Rebuilding the Family:  

Recovering from Industrialism

Evangelical Christianity has never come to grips with the massive sociological changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution. Until that time, agrarian culture and values undergirded biblical concepts of the family. However, mechanisation, immigration, urbanisation, and rapid transportation radically transformed the entire Western world. If we are not aware of its sociological impact on the family, we have no objective basis to evaluate the changes that resulted. There is a real danger that we will accommodate ourselves to prevailing cultural norms, rather than biblical ones. And hence, the Christian family becomes salt that has lost its savour.

BEFORE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Before the Industrial Revolution, most people lived in small communities. The same families lived in the same locales for generations, since the family was tied to the land. Mom and Dad usually came from the same community and therefore shared a common cultural background, values and sense of identity. Children were an asset; every extra pair of hands meant the farm could produce more food (or the craftsman more products). Mom's domestic skills, baking, cooking, sewing, etc., were desperately needed in the home. Children worked closely with their parents from a young age. Dad worked with the sons in the fields (or at his craft), Mom with the daughters in the house. Children learned not only skills, but character and values at the same time.

Work, recreation, religion, and welfare were all family-orientated and contributed to a sense of identity and belonging. Children had both economic as well as social incentive to maintain close family ties. They inherited the land, expanding the family's economic basis. The extended family assisted during emergencies. The sociological background therefore reinforced biblical family values.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, modern industries required centralised locations and large numbers of workers with new skills. Young people fled the security of small town life for the promise of a better economic future in the cities. Initially, working conditions were harsh, living conditions worse, and the normal social supports unavailable. Alcohol was often the only solace to a bitter life. Christians found that they did not have churches and pastors in the right places. Many denominations suffered from a lack of pastors for most of the Nineteenth Century. Thus, as the population became urbanised, it also became increasingly secularised generation by generation.

The economic benefits of mass production and cheap transportation eventually greatly benefited the family materially, but not spiritually. Specialisation allowed a greater variety of goods and services. Mechanisation and mass production allowed the average citizen to purchase products more cheaply than ever before. Yet the underlying effect was to create a materialistic, consumer-oriented society, a society that emphasised fast-paced, instant gratification.
These changes in culture undermined and destroyed the sociological foundations that had held the family together from antiquity. Industrialism meant that a man no longer necessarily followed his father's trade. New industries required new skills and a son could often improve his economic status simply by learning those skills, skills he did not learn from his father. As agriculture became increasingly mechanised, fewer workers were required, a situation not only fuelling the exodus to the cities, but also removing the economic incentive for large families. Children now were perceived as an economic liability. Rather than having more workers, a large family simply meant more mouths to feed and more children to educate in the specialised school systems. In a similar way, mechanisation removed much of the woman's traditional work, making her almost unnecessary in the home. By the Twentieth Century, women found themselves bored and feeling useless since housework was no longer challenging or fulfilling. Technology also eliminated the traditional distinctions between men and women's work. By World War II enormous numbers of women entered the work force in the defence industry. Technology allowed women to work in factories doing the same work as men (for lower wages, which then became the moral justification for feminism). Women then became competitors with men for the same jobs.

Increased transportation meant that children could and did move further away from their families in search for economic improvement. This broke down traditional communities and left the nuclear family bereft of the traditional support system. Consequently, one's identity was now less dependent on one's family or community than on one's possessions or sense of self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the greater plurality of options meant decreasing commitment to any one option. For example, in small communities, there might be only a few possible life-mates for a young person. In the new urban areas, there might be hundreds. The extended time required to acquire economic skills also meant that young people put off marriage much longer than before. These two dynamics, fuelled with material prosperity, resulted in "dating" replacing courtship as a means of finding a life-mate. Young people had more time, more opportunity, and more alternatives. They also had less commitment to their chosen partner (after all, there were always other options available if this one didn't work out). When connected with the humanistic ideal that the highest good is the self, widespread divorce became inevitable.

As the family fragmented, the state was quick to fill the gap with state education, welfare, community "services", etc. Public education, by removing young children from the home and the influences of the family, undermined traditional family relationships. Individualism was reinforced by the new humanistic "Enlightenment" philosophies which were the operating methodology of the state schools. In all this, the church badly fumbled. Rather than influencing culture, we allowed ourselves to be influenced by it. Christians eagerly grabbed at the promise of the "good life." We sacrificed our families at the altar of a growing economy, good jobs, career progression, and a house in the suburbs stuffed with toys.

The Industrial Revolution was accompanied by the rise of antinomian (God's Law has no relevance to the Christian) and Arminian (man's choices, not God's, are ultimate) theology. Both errors focused on the individual because both had no concept of covenantal living. Thus Christians were hit with a one-two punch of poor theology and a changing society. We've been staggering around the ring ever since.

