fellow citizens so many centuries ago; I hope I do not have to watch my wine glass with special care after this lecture. But it is my impression that the Athenians’ frustrations with Socrates were not entirely with his quest for values; those frustrations arose partly because he mostly asked questions but did not always offer good answers. I will try to ask some questions and also offer some answers; obviously you are free to try to find better answers if you cannot accept my proposals. I am not afraid of disagreement, but please hold the Hemlock.

As a young man I had the privilege of being an academic assistant to the very significant social scientist David G. Myers. His wide-ranging, award-winning research in psychology and sociology was informed by a search for values and principles which would make human life flourish, a kind of Socratic quest. He dared to hope we can identify trans-cultural values which will promote human well-being, happiness, and the common good, and this hope led to his intensive research and extensive writing. He also claimed that it is the big things that have a big effect on human well-being, matters like key ideas and values, whereas he was convinced that many passing fads had relatively little influence on human well-being, no matter how aroused people may become in discussing different government policies and different styles of parenting. So in the spirit of Myers, I will suggest that ideas and values which we can bring into the formulation of policies, programs, and practices in the family, business, and government are more important than many particular decisions which we have to make. Those values and ideas will shape all our policies, programs, reactions, and relationships. Let me illustrate.

I. Children—Gifts or Problems?

At the beginning of all our thinking about children stands a fundamental philosophical question: what is this child? We can make the question more pointed by asking, is a child primarily a gift or primarily a problem? Several years ago a pregnant colleague complained that her medical doctor saw her pregnancy as an illness, a problem, whereas she did not see the pregnancy as an illness or a problem. She saw the child as a great gift. The contrast in basic philosophy of life was stark. Forgive me for speaking plainly, but this contrast, nicely articulated in a medical clinic, is foundational for many matters related to children and child-rearing today. It is close to the low birth rates causing the declining population in many developed countries, close to how

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16 An earlier version of this speech was presented for a conference of European Union policy makers held in 2007 by the Czech Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, in Prague, Czech Republic.
we treat mothers, close to how we treat each child, and central for policies in business and government.

This is a fundamental existential question that cannot be answered by a study in sociology or economics. Our answer will not only shape our policies and our treatment of each child; the future of western civilization depends on our answer. If we think children are most fundamentally problems to be avoided, we can avoid the problem and bring all of western civilization to an end. And without having clarified and discussed the question, this is the answer implied by our low birth rates in so much of the developed world. In contrast, I see my three children as three of the greatest gifts my wife and I ever received. And our grandchildren are also tremendous gifts.

I would emphasize that our feelings toward children are an existential decision; by this way of talking I mean it may be impossible to prove to the satisfaction of all people that children are a gift. This is a decision that stands before and influences all our other decisions. A person could choose to see only the problems related to having children, e.g. medical problems, financial problems, loss of time and freedom, worries about their well-being. Babies are dirty, noisy, and expensive. But we can also choose to see the way in which our lives are so deeply enriched by having children, and also desire to pass on the gift of life to another generation. Such a choice is axiomatic in the sense that it comes before and informs rational and scientifically informed decisions. To say it is existential is to say it comes before rationality, provides the basis for rationality, and therefore might not be rationally demonstrable. In a deep sense, it is foundational for all of life, in families, in business, and in the wider culture.

If we decide to value children as gifts, not primarily as problems, this will lead to child-friendly policies in government and business; it will also change our personal reactions to each pregnancy, birth, and child. For example: do we rejoice when a colleague announces her pregnancy, or do we silently complain about the little problems that it will cause for our work? Which we do is determined by our prior value decisions; do we mostly look at the little problems, or do we decide to look at the way in which our lives can be enriched at every level (including the economic level) by the presence of another human being? Our value decisions may appear to be very hidden and private, but that is not really true. All of our actions arise from our value decisions, and in that manner our basic values are communicated.

