

The Age of Throwaway Children

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"Children and marriage still go together and always will, but children are becoming less popular." That's what Angus Campbell, director of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, reported in this month's *Psychology Today*. Unfortunately, it's a phenomenon that's being widely noticed, and it may even be the understatement of the month.

A free-lance writer commented in the *Washington Post's Potomac Magazine*, "There's no quicker route to poor opinion than to be at a dinner party and say brightly at the table, 'Guess what our Jeremy said today?' Children are taboo at dinner parties." That same week, *U.S. News and World Report* (May 12, 1975) pointed out that thousands of American youngsters are running away from home, many of them "throwaways," unwanted in their homes and literally pushed out by their parents because they were just too much trouble to take care of, especially as the recession continues and more parents lose their jobs. "Sometimes parents of such children, when contacted by authorities who have picked up a youngster, say they don't want the child back."

Adult abuse and even murder of children have been increasing for children of all ages, but particularly older children and babies, and economic factors have been cited to account for the sharp increases reported recently.

Divorce rates have risen more than 700 percent in the last 50 years and the number of single parent families has mushroomed. In 1948, only one out of 14 children under six was brought up by one parent; by 1973, that proportion had doubled to one out of seven children. "Never in the history of any society have we had a situation in which only one person and sometimes less than one person is left with the responsibility of bringing up a child.... God knows, it's a very unreliable structure," Cornell psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner told the recent American Orthopsychiatric Association annual meeting.

These facts dispel the myth that this is a child-centered society, as some have claimed. Instead we see an ambivalence about even having children. "Raising a family seems to be one of those tasks, like losing weight or waxing the car, that is less fun to be doing than to have done," Angus Campbell reported. There is a sad lack of understanding underneath all these statistics, a terrible misunderstanding of the purpose of children and the family. How can we ever expect to bring about a more just, more loving society, when children get this kind of upbringing.

I've heard my own cousin and her husband discuss how much they don't like children right in front of their two young boys. What kind of pattern of family life will those boys have when they too become parents? It's a fact that child abusers generally were abused by their parents. One of the runaways quoted in *U.S. News* said, "I want to go to a real home with parents who are understanding." Is that too much to ask?

If we see a lack of standards, a lack of love, a lack of order in our society, they are all a reflection of the increasing failure of the family. Bronfenbrenner expressed it this way: "We set up a marvelous invention. I think the Constitution of the United States is one of the most creative acts in human history, and we still haven't learned to profit from it. It says you can keep your individual identity and your community commitment and you don't have to sacrifice the one for the other. We've taken the first part of that, and really written it up as 'Do your own thing, don't commit me to anything, not even a child.' Well, the system isn't working. It's breaking down because we've gone too far on this individualism kick."

At the core of social, national, business, or world ethics is family ethics. Ultimately, all ethics originate from family ethics. Judging from the situation in the world today, it should be obvious that we desperately need a new ethical viewpoint, one that can provide hope for turning back the tide of collapsing values. The present system, we can see from the effects, is not working. If we want to set up a new one, where do we have to start? Before we know where to begin, we have to know what the ideal is that we want to strive towards. What is the purpose of the family, the purpose of children, from God's point of view? The system that is based on His original ideal will work.

In a marriage, a man is not proud because of the build of his body, and the woman is not proud because of her femininity, but they are both proud of there being love between them. Love, then, is the center of the family. God, as the source of all love, longs to be able to pour forth His love upon all of His children. God did not want wealth, position, knowledge, or anything like that. He wanted love, and He wanted to love. But even if we individually have a deep love for God and can experience God's love so that we almost feel like exploding with joy, that is not enough. You must experience that degree of love in all three kinds of love. Anything in the world can be understood only by our own experience of it. Unless you give birth to your own children, you don't realize fully the love of God in you. In restoring yourself, you can realize the true love of God in yourself. Then through love in your marriage love is broadened or elevated to the next level. When you are a parent to your children, your love is still more elevated and reaches a greater dimension.

For God's love to be actualized, the husband and wife must unite in love centered on God, and create children centered on God. God's love can only be expressed fully through the family, where all three kinds of love can be experienced. We can only become one with God's heart by learning to love as children, as husband and wife, and as parents. Throughout our lives as children, as a couple, as parents, we practice love in order to experience God's love. We will always feel unsatisfied with the quality of love we are experiencing in our lives, we will always feel unfulfilled, feel a lack of love, until we learn to love all three ways and can fully share the depth of God's love, the only love that can fully fill that longing for love we all have.

"Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward," says the Bible (Psalm 127:3). Children are born from a husband and wife when they unite in love. Man is an instrument to give birth to a child, and the power of creation comes from God. Therefore, when the husband and wife are united in God's love, they give birth to God's child.

Reverend Moon said recently, "When you have children, you are in the position of parents, which means you are in the position of God to the children, to His children. So you must, in raising your children, be like God, caring for your children and loving them as God would."

This means parents have a great responsibility to be united with God in their hearts and must educate their children as children of God to reach perfection. If parents fail in uniting with God perfectly, or fail in educating their children to be perfect children of God, they will be accused by God and their children. Parents can be real parents only when they can give both physical life and spiritual life to their children. They have to fulfill their responsibility until they see their children reach perfection.

In the Psychology Today survey, couples with young children reported feeling more stress and pressure than the other people studied. The child placed "unanticipated strains" on the marriage.

That kind of marriage, in which the husband and wife live only for themselves and their pleasure and convenience, is not according to God's plan.

"More than anything else, you must think that marriage is for your descendants," Reverend Moon has said. "When you leave the earth, your children and grandchildren and all of their children will be left behind you, seen by other people, even though your love is not visible. Love cannot be seen; it dwells invisibly within you and works through you. But when you find a husband or wife with God's love, together with that person you can create children, making your love concrete in them."

In a month which provided such dismal news about the state of the family in America, I also found a small item about a mother who received an honorary bachelor of arts degree while her son received a bachelor's degree cum laude in sociology. Her son had been paralyzed from injuries he received in a trucking accident while serving with the U.S. Marines in Okinawa. The mother helped her son to get an education -- she drove him to the campus, wheeled him to classes, and helped type his assignments.

During tests, she wrote the answers he dictated to her. You can imagine that during all this time she was making sacrifices in her own life, that there were other things she might have been doing. But she gave those years totally to serving her son, and her son will never forget that gift of love. He will have learned from his mother what love is, and he will be able to love others having known that love.

How do we get from where we are -- with children being thrown out of the home for being too much trouble, creating too many pressures -- to where we want to be, where we need to be if our society is to survive?

Twenty-four hundred years ago, Malachi prophesied, "I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers..."

That ideal is still to be realized, God's standard of love has still not been actualized on earth. That is why we still need and still await the coming of the Messiah, who will be able to actualize God's standard of love on all three levels -- children's love, conjugal love, parental love -- and who will "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers."