

## REVITALIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

by Sally Schlundt

When I first received word inviting me to give a talk, the title made an impression on me immediately - - it could have read, the revitalization and transformation of the family, but no, instead it read the revitalization and transformation within the family. I'm glad it did because that happens to agree with the crux of my beliefs, that any kind of transformation at all must occur from within - - not as a result of outside forces.

Family, what is it? Dr. Charles Stinnette at the Graduate Seminary of Philips University in Oklahoma defines family in the following way, "It is a world of persons, a cosmos of meanings and common understanding which provides a center for unity and conflict, for meeting and withdrawal, for the shaping of identity and for the birth and nurture of our essential humanness. The mode in which family is a whole, and yet provides for diversity is the heartbeat of healthy living. Further, the family is a social organism which is propelled, not alone by physiological function, but most importantly by interpersonal events. Here is the foundational cornerstone for adequately understanding the family."

Now, the URANTIA Book describes the universe as a huge growing arena that is set up in such a way that it unerringly activates our individual growth - resulting mainly from the interaction of other beings - through the socialization process. We start small at first (we couldn't handle anything bigger) and gradually work our way up to larger and more diverse associations. Thus the smaller manageable unit - the family - is the primary social medium in our lives through which we grow and extend the learning it facilitates.

On page 1776 we read, "Marriage, with its manifold relations, is best designed to draw forth those precious impulses and those higher motives which are indispensable to the development of a strong character." Growth requires encounters with people. Evidently we wouldn't grow much on our own, if at all, so we need the stimulation of continually bumping up against other people. And characteristically growth doesn't occur without conflict, and families due to their intense degree of intimacy provide the necessary rich soil. Contrary to how many of us feel and think, we're not here to simply get along smoothly, we're here to grow vigorously and deeply. That's God's chief objective in having us here and that doesn't occur in environmental ease (as the URANTIA Book so aptly puts it). In fact the URANTIA Book describes the partnership between man and woman as basically antagonistic - a pairing of opposites both complementary and necessary. It's symbolic of nature's way to capitalize on differences - to utilize and benefit from the union of diversity. Also found in the URANTIA Book: "The enforced associations of family life stabilize personality and stimulate its growth through the compulsion of necessitous adjustment to other and diverse personalities." (942)

Furthermore, the family is the oldest and most prevalent institution and yet it is the most grossly undervalued institution on this planet. Even so, family is the most influential institution in our lives - shaping us and as a consequence, in turn, shaping through us the society we live in. The family is our primary learning institution, where we learn about life, about the universe and about the very nature of God. To the point, on page 941: "The family is the fundamental unit of fraternity in which parents and children learn those lessons of patience, altruism, tolerance, and forbearance which are so essential to the realization of brotherhood among all men."

Also, on page 913 we read, "Marriage is enduring; it is not inherent in biologic evolution, but it is the basis of all social evolution and is therefore certain of continued existence in some form. Marriage has given mankind the home, and the home is the crowing glory of the whole long and arduous evolutionary struggle."



It appears, in the evolution of human relationships, the tribe initially dominates the individual, but as the family evolves, the individual is then freed to act out of individual initiative within that family structure. The family is the ideal nucleus from which individuality can responsibly operate.

It is frightening, however, that although family is essential for the over-all benefit of individuals and society, statistics show that the family - and with it a great deal of society's moral fiber is declining. In today's modern society we are witnessing a general tide of family disintegration. Why is this happening? There are many opinions but usually they only scratch the surface. For the problems of the family are not exclusive to the family but rather symptomatic of an all-pervasive cultural problem.

Now, the single most important influence on our contemporary culture - on our lives - has been the industrial revolution with all of its consequent effects upon every aspect of life, from science and technology through economics, education, politics and religion. We have time to focus on only a few key factors. It has been through the advances of science and technology that the basic function of the family has been altered in its very nature, and so its stability shattered. Not only has technology provided us with the inventions making it possible to travel farther and therefore extending our sense of personal territory, but it has also given us less reason to stay and work together.

Families had always been cohesive because they were functional and necessary for society, controlled in turn by social norms and mores. But the functions that held families together and gave them meaning are no longer pertinent in today's culture - science and technology have largely taken care of that, cutting families free from their original or traditional working responsibilities. We are not in the same symbiotic relationship with society we once were.

All this newfound freedom is of little comfort because we're losing our sense of significance, and instead of society depending upon families anymore we find families and its members hopelessly dependent upon society's larger less personal institutions. As the family has become less and less necessary for the physical well-being of the society it is left with a feeling of worthlessness. Probably the most disastrous affect the industrial revolution has had on family is this diminishing sense of significance. Next to love - a feeling of significance is the greatest human need - if we don't have that we have little reason for existing.

However, the industrial revolution itself is not the culprit. Rather we are victims of ourselves, in how we handle the new advances. For instance, the one invention that has probably most radically changed the face of the family day to day life style is the television set. It has been blamed vehemently for interfering or replacing intimately shared family activities. Howard Steing - Clinical Professor of Medical Psychiatric Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma considers the use of the TV a symbolic expression of American culture. He maintains that TV is as much a person in the household as any real person - a person that captures our attention so totally that it obliterates reality going on around us. This is no accident, for he asserts that we actually engage TV to replace close personal contact, to escape from the commitments and sorrows existing with real associations. TV is the optimum and ideal friend,



filling the void, giving us a sense of living and personal contact, willingly giving all and asking nothing in return. He maintains that in the sense that TV actually isolates us from real contact - separating us from real socialization - it's an addiction every bit as harmful as alcoholism or drug abuse. Since TV has become a cultural norm it offers one the luxury of having the ultimate sanctioned distraction. These norms make self-indulgence - rights without responsibility - convenient and justifiable. Sadly, the irony of it all is that TV both fills the emptiness and serves to perpetuate it - it is symptomatic of the very isolation we use it to overcome, and so symbolic of a vast range of depersonalizing influences. "TV, though, (he goes on to say) doesn't create or destroy relationships - it is not the villain, - it is a matter instead of how the television is used in the relationships." Instead of disrupting family intimacy, for instance, it can be used as a means of family sharing - used as an extension or a means of socializing. He notes: "Long before TV existed, there was plenty of generational segmentation, role specialization, fragmentation and compartmentalization in the American family. TV simply was placed in the service of these tendencies, further disrupting interpersonal ties that were already fractured."

Looking more deeply, the problem has little to do with actual by-products of the industrial revolution but rather it's associated values. In an essay written by Dr. Peter Kountz and Rev. Douglas Peterson, entitled Marriage, Career and Disintegration of the American Dream, the point is made: "The work/career component is the greatest danger to the American way of life - not liberation or the failure of the church to provide adequate moral guidance. With technology came a new set of values; speed and efficiency came to be valued as work was moved from home to the office and factory in order to bring workers and materials together in the most efficient way . . . Because of its astonishing growth and development through technology, contemporary American society has come to value progress and upward mobility as well as efficiency, productivity, and technical expertise. . . Americans have in this way become almost exclusively committed to the values of the technological, work-oriented American Dream... (And) it is precisely the American Dream that continues to confuse and frustrate 20th century American culture and its primary institutions. It is a lure enticing us into the belief that its attainment will bring joy and pleasure. Like the fish that takes the bait, our frenzied pursuit of the lure turns into bitter disappointment, mistrust and frustration." And they make clear the affect this pursuit has on the stability of the family: "The value of family staying and playing together has been shattered by the dozens of individual interests that scatter the family members to the four corners of their community."

Now then, functional reasons, economic and social, in the past provided the necessary cement that held families together, giving them meaning and justifying their existence. But today those same reasons are no longer relevant and consequently family is suffering an identity crisis. It's at a point where it can go either way - where it must either disintegrate from loss of meaning or find deeper reasons for existing. We are entering a new age - one that requires a new design suitable for an enabling culture - something as functional as yesterdays family was to an earlier era.

But we presently lack a viable value system - what value systems we do have are either hopelessly outmoded, irrelevant or corrupt. We are presently experiencing moral anarchy - where anything goes. The fast pace of a radically changing world has given us



little time to adjust and re-define our purpose. Consequently we're at a point in history where we've gained moral freedom and don't know what to do with it - we've been socially regulated for so long that we don't know what to do on our own responsibly. Many of the standard moral codes have broken down. Margaret Mead in Culture and Commitment explains that we are suffering a crisis of faith - we have lost faith in religion, political ideology and in science and are therefore deprived of every kind of security. She maintains that this is a world-wide problem because of what she calls the electronic network - that combined with airtravel connects everyone together finally - leaving no one in cultural isolation. Everyone is now exposed to other beliefs, other norms and mores. We are no longer limited by our small cultural scope. Our old standards and values are undermined by the awareness of other standards and values - we don't just believe blindly anymore.

The key to a reconstruction of our failing culture and society with its many institutions, - belongs to those with a fresh perspective. Although society has largely controlled the individual it is none-the-less an invention of the individual - an extension of self-maintenance and self-perpetuation. Society is a tool devised by the individual to assure survival - the two working in common liason each serving the other for the ultimate benefit of the whole. Institutions were devised for specific functions. Before the dawning of the industrial revolution the family was the primary institution - all other institutions being secondary. In today's era, however, other institutions have become primary, a result precipitated by the industrial revolution which largely obliterated and replaced much of the family's function. This depletion of the family's function has created an unhealthy imbalance. In the past all institutions, including the family, were engaged in common reciprocal serving - the family served the other institutions and the institutions, in turn, served the family. This interdependence, this healthy symbiosis, has been broken as other institutions have loomed ever larger resulting in the family becoming irrelevant as well as powerless. Rather than the individual being a necessary part of a viable institution anymore (whether that be a family or a small business in the community) his only means of contributing has been reduced to that of a consumer. He has become depersonalized as institutions have grown into depersonalized giants - his own particular selfhood and personal skills unimportant.

Society, today, is working in liason, not with families of individuals but with corporate structures. Those institutions are being served by the society now, as mores, values and ethics are all designed for the maintenance and perpetuation of this industrial complex. Industrial survival is society's primary concern leaving the individual and family expendable. And so, the active values in our time are personally disabling. They encourage uniformity rather than individuality, dependency rather than self-maintenance, self-motivation and responsibility. In our society, profit comes before people.

Today we need a new ethic. An ethic that enables and frees people to themselves and one another - utilizing skills for the over-all benefit of society. An ethic both respectful of the needs for personal freedom while at the same time affirming each individuals responsibility to the whole.



With the industrial revolution came a set of values that has played havoc with the family - the one indispensable institution we have. And the family is the only institution that can fully embody this new ethic. It won't happen in lesser institutions; in education, government or religion - only in the family. Only the family is capable of being the initiating and central enabling institution. Only the family is the spawning ground for responsible individuals. The family is the only institution capable of freeing people to themselves and to God. In effect, other institutions are depersonalized. Only the family is made up of intimately caring individuals - it's the only institution looking out for truly individual concerns. It's the only institutions that can create love. To quote my husband "institutions cannot love - only people love." The family institution is the sole exception, for when it functions as it should it alone fosters deep, intimate, personal love!

I'm convinced that the main problem of the family today and therefore our culture is simply that the family doesn't appreciate itself - it's importance - failing to notice the enormity of it's influence. According to the URANTIA Book, the family is far from being insignificant - it earns the lone distinction, in fact, of being "man's supreme evolutionary acquirement and civilization's only hope of survival." (943) Ironically, on the very institution that is least understood and least appreciated rests solely the ultimate solution to the manifold problems that plague the world today. The family and its capacity for growth and change is the ultimate educator of society and finally the universe. Families are the teaching centers of real education and models for all social structures. It is the family from which we learn or don't learn individual responsibility, cooperation, love and caring, fairness, justice, compassion, forgiveness and grace. It is from the family that we learn how to regard and finally treat our fellow man. As found in the URANTIA Book, the family is absolutely essential for revealing the true character of God. On page 516 it reads, "The relationship of child and parent is fundamental to the essential concept of the Universal Father. . ."

Jesus regarded the family so highly, in fact, that "the family occupied the very center of Jesus' philosophy of life - here and hereafter." (1581) Jesus never underestimated the value of family - he saw family as representative of the highest levels of existence - referring even to the kingdom as a divine family. Jesus said: (on page 1839) ". . .(the) Father has directed the creation of male and female, and it is the divine will that men and women should find their highest service and consequent joy in the establishment of homes for the reception and training of children, in the creation of whom these parents become copartners with the Makers of heaven and earth. And for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall become as one." By what he said and how he lived - Jesus elevated the union between man and woman and the subsequent family to a level far exceeding it's status of that era and even today's era. He gave meaning to the statement found on page 939 that, "The family is man's greatest purely human achievement. . ."

Families are not only educational institutions for the members that comprise them but also educators of society. Families are essential as carriers of culture and instruments of change. In the URANTIA Book it's emphasized how all-important this function is, "Society itself is the aggregated structure of family units. Individuals are very temporary as planetary factors - only families are continuing agencies in social evolution. The family is the channel through which the river of culture and knowledge



flows from one generation to another." (931) Family is basic for passing on the cultural torch - giving continuity to social evolutionary patterns. Families are the carriers of society, without which society would stagnate. And to substantiate that, in the URANTIA Book it reads, "Almost everything of lasting value in civilization has its roots in the family." (765)

Dr. Charles Stinnette highlights and summarizes family's basic import and function. "(Family), it is both a conservator and mediator of human value and a prophetic center which translates a cry of distress into a summons for help and change. The family is destroyed from within whenever it ignores either of these mandates. Its function as a center for prophetic change gives meaning and import to its function as the nururing center of civilization."