I would also suggest that the children in our families, businesses, and communities will know from a very young age whether we see them as problems or gifts. Long before children can speak, they know many things at a deep, intuitive level that shapes their experience of the world. If they know that they are welcomed as gifts, they can more easily respond to life with basic trust, love, and the courage to become good citizens and neighbors; if they are seen as problems, their deepest anxieties are unduly aroused, leading to alienation from society and themselves. This is the path of delinquency, whether this alienation is expressed in drugs, crime, or gangs. Our private value decisions have a life-shaping effect on the children in our families, businesses,
and wider community; our deepest feelings toward children set a deep direction to their response to their experience of life.

II. Loyalty Promotes Security

Long before they can express their thoughts in language, children seem to be aware of key elements in the value structure of their environment. This goes beyond the question of whether they are seen as gifts or as problems. It includes the presence or absence of interpersonal loyalty. The problem we need to consider is how to prevent children from having undue anxiety that they will be abandoned, especially abandoned by their parents. Anxiety about possible abandonment, or the experience of real abandonment, can easily cause a fundamental break in a child’s relationship to society and to the world at large. Abandonment, or anxiety about abandonment, often undermines a child’s basic trust and courage to exist. This is, I am convinced, the background to the very dismal statistics we have all read, about how the children of divorced parents have so many psychological, sociological, medical, and educational problems. These children feel abandoned by the people closest to them, and that experience has damaged part of their basic trust and courage. That is why, I believe, that the statistics are so much worse when a woman bears a child as the result of a short relationship and never marries the father; that child was truly abandoned by the father from a very early age. Children as well as adults have a fundamental need for human loyalty. When this loyalty is broken, there is often damage to the spirit of the person, damage which is expressed physically, socially, psychologically, or educationally.

Many times we find the school or state social agencies trying to solve problems in the lives of children that arise because the children were perceived as problems and then felt abandoned by their mother or father. Of course, we need to do all we can to help such people, but we also need to ask about the value structure that will reduce the problem in the future. Part of that value structure is lifetime marriage and family loyalty. Children tend to flourish, with a stronger sense of basic trust and courage to exist, when there is both real and perceived family loyalty; this family loyalty is most often broken by divorce or separation. The divorce or separation of parents very commonly leaves children feeling abandoned, which damages their fundamental courage to live and basic trust toward life. And tragically, the majority of divorces seem to occur after relatively low levels of conflict, levels of conflict which could easily have been overcome or even forgotten.

Without resorting to totalitarianism, there is little a state can do to very quickly eliminate the vast majority of divorces and separations; however, the state can attempt to adopt policies and promote educational materials that will communicate the message that interpersonal loyalty is a fundamental human need. Extreme individualism does not promote happiness; loyalty and lifetime companionship promote happiness and empower our children to flourish. This simple philosophical principle needs to be included in our schools, policies, and laws. It is a fundamental and humane value decision that must be made, implemented, and communicated in
the family, in business, and in state agencies. Once this value decision is made and implemented, it can seem to become a self-authenticating and life-giving part of the culture. After implementation of a wise value decision in public policy, that policy or law tends to promote the genuine acceptance of the basic value by the population, even if there is some popular frustration with the policy at first.

III. Unconditional Love and Moral Structure

One of the most difficult challenges with regard to children has to do with the relationship between unconditional love and the need for moral structure. On the one hand, we should all be aware of the way in which children (and probably all people) have a deep need for unconditional love, as some phrase it, unconditional positive regard. The experience of such positive regard unleashes something powerful and creative within a person. In a certain sense, it sets people free. Such positive regard speaks to our deep need for acceptance by others and by God. On the other hand, at the same time, children need practical moral guidance and restraint; they need clear, everyday rules regarding how to act and what not to do. And such practical moral guidance inevitably seems to imply that children (and people in general) are not acceptable if they do not follow the rules, and that everyone fails at times.

This leads to a profound complexity at the level of basic values which we hold toward children and which we must communicate to children. Our children are simultaneously gifts which we unconditionally accept (and such loving acceptance has to be communicated) and also recipients of all the rigorous demands of responsible life in society (and these rigorous demands need to be effectively communicated) which are necessary to fulfill in order to be responsible people and good citizens. And such existential complexity has to be effectively communicated in the family, the school, and the society.