PLIGHT OF THE MODERN CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The modern Christian family now too often looks something like this. Dad and Mom come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds with no sense of their cultural history. They may also come from completely different parts of the country. Consequently they often have divergent goals, interests, expectations, etc., except for a common commitment to self-fulfilment.

In college (or wherever), they met, "fell in love", and decided to get married. Because of large college debts, Mom goes back to work after the honeymoon, trying to recapture some of the massive investment her education required. After several years of increased consumer debt, Mom and Dad decide to have a family, but they cannot afford to have very many children. As soon as
possible, Mom needs to go back to work to keep their affluent, debt-ridden, life-style going. As the children grow up, they are immediately sent into the public school system; Christian schooling is too expensive and home-schooling too difficult. Time with the family is severely limited due to Dad's career, Mom's work, and the myriad of recreational activities the children are enrolled in. Quality time is defined as everyone watching the same program on TV.

Church offers no respite. The children are carefully separated from the family as soon as possible and given mindless entertainment in various youth activities. Children develop their core values from school, television, friends, and the other kids at church (hence what bad habits they don't learn on their own, their peers will soon teach them). Since the culture emphasises personal gratification, a significant number of children will become involved in premarital sex, drug abuse, indolence, etc., much of which they will carefully hide from their parents. Many of these children will drop out of Christianity before 25. Dad and Mom will be tickled pink if their children stay off drugs, go to college, and get a good-paying job. They will be ecstatic if their kids marry a nominal Christian, show up for church (but probably not theirs) a dozen times a year, and do not formally renounce the Faith.

Meanwhile, Mom and Dad are frustrated with each other and adultery or deviant sexuality is a real possibility. Dad abdicates the running of the family to Mom (he's too busy playing with his remote control). Mom wants a strong husband, but has no model of godly submission. Secularised culture has given her totally unrealistic expectations of what it means to be a woman (she's to be a career-minded girl, who is a super mom to the kids and a sex goddess to her husband, all the while finding her sense of identity by discovering her real self). She's frustrated, often bitter, and slanders her husband at women's Bible studies.

If the family is really "spiritual", they become church fanatics, serving on endless (and mindless) committees, "religiously" attending activities, social groups, etc. The family goes further into debt to get their kids through college. When the kids grow up, they usually move away from home (staying there isn't really a consideration), immediately amassing considerable consumer debt of their own. Meanwhile, Dad and Mom have to invest an enormous amount for their retirement so that at 65 they can drive around the country in an RV visiting the grandchildren. When they die, they leave little inheritance to their children, comforting themselves by thinking, "Well, money always ruins kids; let them work for it just as we did." And the cycle starts all over again.

But with each turn of the wheel, the commitment of the individual to anything except his own pleasure grows less and less. The individual Christian is often frustrated, alienated, and tries to find satisfaction in either work or hobbies. Children are increasingly seen as an "experience" rather than as a duty to fill the earth and subdue it. Life is fractured and divided. Where one works has nothing to do with where one lives or goes to church. The church itself is simply another social club, with the membership changing annually. There is therefore a dearth of significant and meaningful relationships. Women are frustrated at their men who live increasingly irresponsibly outside their jobs. Women run both the home and church. Divorced from any significant, lasting human relationships, Christians end up just like their unregenerate neighbours, living a self-absorbed, self-indulgent lifestyle, moderated only by the thinnest veneer of biblical morality. And the root problem is the loss of the biblical family. A sub-biblical family means that individual Christians do not grow in the fundamental character qualities to make effective leaders. The church weakens, producing even less effective Christians, who in turn are more and more influenced by the world, rather than influencing it.

A SOLUTION

A comprehensive biblical worldview gives us a divine perspective from which to critique sociological changes, and offer valid biblical alternatives. Thus rebuilding the nation begins with rebuilding the family from the perspective of God's Word. The rebuilt family provides warriors for the battle, leaders for the church, theologians and pastors who can uncompromisingly preach against the evils of this age. The family, as Dr. Rousas J. Rushdoony has pointed out, is man's first
school, state and church. Therefore, rebuilding the family requires that we draw our model, not from contemporary culture, but from Scripture.

Allow me to offer some practical suggestions as to how the family could be rebuilt according to biblical norms. Not everyone will agree with my recommendations. But this is a start to redefine the Christian family in opposition to modern culture.

**SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR REBUILDING THE FAMILY**

Large families are good, even if the economic incentives no longer exist. Large families are one of the keys to dominion: "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (GEN 1:26-27). Each godly child is another warrior for the Kingdom (PSA 127:3-5). Therefore, normally speaking, Christians should have as many children as God provides. Husbands must be the heads of their family. Head means authority. Fathers must take responsibility to lead their families (EPH 5:23). Men need to put away their toys and start acting responsibly, utilising the resources of the family for the Kingdom. Vocation must replace career in our thinking. A vocation is God's divine call on a man's labour. Diligent labour will be honoured by God. However, careers are artificial attempts to meet man-made standards for success. Hence, some good "career" moves may have to be turned down, if the unity and solidarity of the family is put at risk (MK 10:29-30).

Families must assume personal responsibility for the education of their children. The father stands accountable before God for it, even if Mom is the one who does it. Fathers must teach their children God's Word. Nothing else is as important to the welfare of the family as this task (DEUT 6:6ff). Dominion starts with Dad leading the family in daily worship. In spite of the humanistic feminisation of modern culture, wives need to learn how to submit to the lawful authority of their husbands (1.PET 3:1ff). Before accepting a proposal of marriage, a woman must ask herself, "Sure I 'love' him, but do I respect him, and can I submit to him?" (EPH 5:33). Women need to be fully employed at home, developing alternative economic strategies. Working outside the home is destructive to the family, harmful to the children, subverts the husband's role, and distorts the woman's (PROV 31:10ff).

Singles should normally live with their parents (not going off to live by themselves, or go 'sightseeing'), saving money and preparing for marriage (PROV 10:4). Young men should demonstrate that they are ready for the responsibilities of marriage by being debt-free and possessing considerable savings (having established themselves in a trade or business). Women (and parents) should reject any potential suitor who is in debt. Fathers might want to consider a "bride price" for their daughters, which then becomes their dowry (cf. GEN 29:20; GEN 31:15-16).

Parents must leave an inheritance for their children to further economic dominion. There is no such concept as retirement in a biblical worldview, only a time when one's work no longer remains economically viable. Men continue to work until the Lord calls them home. Older men need to use their time sitting in judgement (PROV 13:22). Children are a man's social security and retirement. Inheritance can be given before death to educate, start businesses, or help purchase a home.

The primary work of all husbands must be (1) their dominion calling; (2) the discipline, training, and nurturing of their families, and only after these two requirements are met should they (3) minister outside the home (1.TIM 3:4; 1.TIM 5:8). As children grow older (and parents grow wiser) they are then freed up for more ministry outside the home. Hospitality is the normal ministry for most families (ROM 12:13, HEB 13:2).

Parents must not allow their family to be fractured by diverse interests, hobbies, entertainment, sport, etc. Recreation especially ought to be family-oriented (AMOS 3:3). If you cannot do it together, then maybe it's not worth doing. Family comes before individuals. The church must not separate families; get rid of Sunday School, youth groups, or other forms of religious baby-sitting (JOSH 18:1). Teach children to worship from a young age. Daily family worship trains children for Sabbath worship.
Families must get out of debt (ROM 13:8). Advanced academic education is an expensive luxury, not an inalienable right, especially for girls. Money invested in academics may be more profitably used in other places (dowry, down payment on a house, etc.). Formal education beyond normal schooling must be evaluated in terms of its economic advantages (and its spiritual dangers). Therefore, a godly man may well decide that the combined cost of an expensive academic education and four years of lost wages, outweighs the often-intangible benefits of a degree (LK 14:28). Parents should give their children financial incentives to stay close to home and develop an interdependence that lasts beyond childhood. Children ought not normally to move away from their families (PROV 27:8). This strengthens the ability of the family to meet social/welfare needs (1.TIM 5:8).

Christians must use their free time profitably: reading, working, playing together. Home-based businesses are highly recommended (1.COR 7:21). Get rid of your TV and buy several computers (or a piano) instead. Teenagers should not date; parents need to carefully chaperone male/female contacts. Parents have the responsibility to ensure that mates for their children share common doctrinal, ministry, calling, and life goals. Arranged marriages (with the consent of the children) are not archaic, but a wise way to ensure family stability (GEN 24:1-4). Teenagers are young adults and should not see their teen years as time to be irresponsible. Teenagers are given too much time, too much money, and too much opportunity to sin (especially if travelling away from home). Young adults should focus their time in working diligently at their calling as early as possible (EPH 5:16).

CONCLUSION

Most of what passes for family "values" in this country is simply baptised secularism. Some people will agree with all the suggestions mentioned above. Some will disagree with all. The main point is to get Christians thinking biblically about their families, and to ask themselves some hard questions about their core values. If we agree to start asking some hard questions God may give us grace and answers. Theology must take precedence over sociology. The way to change the culture is to apply a consistent, biblical worldview in place of the ever-changing values of fractured society. Covenant families, united in goal and purpose, are the basis for a rebuilt society. This may mean sacrifices, but the reward is dominion in the name of King Jesus.

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