Yes, far from being insignificant, the family's responsibility is indispensable. Now, then, do we proceed in this vital reconstruction? Family building is at an all time low - it's becoming less and less an attractive venture for people. Parenting is the most important job on this planet and yet it is the least prepared for and the least appreciated profession of all. In their combined book Here's to the Family, Betty and Joel Wells analyze the dilemma this way: "The husband and wife who enter into familyhood - that is, have children, are offered little by way of preparatory education or professional training for what is surely one of the most complex and challenging jobs in the world. Nor are they offered the same sort of support which surrounding institutions used to provide. To get married, stay married, run a household, raise healthy, well-adjusted children to the point of incipient maturity is not the easy, automatic, natural thing it was once supposed to be. In fact, not very many people, when you take the population at large, are able to do it. Yet when they are successful, there's no Nobel or Pulitzer prize awarded; no cover story in Time to celebrate the achievement in the face of odds that grow longer each year."

Parenting, no doubt, is a thankless task today. Family is no longer regarded with unquestioned respect, - no longer considered the pace setter and upholder of right but, is instead, blamed for everything - blamed for the ills of both the individual and society. For that matter, Aldous Huxley in Brave New World forecasted a world where family would be entirely obliterated due to its negative and immoral influence on people.

We are understandably apprehensive about entering parenthood anymore. Thanks to psychology we've been made aware of all the risks. We are conscientious about parenting now in a new way - having been made aware of the damage parents can wreak. We truly want to do the right thing, our intentions are right but we find ourselves so overwhelmed by the constant onslaught of diverse viewpoints on childrearing that we end up numb by the sheer confusion and ineffective by the inevitable guilt.

And, parental authority is being continuously undercut today by the various experts in our society. We hear today of the rising apathy among parents, that increasingly parents are shirking their responsibility. I believe there are such instances but I also believe strongly that most parents are interested - extremely interested in their children and if anything, they feel at a loss - they doubt their own competence as parents. I feel parents have to like themselves again and, therefore, like their role. Parent has become a four letter word in our society and that has to change. Furthermore, no one is more fitting for the job. The so-called experts only know a portion of the child's over-all needs. It's the parents who must take their rightful place again as



the only experts in the raising of their children. In the URANTIA Book we read: "... any attempt to shift parental responsibility to state or church will prove suicidal to the welfare and advancement of civilization." (941) Moreover, on a neighboring planet, as a positive example, children are under full control of their parents.

What this means is that today parents need to retrieve their full responsibility and authority once again. Responsibility mainly as teachers. In the URANTIA Book we find that teaching and child rearing are in fact inseparable. Education, unfortunately today, is regarded as only occurring in certain specified places and by certain specified people. Actually, though, learning is no more a consequence of organized education than religion is a consequence of organized religion. Learning is a part of life - is life, in fact.

Family is the arena for personal and interpersonal development. Family is a combination of elements that we require to grow. Even Jesus had to experience being both child and parent in family. On page 516 we read: "No surviving mortal, midwayer, or seraphim may ascend to Paradise, attain the Father, and be mustered into the Corps of the Finality without having passed through that sublime experience of achieving parental relationship to an evolving child of the worlds or some other experience analogous and equivalent thereto. The relationship of child and parent is fundamental to the essential concept of the Universal Father and his universe children. Therefore does such an experience become indispensable to the experiential training of all ascenders." We need the opportunity to parent - not just for our children's sake but for ours as well. We need the addition that children bring to an intimate association.

It's common in our society to exclude children from our adult lives - to see them as a becoming - a "future", as Maria Montessori puts it, and therefore we segregate ourselves from them. Children though provide us with a necessary balance - something we wouldn't have otherwise - children are not merely a becoming but part of our very essential and necessary socialization process. Maria Montessori further points out that by cutting ourselves off from children as we do, we are consequently severing ourselves from a necessary part of ourselves and ultimately our society. We are only half functioning and growing at our potential capacity. She explains it as follows, "There is in us, finally, a peculiar emptiness, a blindness we have built into our spirit and our civilization. Something like a blind spot in the depths of the eye, this blind spot is in the depths of life."

I quote my husband - he said - "Children are incredibly precious because of their relative rarity in the total ascension career - but in our society they are largely cast aside. They should be our teachers - as God learns from us, so we learn from our children."