In philosophical terms, this is the problem of love and justice, which is also the problem of freedom and form; in the religious tradition it is frequently called the problem of grace and law or law and gospel. I am sure I cannot solve the problem at the theoretical level; maybe no mortal can give a good explanation. I am also sure that some type of dialectical interaction between the two principles is extremely important for our value stance toward children and for the moral content of our relationship to them.

Children have to hear and feel that they are deeply and unconditionally loved by their parents, by their school teachers, and by other authority figures in their lives, while at the same time they also hear and feel that life is filled with profound demands, some of which we might never completely fulfill. It is almost unavoidable that each person will be unbalanced in this question; some people will easily express unconditional love toward children, whereas others will easily express the demand for discipline and control. And society itself tends to fluctuate between these two poles. True authenticity is reached only at the point of fully embodying and communicating
both love and justice, both form and freedom, completely at the same time. But who has reached such a level of personal maturity?

While we may never be able, whether theoretically or practically, to fully express unconditional positive regard (love) and also the need for deep moral discipline (rules, responsibility, and justice), we must take some steps in this direction. At this point, I am mostly forced to draw on my own experience as a parent of three responsible children. We have to consciously take steps to communicate both that we love our children and that life itself (not really us personally) imposes the need for moral discipline. We will need to tell them that certain behaviors are wrong, but we then should also tell them that we love them. We will need to stop our children from doing some actions, but that should be accompanied by our acts of affection, perhaps a hug or an embrace. On occasion children may need to be mildly punished for things they have done, but they also have to hear about our forgiveness when they apologize. And in this process, parents and teachers have to be extremely careful on several matters.

If children are only given unconditional love, without demands and discipline, they can easily become very happy with themselves but irresponsible toward others and toward society, a result none of us here wants. On the other hand, if children only receive discipline, rules, and demands, without much love and tenderness, they easily become bitter and angry toward life, again a result we want to avoid. If children have the feeling that rules and discipline are only the personal demands of a parent or teacher and not somehow the demands of life itself, they will be inclined to look for an opportunity to escape their restraints. And similar to the way in which unduly restrictive civil laws push people into crime, unduly harsh or restrictive discipline in the family or school can prompt rebellion. If children learn responsible behavior with a very small amount of external pressure or enforcement, there is a higher probability that they will internalize responsible behavior and the cognitive value structure that supports such behavior. Children (and probably adults, too) need a living combination of unconditional positive regard joined with sensible (not arbitrary) structure or discipline that fits the demands of life in society.

Comments

There are many detailed questions about child-rearing which resist once for all time, permanent answers. Each child has slightly different needs and opportunities, which have to be assessed by the parents to the best of their abilities. The role of the state is probably to remind parents of this responsibility and to provide advice and testing to assist parents in this responsibility. And many other matters that can seem very important for a short time may have a very small impact on the total lives of our children. They should be seen as matters in which we constantly look for ways to make small improvements, but these improvements should be recognized as small. Here I am thinking about things like the exact schedule of childcare and school, who organizes and pays for their care at what age, exactly how their medical care is organized, how much or which sports at which age, and a thousand other detailed questions. The big things are the big things, and among the truly big things are the ideas and values which we bring into the biggest challenge facing us.
as individuals and as western society: How do we train the next generation to become people of whom we can be proud and who will be grateful to us, as parents, educators, and citizens, for what they have received from us?
The Role of the State and the Role of the Family: Forms of State Support, Child Care, and the Needs of Families

Dedicated to the renowned Czech child psychologist, Professor Zdeněk Matějček (1922–2004)

The first years determine the rest of one’s life.

800 years ago Emperor Friedrich II Barbarossa (1194–1250) wanted to discover which language was the original language. He therefore gathered newborn babies from a large number of African, Asian, and European countries – as emperor he had the power to perform this type of brutal experiment – and entrusted them into the care of a deaf and dumb nanny, who only nursed and fed the babies, but was not allowed to communicate or to play with them. Which language would they learn by themselves? In what language would they speak their first words? The emperor never discovered the answer because all the children died too early; they simply withered away.

Man is adapted to live in the society of others. For this reason, isolation still remains one of the cruelest types of torture, even when the prisoner is not otherwise harmed. We now know from a series of research projects what the emperor did not know: children do not only need milk, food, and physical care; their lives are also dependent on close relationships, conversation, bodily contact, emotions, games, and company.

I grew up in an area where there was a lack of iodine, and as a child I did not get enough of it. The result is that I now have to visit the doctor each year to have my thyroid tested, and I take medication on a daily basis. Whereas the connection between these two things is obvious to everyone, many people are unwilling to see connections relating to children that are just demonstrable scientifically. Our treatment of small children, including acceptance, speech, relationships with other people (particularly the mother and father), care and many other factors, play a large role in the problems and successes children later have in the areas of social behavior, education and work.

For example, we have known for a long time that the more we talk to small children, and the more intimate this conversation is, the faster their brains develop, the higher the number of synapses, the better they learn to talk and think, the easier they find it to learn later on and the

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17 This essay is a revised version of the opening speech (presented in German) at a conference on “The division of early childcare between the family and the state,” for European Union policy makers held in 2007 by the Czech Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, in Prague, Czech Republic. It was lightly edited by Thomas K Johnson.

more developed is their emotional intelligence and their confidence in adapting to ever-changing situations. To summarize: each hour we spend talking with children, or during which they listen to adult conversations, provides them with a head start on life.

It is therefore in the interests of the state and businesses to allow children to spend as much time as possible with one or both parents. The quality of childcare provided outside this period should also be very high, covering more than just the visible role; each care-giver should only have to deal with the smallest possible number of children – psychologists and experts recommend two\(^{19}\) or three to four\(^{20}\) children to one care-giver!

A worldwide psychological study of relationships\(^{21}\) proved dozens of years ago that during the first years after birth relationships are more important than learning, and that an early stage involving an intensive, intimate relationship with the same adult provides a foundation on which education can subsequently build, whereas no later education can compensate for the lack of a relationship during the first years of life.

*During the first year of life (12 months)* any deviation from a situation where the primary care is provided by the mother or the parents is clearly and simply associated with a rise in the death rate of babies worldwide. This fact was continually pointed out by the Munich pediatrician Theodor Hellbrügge (1919-2014), long-term Director of the Child Care Institute at the University of Munich and founder of the International Academy for Developmental Rehabilitation.\(^{22}\) During the first year of life, if this is at all possible, babies should not be entrusted to other people, and if they have to be cared for by someone else, this should only be for a short time and by someone the child already knows well through his mother.

After these 12 months, the next cut-off point is the *first 18 months*, which is the age also proposed by supporters of day care centers, such as Wassilios Fthenakis, as the youngest at which children should attend day care. This is without even taking into account the fact that each specific case should still be evaluated to see whether the child is prepared for day care or whether he or she should attend at a later date. Until age 18 months, the child is not ready to relate to a number of different children, and only after that age will he gradually derive more benefit from playing with a fluctuating group of other children.

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\(^{21}\) See Karin Grossmann, Klaus E. Grossmann, *Bindungen – das Gefüge psychischer Sicherheit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004); Deutsche Liga für das Kind in Familie und Gesellschaft, *Neue Erkenntnis der Bindungsforschung* (Berlin: Deutsche Liga, 1996); and further materials by Karl H. Brisch and Theodor Hellbrügge listed in the following footnotes.

\(^{22}\) See Theodor Hellbrügge, *Erlebte und bewegte Kinderheilkunde* (München: Prokon-Verlag, 1994); Theodor Hellbrügge, Klaus Döring, *Das Kind von 0 – 6* (München: Herbig, 2003, 10th edition); Theodor Hellbrügge, J. Hermann von Wimpffen, *Die ersten 365 Tage unseres Kindes* (München: Knaur, 1976 and 1996, a number of reprints available). Hellbrügge advocated and supported home care for handicapped children with their parents with professional assistance and proved that this is almost always better than care outside the home. See www.theodor-hellbuegge-stiftung.de. The importance of relationships between small children and a constant close companion for their psychological and physical well-being can be studied in further materials published by Karl H. Brisch and Theodor Hellbrügge.
After 12 and 18 months, the research often takes a cut-off point of 36 months. There is no doubt that during the first three years of life, reliable relationships and structures have a significant importance for later life and we should, as far as possible, avoid even moving house or exchanging the main care-giver, not to mention divorce.

