

The War Against the Family

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When the perennial philosophy identifies the family, along with the political community or state, as “natural” societies, it is telling us that these two societies embody and reflect what concerns the very essence of the human beings who compose the membership of those societies. The family and the state can be said to be natural because they perfectly conform to, and meet the basic needs of, human nature. They are, as it were, the natural expressions of human nature, and, because they are not the results of human invention, they can properly be regarded as God-given—the providential means by which we are enabled to fulfill our common vocation as rational creatures and thereby attain the end for which we were created.

The family and the state, then, because they play so critically important a role in our lives, command all the caring attention we can give to them. They do not, however, enjoy the same level of importance, for the family takes precedence over the state. The family is the more fundamental of the two societies; it is the foundation upon which the state is built. While it may not be true that healthy families absolutely guarantee a healthy state (it is possible, at least for a time, to have a society with a preponderance of healthy families which is headed by a corrupt government), but it is clearly the case that, over the long run, healthy families make a healthy state considerably more likely. But one thing is certain: no society can ever hope to have a healthy government if the major portion of that society’s families are in a sickened condition. In the final analysis, the virtue of the state depends on the virtue of the family.

Today we are living in unusually precarious times by reason of the fact that a veritable war is being waged against the family. This is, I think, a unique phenomenon in human history, for which we can find no exact precedent in the past. And it is a fairly recent phenomenon, in historical terms, in that it has its origins in the rise of a certain brand of totalitarian thinking, some 150 years or so ago, and the subsequent appearance of

the kind of totalitarian statecraft which modeled itself on that thinking. The essence of totalitarian political thought is the premiss that the state should be all-powerful, becoming the central reality in people’s lives, controlling as completely as possible every aspect of their lives. Totalitarianism can be properly called unnatural, for by making the state the be-all and end-all it thus destroys the state’s identity as a natural society, that is, one which serves genuinely human needs.

One of the chief characteristics of the totalitarian state is the adversarial attitude it habitually takes toward the family. Why should this be so? Because the family stands as an accusing witness to totalitarianism’s corrupting influence upon the state as a natural society.

The totalitarian state sees the family as the principal obstacle to its totalist ambitions. Demanding as it does the complete loyalty of the citizenry, the totalitarian state cannot abide the thought that anyone should continue to preserve loyalty to the family. The family must be either entirely neutralized, or destroyed altogether, so that it can exert no anti-totalitarian influence within the society.

Recent history has provided us with abundant evidence of how totalitarian regimes treat the family, especially in those countries which have suffered under Communist dictatorships. China is a dramatic case in point. Few cultures can match traditional Chinese culture for the primacy of place and the honor it accorded to the family, so it was predictable that when, in 1949, the Communists took control of China, the family was immediately put in jeopardy. Mao Zedong and his henchmen, besides declaring open war on religion, launched a furious attack on the Chinese family. One of the key tactics which they used in this effort was to forge a separation between parents and children, between elders and youth, both physically and, more importantly, psychologically. They knew that the family was a major impediment to the state becoming all things to all men.

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Québec

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The war against the family which we are witnessing today in our society may not be as overt and brutal as that carried on in certain Communist countries; it is usually conducted in more subtle fashion, but its deleterious effects are nonetheless no less serious. What factors initiated this war? What factors sustain it? There are doubtless many, but I will limit myself to naming but a few of the more important ones.

There is the decade of the Sixties, as one of the initiating causes of the war. With its infamous sexual revolution, its childish branding of all authority as intrinsically evil, its mindless contempt for the past, that decade polluted our cultural atmosphere, and contributed significantly to the establishment of the anti-family attitude so prevalent in contemporary society. Today the baleful influence of the Sixties continues unabated because many of the "flower children" of that dismal decade are now powerful figures in politics and the mass media, where they continue to peddle their anti-family propaganda.

There is public education and the kind of pedagogy which it commonly fosters. Many school administrators and teachers have thoroughly bought into the anti-family mind-set which is part of our cultural climate, and they are indoctrinating children and teenagers accordingly. The sex education programs which are now a standard part of the curriculum are by their very nature anti-family, for these programs usurp the rights of the family, and attempt to do what should only be done within the ambit of the family.

There are certain government welfare programs which, whatever might have been the good intentions behind their inauguration, turn out to be, in their practical results, destructive of the family in the most devastating of ways. Young men are encouraged to shirk responsibility for paternity, while young women find having children out of wedlock to be a financially beneficial option.

There is militant feminism and militant homosexualism, which are active combatants in the war against the family, particularly by their promotion of that aberration called same-sex marriage, a pathetic attempt to gain legitimacy for the unnatural by mimicking the natural. But reality refuses to be tampered with. Calling a twisted association "marriage" does not make it so, for essences cannot be altered by the facile misapplication of labels. Totalitarianism "de-natures" the state by making it totalitarian. The advocates of same-sex marriage go one step further, for they create a non-entity, a pure fiction, and foolishly suppose it to be real.

Rules for Fasting and Abstinence

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 9, 2011. Canon Law of the Catholic Church concerning fasting and abstinence for Latin Rite Catholics states:

Can. 1249 — All members of the Christian faithful in their own way are bound to do penance in virtue of divine law; in order that all may be joined in a common observance of penance, penitential days are prescribed in which the Christian faithful in a special way pray, exercise works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence according to the norm of the following canons.

Can. 1250 — All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and times throughout the universal Church. [Although no particular penance is prescribed by the Church (ref. Can. 1250), the old discipline of abstinence on all Fridays and of fasting on all weekdays of Lent may be maintained. If not, it must be replaced by some other form of penance.]

Can. 1251 — Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion of the Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Whenever a solemnity (first class feast) falls on a Friday, abstinence is dispensed.]

Can. 1252 — All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance.

Can. 1253 — It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety. [In the United States and many other countries the days of abstinence are Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent. On other Fridays, one is allowed to commute abstinence into another form of penance (e.g., the Way of the Cross).]

There is a war on, a war against the family, and it is no exaggeration to say that the future of human society, specifically as human, depends upon its outcome. Because so much is at stake, no one can afford to claim neutral status in this war, and take up comfortable residence in a safe Switzerland of the mind. We are all needed on the front lines, for if the family falls, we all fall. ✠

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