EDITOR’S NOTES

SPECIAL ISSUE: WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES II

Imagine two thousand people from around the world, coming together in Geneva to talk about families: Muslims, Jews, and people from many Christian faiths. The declaration about families that grew out of the congress reflected in the “Statement of Principles,” which is in the magazine will send a message from the traditional, natural families of the world to the United Nations. That message, supporting time-tested, pro-family values upon which people of many faiths and cultures agree, can affect UN policy for good.

It’s just in time, too. According to Kathryn Balmforth of the World Family Policy Center, anti-family forces have “hijacked” the idea of human rights to use as a weapon against religious, cultural, and familial rights. Motherhood and religion are “oppressive” to women. Parental guidance of the religious, social, and sexual education and choices of children no matter how young denies the children their “individual rights.” Indeed, just about anything that might protect families and allow parents to teach time-tested values to their children is shouted down as “paternalistic” and “oppressive.”

All this may seem far-removed from our lives, even ridiculous. But the UN treaties and other documents, and the tactics that created them, already affect the language of national and international politics and policy. They are being enforced and championed by activists who have, Balmforth said, deceptively manipulated the UN system.

Constructive involvement by pro-family groups and individuals at the local, state, national, and international levels is essential if we are to support the many, but out-numbered, pro-family UN delegates, congressional representatives, and others working on behalf of the natural family. Involvement is essential if we are to preserve the choice of rights and principles that guide our families. We applaud the World Family Policy Center and Richard Wilkins, managing director, as well as The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society and its president, Allan Carlson, the conveners of the congress. Take time to read our overview of some of the key messages of the congress then consider your own involvement, locally or globally, in protecting the natural family as the fundamental social unit.

Glen C. Griffin, M.D.

Glen Griffin is the editor-in-chief of Marriage & Families, a member of the faculty of Brigham Young University’s School of Family Life, president of the American Family League, and author of It Takes a Parent to Raise a Child.

Marriage & Families is a peer-reviewed journal for young couples, husbands & wives, parents, and professionals—including educators, counselors, therapists, psychologists, physicians, social workers, nurses, public health people, teachers, clergy, experts in family law, and everyone interested in marriage and families. Our editorial board members belong to many faiths—with a common belief in the importance of traditional families. Marriage & Families is dedicated to strengthening families. Without apology, our name begins with the word marriage—a concept that many dismiss or completely ignore these days. However, since marriage and fidelity are essentials, not options, in a healthy society, we are pleased to bring you a publication containing credible data supporting this and other time-tested principles and values related to the family.
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A family, then, needs mother and father, both unconditionally committed to each other and to the child or children. The requirement of unconditionality in the commitment is another subject, but one which is indicated by a growing body of impressive research.

Wholeness, family, wholeness of families, peace, peace in the family, whichever way you combine them, come back to that troublesome concept: commitment. In our age dominated by emotion, sensation, and new ideologies crying out for emotional and sensational liberty, commitment has become the Cinderella of the virtues. Not only unappreciated, unpopular and misunderstood, commitment is now discouraged and even discriminated against in many ways.

-Madame Christine de Vollmer, President of the Latin American Alliance for the Family

Policy makers and public officials in many parts of the world are beginning to recognize again the social, cultural and economic importance of lifelong marriages and healthy families. ... More however needs to be done to spread these policy ideas throughout the world.

Our choice is clear. We can throw up our hands in despair, unwilling or unable to propose a solution to family breakdown and falling fertility rates, with all the social consequences that follow; or we can take a positive step forward, committed to the aspiration so many people share, in the hope that with practical support and encouragement, we can continue to build strong nations based on a healthy society with its foundation of stable family life.

-Honorable Kevin Andrews, Barrister, Member of the Australian Federal Parliament

The attachment of a husband and a wife is in such a way that each of them wishes the well-being and comfort of the other, and is happy in forbearance and self-denial for the sake of the other. As a matter of fact, the ... basis of unity of the husband and the wife is greater than passion. It is the same thing which the holy Qur'an mentions with the name of mawaddah (love) and rahmah (mercy) ... .

-Mohammad Javad Sabhani, Ph.D.

The Wirthlin survey further confirms that the anti-family movement, which has so much momentum in some parts of the United Nations system, represents the view of only a small minority of people, and is favored only by a minority of governments. Of this minority of governments and I am including my own government in this group most do not reflect the views of the majority of their own people, but of certain elites who have maneuvered themselves into positions of power.

-Kathryn Balmforth, J.D., Director, World Family Policy Center
Greetings from Focus on the Family. We were privileged to take a team of twelve people to Europe to discuss the differences between the European and American approaches to sex education. What we found is that while students are pushed to use contraceptives, the cry of their hearts is to have adults and society believe in them and to have a lasting marriage relationship without divorce. Different cultures—similar hearts.

-Amy Stephens, Focus on the Family

There is a bright side however: social order, once disrupted, tends to get remade once again, and there are many indications that this is happening today. Families and governments are reevaluating the role that family plays in the economy and in society. Working women and men are searching for alternative working arrangements to make family and work obligations compatible. There is an overall search for moral principles that could establish some common denominator in an ever-diverse multicultural society. One may ask why one could have expected this to happen. The answer can be found in human nature. Men by nature are social creatures and the family is its basic unit and most important manifestation.

-Jean Bethke Elshtain, Ph.D., Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, University of Chicago

STATEMENT • OF • PRINCIPLES
WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES II

As part of the World Congress of Families II, delegates from throughout the world prepared the Geneva Declaration, consisting of twelve paragraphs of ideals and policies for families in relation to society and current issues. The principles listed here are the first sentences of each part of the Declaration. They summarize the Declaration, which was approved by those who attended the congress and will be presented to the United Nations and other policy-making bodies as the voice of the families of the world.

Our Purpose: We assemble in this World Congress, from many national, ethnic, cultural, social and religious communities, to affirm that the natural human family is established by the Creator and essential to good society.

Society and the Family: The natural family is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered on the voluntary union of a man and a woman in the lifelong covenant of marriage.

Marriage and the Family: The cornerstone of healthy family life, marriage brings security, contentment, meaning, joy and spiritual maturity to the man and woman who enter this lifelong covenant with unselfish commitment.

Children and the Family: The natural family provides the optimal environment for the healthy development of children.

Sexuality and the Family: The complementary natures of men and women are physically and psychologically self-evident.

Life and the Family: The intrinsic worth, right to life and sanctity of life of every human person exists throughout the continuum of life, from fertilization until natural death.

Population and the Family: Human society depends on the renewal of the human population; the true population problem is depopulation, not overpopulation.

Education and the Family: Parents uniquely possess the authority and responsibility to direct the upbringing and education of their children.

Economy and the Family: Economic policy, both corporate and governmental, should be crafted to allow the family economy to flourish; what is good for families is good for the economy.

Government and the Family: Government should protect and support the family, and not usurp the vital roles it plays in society.

The Family and Religion: Parents have the right to teach their religious and moral beliefs to their children and to raise them according to their religious precepts.

Call to Respect the Family: We exhort all persons, families, social organizations and governments throughout the world to respect and uphold the institution of the natural human family, in accordance with the principles of this Declaration, for the good of present and future generations.
We can learn much about sexuality and the natural family from the collective tribal wisdom and understanding of the peoples of Africa. Human cultures throughout history have attempted to harness and direct the potent power of transmitting life. Most cultures stipulated not only the person or persons with whom one could have relations, but the manner in which the sexual act might be done. These subconscious understandings have built my philosophy and that of other Africans.

The general instinct of humanity was to shield the powerful procreative act from misuse and society from the misuse of sex. Christian and Muslim influence, which came to Africa around the mid-1800s, ensured for a time that the relationship between a man and a woman would continue to be considered sacred. However, by the mid-1960s, this ideal of sex between only men and women in the bond of marriage began to fall apart. This was true in many cultures in the West and in the East, but perhaps the impact has been most extreme in Africa with its delicate tribal balances. Once it began, the ideal of the sacred nature of sex rapidly collapsed. This resulted in children being born out of wedlock, marital breakdown, abandonment of children, and even the abandonment of the elderly, who used to be held in great esteem in African cultures. Subsequently, an explosive increase in sexually transmitted diseases of every imaginable kind has occurred.

What led to this massive collapse of an ideal of sexuality within marriage that was once almost universal? First, thanks to contraceptives and their aggressive worldwide marketing, many seem to get away with infidelity and premarital sex. But deception, of course, quietly destroys relationships, and the destruction is now so massive that it’s affecting whole nations, as indicated by the terrible impact of AIDS.