The German Association of Psychoanalysts has made the following comments on this subject – which, unfortunately, the German Ministry for the Family has failed to take into account: “The results from studies and experience (not ideology) have shown that the primary factor contributing to the development of a child’s feelings of security, the development of his personality, and his psychological well-being is a sound relationship with his parents. Because of this, it is extremely important that the mother and father be emotionally available and devote time to their children during the first three years of their life.”

Do we want to make families even more non-functional?

Many problems have arisen in modern families because, as its role has been gradually and massively downgraded for 300 years, the family has lost a large number of its former functions. Among the most important of these are its economic and educational roles. This also resulted in a significant loss of stability for the family. Many people found that these losses, when they allowed their families to break up, or when they failed to establish a family in the first place, became less and less significant. But this has also made it easier for families to break up or for people to fail to establish families.

“This often implicitly entailed the transfer of functions that had originally been performed within the home or the family to higher-level social structures, and in particular to the state. From a perspective of hundreds and thousands of years, we can see this handover of functions to higher social structures in almost all areas of life, in the area of religion as well as that of law, in economic terms and in education. This process of relieving the family of its functions, which is so blatant today, is one of the prevailing trends in the history of family development.”

“We have seen that the lightening of the family’s functional role has been accompanied by the assumption of these functions by parallel or higher social structures or that this has resulted in the formation of non-family structures. Here we could name schools, factories, communities and, above all the state with its varied social institutions.”


25 Ibid., 111.
For centuries the family was the institution most frequently encountered by the general population. It determined their lives, provided emotional, economic and other support, and ensured the relevant educational input. It lost its economic function with industrialization and its educational role with the emergence of schools.

However, it is remarkable that, in statistical terms, there is still no stronger influence on a child’s future than the family from which he comes! This is the case whether we look at it in terms of education, social standing, income, social awareness, self-confidence, or social involvement. Statistically, the influence of the family on the child as a future adult is more important than any other factor, despite the fact that long term attempts have been made to mitigate this situation, through the educational system, for example, which are unfair to the child himself.

I am not now simply bewailing the decline of the role of the family over the past centuries. We must also notice the positive increase in freedom and the possibility of development. However, in my opinion, the question today is whether we also want to remove the last functions from the family and the tasks it still performs. Do we truly believe the state is really able to take over these last remaining functions itself or hand them over to other institutions?

**The welfare of the child and economic pressures**

Children’s welfare plays a very subsidiary role in a service and industry based society, because children cannot yet contribute to economic growth.\(^26\) Although the economy wants a labor force in the future that is educated, socially mature and hardworking, it is not involved in establishing one. Someone else must bear the cost.

Many parents devote very little time to their children, not because they do not want to, but because the social and economic pressures are too strong. No one bothers to ask the children themselves, although the studies show that, “Children do not want to go to day care centers.”\(^27\)

It has been known for a long time – for example, from the largest long-term study on this theme carried out in the USA and published in 2007 – that children who were only cared for in day care centers are far more aggressive, less independent, less secure, and more reliant, but the economy is not bothered by this; it simply excludes the more aggressive and less educated children when selecting employees.\(^28\) The first research into this topic was performed by the excellent Prague


\(^{28}\) In the USA this topic has been the subject of much discussion in the so-called “Mommy Wars” – as well as research. Studies performed up to 2000 in the English-speaking world referenced in Claudio Violato, Clare Russell. “Effects of Nonmaternal Care on Child Development: A Meta-Analysis of Published Research,” 268–301 in: Claudio Violato, ed., *The Changing Family and Child Development* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000). The overall result: intensive non-maternal care leads to a statistical increase in abnormal behavior (e.g. aggressiveness). The largest study was carried out by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. *The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD): Findings for Children up to Age 4 1/2 Years* (05–4318),
child psychologist, Zdeněk Matějček, who carried out four major studies into child development in Czech day cares as well as the development of children in various different types of families at Charles University in Prague.  