There's a beautiful book out; it was referred to us by Marjori Reed and it's entitled: Whole Child Whole Parent, written by Polly Berends. Here is what she has to say about the education of parenthood: "It's an existential fact that most of us need our children. There are a few people walking this earth who learn the arts of motherliness and fatherliness without children, and they are very wise. But most of us benefit from the big push our children give us toward the discovery of these qualities - qualities which are absolutely necessary to our fulfillment and of more lasting value than most of the lessons of childhood. We learn them for the sake of our children, but they benefit us most of all. Once we have learned to be truly motherly and fatherly (we need of course, to become both) we will always be much happier. The gain is not the having of children; it is the discovery of love and how to be loving. The foundation of love is the knowledge of goodness. The qualities of this love are receptivity, patience, innocence, humility, trust, gratitude, generosity, understanding, and the desire to be good for goodness' sake."



The most moving insight was when I read the following statement: "Parenthood is just the world's most intensive course in love." Not only do we disclose the true nature of our Father's love to our children as is so aptly pointed out in the URANTIA Book but it's within the family in which we learn love. We really don't understand the full nature of love until we're been a parent.

A perspective of love is basic - any method (for instance in childrearing) is secondary and inconsequential to love - if you don't have love any method in the world won't work, and by the same token, if you do have the love any method in the world will work. This was the wonder behind Jesus as parent; it wasn't his technique per se - his technique was love based - love expressed.

On page 1013 we read, "...the entire religious experience of such a child is largely dependent on whether fear or love has dominated the parent-child relationship."

The ultimate goal of parenting should be to free the individual to himself - to God - to allow him to teach himself actually - to learn from life like we all do, through the instrument of experience. To formulate his own truth. Polly Berends added a dimension to the well used quote by Jesus: "...except you become as a little child you shall never enter the kingdom." She goes on, "He wasn't talking about cute or little or helpless or ignorant: he was talking about the child's most outstanding ability, the ability to learn." Children teach us about the true nature of education.

I read somewhere that adults are collaborators in life with children - not experts - but fellow learners, because learning occurs always, everywhere and with everybody. Our role has to do with "...assisting the child to win the battle of life." (91) Everyone in a household as equal participant, working in collaboration with one another, each empowered with his own personality and sense of responsibility is what true freedom is all about - it's the way of the universe. Jesus' family was so designed. It is true with the Father's family.

Parenting - a disclosure of God - of the universe, and to the universe. In asking ourselves how to best raise our children we need only to look to the universe itself as a model - to God as our model parent. His entire emphasis is to teach, not judge or punish. We're allowed to learn on our own - to freely explore life. We learn through experience, trial and error, through life's natural consequences. Life itself teaches us as we come to learn its natural laws. Maria Montessori says in her book The Child in the Family: "Man must construct himself, and in the end, possess himself and direct himself."

In conclusion; Even though this is a time of great insecurity for the individual and the family, I see this as a magnificent opportunity for all of mankind. One way to look at it is to see ourselves being weaned from an outer social control, to an inner greater control. This current maricistic period we're witnessing is not only understandable but maybe even necessary before we discover something else. It's like being weaned from the bottle and resorting to our thumb for awhile. We're in a period of self-discovery - of finding our separateness. After all, that's where God ultimately finds us - alone - he relates to individuals not groups as such. The challenge now is greater than ever before and that's really what's scary about it; the control is no longer out there - it's up to us now - we have to find the answers and direction within



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ourselves.

And what does this say about family? Family has a chance for new meanings and so new functions to meet the needs of the new era. In fact, people as single individuals functioning autonomously for the good of the group are far more cohesive in the long run than the old family group based on necessity alone and controlled by society. People acting out of personal decisions motivated by choice - choosing through their own set of values in a relationship to God are far more effective and advantageous to a group (whether that be nuclear family or the family of mankind). This is what the age offers us. The URANTIA Book is a book of this new era - a vision of the idea of God-control.

On page 1777 we read: "And thus, if you can build up such trustworthy and effective small units of human association, when these are assembled in the aggregate, the world will behold a great and glorified social structure, the civilization of mortal maturity. Such a race might begin to realize something of your Master's ideal of "peace on earth and good will among men." While such a society would not be perfect or entirely free from evil, it would at least approach the stabilization of maturity."

Shall we begin? The living, enabling family freed from domination of all other less personal institutions, and free to the intimacy of God. A small unit that nurtures responsibly free individuals. It's these very same small units that have the potential to teach the URANTIA Brotherhood what it really can become and on out in time through all other social institutions, even to the world - and more!

Families are tiny microcosms of human relationships reflected on all universe levels - on page 369 we read of it being a reflection of the very universe structure itself. Family as pattern is the only institution that covers the entire range of evolutionary reality even to paradise - the trinity for instance being the primary family. Its feet are in the earth but its head is in paradise - no other institution can claim that!

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