Second, there is the demystification of sex, which looks on its surface like a good thing. But when sex is no longer sacred, nor the power to beget children anything special, everything else goes. This demystification has been done through what I would call a value-free sex education, based entirely on...
how pregnancy and disease can be avoided. In this kind of sex education
no morals or responsibility to anyone is mentioned except mutual momentary
consent very momentary.

Third, we live on what has been called “planet Hollywood,” a name I
have borrowed. There’s a worldwide dissemination of a culture of pleasure as
the ultimate desirable good. Movie figures commit adultery, engage in overt
sexual play, teenagers neck in the back
of cars, and pornography can now be beamed electronically to all corners of
the world.

Fourth is the individualistic philosophy of “me” and “I.” Traditional
concepts of loyalty and the greater
good of the family or society no longer exist. Divorce is cast in an attractive
light, as some sort of right, while perseverance, dialogue, or even compro-
mise in marriage is made to appear oppressive and reactionary. Children are
fought over or sacrificed to the selfish whims of their parents, since, after all, they only
exist if they are
wanted. If they are
not wanted they have no right to exist.

Fifth, there is in many countries a worldwide assumption of a small family
norm. We have recently tried to remove it from our country’s legislative papers
and encourage the idea that responsible parenthood, not adherence to a small
family norm, is desirable.

For

most Africans, the only social security they will
ever know is their fam-

ily. And children have a
stabilizing effect on
their parents’ rela-
tionships. Each child is one
more reason to try
harder to make a mar-
riage work. However,
many families in the
world have only one or
two children. This has
been called “respon-
sible parenthood,” a true
misnomer if ever there
was one.

Sixth, there are extraordinary expec-
tations that have been roused in all
peoples, mainly due to television. How is a man supposed to behave like
a combination of Romeo, Casanova,
and Arnold Schwarzenegger? Many
men simply retreat in self-protection.

Women likewise feel compelled to remain ever young and to compete
with every half-naked girl we are
bombarded with in advertisements and
magazine covers. As I watch more and
more young people being taken home
in coffins— in Africa you can see the
plague passing every weekend, when
the young people who are dead from
HIV/AIDS are taken home to be
buried— when I see this, grow-
ing old seems to me to be a
great and desirable good.
The life expectancy in
many African countries
has gone down by ten to
fifteen years.

Finally, there has been the loss of a sense of a deity to whom all are
ultimately answerable for their actions. When people
think God is “dead,” they often excuse irresponsible actions and the pursuit of
fantastic fantasies.

To conclude, the beauty of sexual
love lies in the fact that it is love, which
is a decisive act of the mature will to
love and to cherish, even and perhaps


As the traditional home of United Nations treaty making about human rights, Geneva has become the modern headwaters of thought about UN family policy. This grassroots World Congress of Families will add to those headwaters a crucial new stream—the mainstream. This group is sending to the UN, and to people everywhere, a family message of the heart from people representing the international heartland of democracy.

Family policymaking in the UN and elsewhere now emphasizes dysfunctional and alternative family types, while the traditional family withers as an endangered species. Exceptions have become the rule, as self-appointed lobbyists have replaced the UN policy agenda with their personal agendas. I find it ironic that now, when democracy is more widespread than ever before, the United Nations—a very undemocratic forum, far from the world’s homes and families—would have allowed this rebellion.

I have long believed that the UN has value. I applaud the original declarations on Human and Children’s Rights adopted in Geneva years ago. But, I discovered that today’s UN has lost the plot about family life when I was a professor of law and another legal scholar asked my opinion of the UN’s 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). He prompted my study of the CRC.

In a UN publication I found this description of the CRC: “A new concept of separate rights for children with the Government accepting [the] responsibility of protecting the child from the power of parents.” Notice that this “new concept” uproots one of the most fundamental natural rights about family life—that parents may rear their children as the parents see fit, as long as the parents are fit.

The 1989 CRC was written primarily by American lawyers whose arguments about child autonomy were rejected by the U.S. legal mainstream in the 1970s and 1980s. The United States still hasn’t adopted the CRC—even though most other countries have. This odd outcome reflects the herd mentality of naïve governments who fear criticism for not embracing an international treaty with the word rights in its title.