The family, as a small unit, is generally unable to resist the pressure of the modern, capitalistic and ever-more globalizing economic order. It is only the state that can achieve this. For this reason, the state should not use its monopoly of power to further increase the pressure on the family. Instead the state should take suitable legislative and guidance measures to ensure that, even in the face of economic pressures, parents can act as they deem fit in the interest of the next generation.

This does not only involve the amount of time parents can spend caring for their children at home, but also child care outside the home. One example should suffice: the experts recommend that parents, particularly mothers, ensure a long and gentle transition period when placing their small children in childcare, to allow the child to transfer his confidence from the mother to the caregiver over time. This means that the mother should spend the whole of the child’s first day at the day care, stay one hour less on the second day, and thereafter spend part of every day there, even if only a quarter of an hour. But what employer would ever allow that?

The German Association of Psychoanalysts comment on this problem by saying, “Many studies have shown that there is a large difference in terms of developmental psychology between a child who enters non-parental care at the age of one year, or a year and a half, or two years and depending on the number of days he spends in care. The longer the period he spends in day care and separated from his family, the higher the level of the stress hormone cortisol can be found in the child’s organism. This explains the connection between long-term, or all-day care outside the family and subsequent aggressive behavior at school, which has been found in cross-sectional studies. Other deciding factors affecting the quality of care in day care are the size of the groups and the rate of staff turnover. Oversized groups or a frequent turnover of staff prevent the child from making secure relationships; this may in turn make him socially withdrawn or lead, during the course of his development, to restlessness, attention disorders and a lack of concentration. In general, we can say that the younger the child, meaning the less he is able to understand speech and time and the less time he spends in parental care, the longer the periods spent in day care and

(Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/upload/seccyd_051206.pdf. The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, Child Care and Child Development: Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (New York: The Guildford Press, 2005). 1,364 children from birth to the 6th class were monitored. The results show the highest rate of abnormal behavior among children attending day care centers, although it is only statistically significant for the lower quality centers. High quality day care centers show a growth in average child vocabulary comparable with other types of care, although it does not preclude a statistically weak increase in abnormal behavior, though any increase in abnormal behavior is disturbing.  

the larger the group of children and the more frequent the staff turnover, the more serious the potential breakdown in his psychological wellbeing.”

The voucher system

The voucher system, in the widest sense of the term, used in various areas of society, originated in the Netherlands, where it was introduced over a hundred years ago by the theologian and then Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper, who based it on Christian ethics. For a hundred years now the state has been using its tax revenues to provide its citizens with money, through a system of vouchers or similar means, with which they can themselves decide on the school or kindergarten to which they want to send their children, or which private radio or television station they want to support, and many other things. In 1955 the renowned Austro-American economist, Milton Friedman, requested that the voucher system be introduced into all areas of the educational system in order to ensure the widest possible decision-making freedom for citizens, enabling them to resist the influence of the state. More and more countries are adopting the voucher system in areas that affect the family – for example Sweden, or the state of Hamburg – because it represents direct state support for children, but at the same time: 1. it leaves parents the freedom of choice because it allows them to select what they want, 2. it frees parents from economic pressures, and 3. it creates healthy competition between those offering the best services.

What does that Christian – or to put it more precisely, evangelical reformed – system of ethics, which is at the base of this system that has proved its worth in a secularized society like the Netherlands, say? It claims that the family, work, the church and the state are all independent institutions that have been established by God, and which did not emerge from one another, do not need to approve of each other because they all derive directly from God. The church should not decide about the state, nor should the state decide about the church. Both have their own rights which apply to completely different aspects of life.