The CRC shows how political activists, who have lost their arguments in such democratic forums as parliaments and courtrooms, have learned to use the UN to exploit the naïveté of local governments. If the activists can clothe their extremist visions of personal relationships (this term is different from the word family) in the vague but lofty language of international law, they’ve built a Trojan horse that lets them slip undetected into a country’s legal system and, hence, its culture.

The UN’s current approach to motherhood and women reflects this problem. Recent UN documents have accepted the extremist claim of radical feminism that motherhood is an oppressive concept designed to perpetuate male domination. For example, many countries want to protect motherhood as intended by the original UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948: “motherhood [is] entitled to special
Marriage & Families

The  Family: A Proclamation to the World

One writer surmised that jobs traditionally filled by heroic, nurturing women—social workers, teachers, nurses, and of course, mothers—are now perceived as second-rate. Devaluing motherhood devalues “everything else women do”; devaluing “the primary work of most women throughout history” tells women “that it is really women who aren’t worth serious consideration.” When a mother feels support from her husband, her family, and her society, she feels like a mother of hope—who values herself enough to nurture a child of hope. Children of hope create a society of hope.

Society has also devalued women’s role in maintaining society’s standards of sexual behavior. The key to sexual fidelity was once the intuitive sexual self-control of women. Most women’s sexuality reflects an inner moral compass that can point true north, like a natural magnet. Of course, just as a natural magnet can lose its power through damage or trauma, women can lose their natural moral magnetism. But throughout history, women have tended to be society’s primary teachers of sexual mores.

Women have too long endured the unfairness of a cultural “double standard” that tolerated promiscuity in men while condemning it in women. Sociologist David Popenoe writes that “men the world over are more sexually driven and ‘promiscuous,’ while women are more concerned with lasting relationships.” A double standard that winks at this male tendency enough to excuse it is unequal and unfair. Society could have responded to this inequality by demanding sexual fidelity of men. But instead, our generation romped into history’s most staggering sexual revolution, seeking male-female equality by encouraging women to imitate the promiscuous tendency of men. Sadly, the biggest losers in this process are children and women.

This brings us to the third area of devaluation: Society has stopped prizing women’s innate yearning for permanent marriage bonds. The social
wreckage produced by today's confusion about sex, women, men, and marriage is well known. Two experts describe this as a remarkable collapse of marriage, leading to growing family instability and decreasing parental investment in children. A woman's desire for marital permanence really is the mortar holding together the bricks of social stability. When marriage is secure, a wife stands at the center of moral gravity for her family's universe, holding her husband close with the gravitational pull of a natural magnet. "Strong mothers build secure homes; fathers and father's sons maintain secure neighborhoods." Sound marriage requires us to value the complementary contributions and roles of both equal partners to the union.

More broadly, women have a gift for nurturing all human relationships. Recent research shows that women will often sacrifice an achievement for the sake of a relationship, but men will more likely sacrifice a relationship for the sake of an achievement. Most radical feminists would reject the concept that women are civilizing agents. They resist this concept because they believe that acknowledging any inherent differences between men and women will lead to negative gender discrimination that will place women in subservient roles.

The women's rights movements of recent years opened many valuable doors to women and pricked the consciences of many men who had exploited women's willingness to give up worthwhile achievements by making unnecessary sacrifices for relationships. But the gender equity pendulum of the past era has moved our attitudes too far, devaluing and damaging the culture's support for motherhood, sexual fidelity, marriage, and women's distinctive voices. It is now time to swing the pendulum of attitude back to magnetic north and to nurture our children and society with women's civilizing influence. Surely society can restore the confidence of women in their own instincts without coercing them into being non-entities. Surely we can invite men to emulate the ethic of care they see in their mothers, their wives, and their daughters. We have already learned the hard way that women, children, and the entire culture are worse off when we seek gender equality by encouraging women to adopt permissive male lifestyles.

Therefore, as this World Congress sends a message from the mainstream into Geneva's headwaters of thought about family policy across the globe, let us call for a more responsible form of gender equality that celebrates and preserves the natural moral influence of women. It is time to equalize the sexes by asking men once more to follow the moral leadership of women, by honoring the equal yoke and lifelong commitments of marriage. That kind of progress will make the world of the twenty-first century not only more equal, but also infinitely more civilized.

8. I first heard this phrasing from Jeannette Hales Beckham. It is supported by studies reported in Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Bruce C. Hafen, J.D. Elder Hafen is a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He has served as Provost and Dean of the Law School at Brigham Young University. He and his wife, Marie, have seven children.

"It is now time to swing the pendulum of attitude back to magnetic north and to nurture our children and society with women's civilizing influence."
Marriage & Families

THE CONVENERS OF THIS CONGRESS ASKED ME TO SUMMON THE DARK POWERS OF DEMOGRAPHY TO FORETELL THE WORLD POPULATION SITUATION IN THE COMING CENTURY. I MUST CONFESS THAT I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE WE HAVE NO RELIABLE WAY OF FORETELLING HOW MANY BABIES CURRENTLY UNBORN HUMANS ARE GOING TO HAVE. I WILL PRESENT TO YOU A SCENARIO FOR A PEAKING OF GLOBAL POPULATION IN THE NEXT CENTURY AND A LONG-TERM DECLINE THEREAFTER. SUCH A SITUATION IS ENTIRELY PLAUSIBLE.

First, let’s take a look at the twentieth-century population explosion. Between 1900 and now, the world’s population has roughly quadrupled from about 1.6 billion in 1900 to about 6 billion today. But the world’s population in our century did not explode because human beings suddenly started breeding like rabbits; world population exploded because humanity finally stopped dying like flies. During our century, life expectancy has more than doubled, from perhaps 30 years around 1900 to about 65 years today. That health explosion is the reason for our great increase in population numbers. But over the century we’ve also seen something else. We’ve witnessed a phenomenon of long-term, steady declines in fertility. This process actually began two centuries ago, in France at the time of the French Revolution, and subsequently spread across the globe.

Projections by the U.S. Bureau of the Census suggest that as of 1998 there were about seventy countries and territories around the globe where fertility levels, if continued, would eventually lead to a peaking and a decline of population (barring immigration). We call this “sub-replacement fertility.” By 1998 about 44 percent of the world’s population was living in countries with sub-replacement levels of fertility.

Moreover, in much of the world where above-replacement childbearing still prevails, dramatic declines in fertility levels are currently underway. Rapid fertility decline is occurring in some surprising places. Take Iran, for example. Between the time of the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s and today, fertility levels have dropped from seven to under three births per woman per lifetime. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East are said to be areas resistant to fertility reductions. But there are countries in the Middle East that have already experienced almost a 50 percent drop in fertility over the past generation. There are also countries in Africa that are beginning a rapid fertility decline.
With all this in mind, let's take a look at the United Nations “low variant” world population projections. By this set of projections, the United Nations Population Division, a group of honorable statisticians within the UN Secretariat, traces out a peaking of world population around the year 2040, and then a subsequent population decline. This is, of course, the “low variant”—just one of three alternatives currently outlined. But I want to show you that it’s not at all an implausible one. Reaching depopulation would simply require a continuation of existing trends for another quarter century. What would a peaking and subsequent decline of world population portend? I will show you three implications of this. The first, inevitably, would be a rapid aging of the world’s population. In the past, the median age for the world’s population has been between 20 and 25 years. It is now about 26 years. By 2050, the median age for a depopulating globe would be about 42 years. In the more developed regions the median age of population would be over 50. That is to say: for every person under the age of 50, there would be someone over the age of 50. A complete transformation of the profile of the world would thus occur.

With the population explosion of the elderly there would be a tremendous change in what we could call the “pension burden,” the ratio of people 65 and older to so-called working age populations of 15 to 64. In Japan, for every 100 persons of working age, there would be 70 people over the age of 65. How pension systems would operate in such a world is an open question. But even more significant would be the question of pension burden in low-income countries. The more developed countries, after all, became rich before they became old. In this and older for every child under the age of five in those same low-income areas of the world. We’d be in a world where there would be many more grandparents than grandchildren. We could get into a new situation, one never witnessed before: the emergence of societies in which the majority of children would have no blood brothers, or sisters, or cousins, or uncles or aunts, societies in which their blood relatives are all ancestors.