In the same way, the state (but also the church and the economy) deals with marriage and the family, supports them, intervenes when they miss their objectives or slip into crime, governs their public relationships in accordance with the law, but does not determine their internal character, and neither does it decide whether they should exist or not. In the same way as the state discovers the natural environment (the created world) and protects its future, it cannot decide on its existence, it also discovers marriage and the family and protects their future, but it

30 “Krippenausbau in Deutschland” in the place referenced.
32 To appreciate this compare with ibid., 49–51
does not consider them its property because it knows that the family develops best when it has maximum freedom and is self-motivated.

In communist states, public ideology claimed that children and families belonged to the state and therefore that parents are entrusted by the state to bring up their children in socialism, or for socialism. The humanistic ethics of our European tradition – for example in Roman law – just as the Christian tradition, has always denied this: parents do not work for the state and children do not belong to the state. In his numerous works at Charles University in Prague prior to 1989, Zdeněk Matějček, who was in constant conflict with the Communist government, bravely and rightly continued to emphasize this fact and after 1990 he provided important momentum for the new Czech family policies.

Catholic ethics, rather than evangelical vocabulary, tends to be used more in the European Union nowadays when we talk about “the principle of subsidiarity:” matters that can be handled by a smaller authority should remain at that level, or, in other words: the EU, or a central state, etc. should not try to perform every task itself because it should try its best to support the involvement of parents, citizens and municipalities at the lowest possible level and the higher authority will only participate in a complementary manner.

“The new lower class”

I would like to add one more thought, which I referred to in my book entitled The New Lower Class: Poverty in Germany. Currently there exists a danger that the growing number of defective families is leading to the need for state involvement and for this reason functional families are being punished to a certain extent because the state also dictates to them how they should behave with their children.

In other words, it is unfortunate but there are families where the children are so neglected or even abused that it is in the interest of the state to place them in permanent care or at least long-term care outside the home. When, for example, children are not taught the language of the country in which they live, at home, which means they cannot be integrated into school, as is the case with unemployed Turks in Berlin, day care is often their only chance of learning the language and entering the educational system. However, this must not lead into a situation where all the parents who properly care for their children have their rights restricted because of these problems.

The same applies to orphans: an orphanage is always a better option for orphans than leaving them to fend for themselves on the streets. But a new foster family is always better than an orphanage, and because of this all the EU Member States strongly support foster families and only maintain orphanages as a temporary solution.

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There are families where – unfortunately – the state must intervene in the care process for the good of the child, but we should not pressurize, as often as possible, either secretly or openly, the far greater number of functional families to entrust their children to the state. This is contrary to the best interests of the child as well as to the wishes of most parents.

And if one day the state did actually assume the responsibility of caring for all the children, it would discover that it is not capable, either financially or in terms of staff numbers, to perform this enormous task, which is performed by millions of parents, leaving aside the social consequences this would have.

The head start taken by the middle and upper classes is not simply because they have more money, but also the fact that from the beginning they tend to invest more time and money in their children. The lower classes tend to not read to small children, whereas the upper classes frequently and carefully select something for the parents or the care-giver to read to children as young as two years old. And if you read the biographies of Nobel prize winners, you will almost always discover how much personal effort their fathers and mothers devoted to supporting them from the earliest childhood. We must not prevent this support being given to children by using the argument that the state must intervene to care for children in families where parents neglect their children.

“Modern fatherhood”

As a committed father, I would like to add just one more point: in my book Modern Fatherhood I have collected a lot of evidence to show how important the father is for the child’s development. The discussion these days tends to focus too much on combining motherhood and a job. Modern research on relationships sees the role of the father as the one who places challenges, advises, and protects their independence, all crucial for child development.35

We should welcome any initiative that gives fathers more time with their children, particularly if it also helps the mothers. For example, most companies have still not understood that an involved father is one of the most hard-working and best employees you can have.36 We also need more literature and training to explain to fathers that their children need them just as much as they need their mothers, and that the time they invest in them today will serve their children for the rest of their lives.

You can find more information and articles on Zdeněk Matějček through the websites below:
de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zdeněk_Matějček
Czech:
cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zdeněk_Matějček

36 Thomas Schirrmacher, Der Segen von Ehe und Familie (Bonn: VKW, 2006) 74–82.
www.rodina.cz/rubrika/matejcek