This is not a totally remote possibility. For example, if the current Italian levels of fertility carry on for simply another generation, less than 10 percent of the population would have both cousins and siblings. How would a world work in which this transformation occurred? I confess that as a lowly social scientist, my imagination cannot stretch far enough to imagine this sort of world. But my imagination may be sorely tested, because this prospective depopulation that I have outlined could occur within the next 40 years. This means that most of the people currently alive on the planet could live to experience and see the consequences of depopulation and cope with them. The demographic specter haunting humanity tomorrow may turn out to be depopulation.

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For the first time in the 223-year history of the United States, the next census is going to ask many questions about race, but none about marital status. The anti-family forces have finally dominated. They have persuaded an entire culture that racial origin is far more important than whether or not you have made a decision to pledge yourself to your spouse and children.

This shift has not occurred suddenly. For years we have been told that everything we do is a consequence of our genetic predisposition. We are told that those who drink do so, not because of a character weakness, but because they have a genetic predisposition to alcoholism—it’s unavoidable. We are told that if you gamble, why, don’t blame yourself. You are merely ill. You have a genetic problem! To these so-called experts who have more to do with propaganda than with science, genetics is destiny. Your genes make you do absolutely everything you do. We are even being told that the homosexual lifestyle is merely the inevitable and inescapable consequence of genetics. How strange that biology “makes us” engage in gambling, alcohol or drug abuse, and homosexuality, but it makes no suggestion that we marry and remain true. How strange that biology, which through the ages has reliably punished promiscuity with ill-health, must be ignored when it urges traditional family and slavishly followed when it urges self-destructive and indulgent lifestyles.

Regardless of this trend, the answer to many of the problems of society is still the traditional family. For example, poverty is the inevitable consequence of divorce. In almost every case, men divorce and become richer, and the women they leave behind become poorer.

Our jails are filled to overcrowding and our court systems are clogged by the malevolent activities of young males raised without fathers. Young women without fathers become the prey of those young males. Many of society’s ills could be resolved by a return to the traditional family. One day in the future, a saner America should put today’s public health officials on trial for their reckless endangerment of citizens. Their following fashion instead of science is costing lives.

With that said, why is it that so many people do not view...
the traditional family with favor? Why is it that, in this very city, an institution that began with such promise fifty years ago has steadily proceeded in the direction of devaluing the traditional family? Is it because they are illogical people? Is it because they have never heard the arguments presented at this congress? No, my friends, it would be an error with the graveness of consequences to underestimate the adversaries of the traditional family. They oppose the traditional family not because they don't get it. They oppose the traditional family because they do.

There are really only two ways to structure human society. The first is hub-and-spoke, where a centralized government relates to each individual in society. Alternatively, we can organize society in a familial way with millions of unrecorded interconnections and the ordinary mediating institutions of society interacting with one another, similar to the way that the human brain itself is structured. The first will always oppose the institution of family because it diminishes centralized control.

There are only two ways to answer these three important questions: where did we come from, where are we going, and what should we be doing?

The second ideology answers the questions in this way. We are divine creatures touched by the finger of God, created in his image, and different from every other creature on earth. We came from a superior being, designed for a higher purpose. We are going somewhere better than here, a place to hope for and strive for. And we should do everything possible to help each other get to that place. There is another ideology in the world that is every bit as doctrinaire, and to which people are just as ardently committed, as

Hence, redemption must come at the hand of government. And what should we do for problems that are too big for one government? Well, you know the answer to that.

But one thing is clear in this ideology: the family is not the solution. There is no need for the family institution, as proven by the rest of the animal kingdom. Since there is no other animal on earth that believes it is morally obligated to honor its parents, or even retain a long-term affiliation with its offspring, family is simply an ineffective, made-up idea.

Those that oppose the family do not oppose the family because they do not catch on; they oppose the family precisely because they do. That is why I believe that our World Congress of Families is performing such vital and critical work. It brings us all together and says race doesn’t matter. Race would only matter if we were animals. But for children of God, it’s what’s in the soul that counts, not the color of the skin.

So we have two conflicting ideologies, visions, or doctrines. One is that we are all children of God; the other is that we are all mere animals. That is the fundamental difference between these two doctrines. The natural consequence of these two visions is either the embrace of the traditional family or the vigorous rejection of that family.

Rabbi Daniel Lapin is a nationally syndicated radio host and president of Toward Tradition, an American movement to encourage Jews and Christians to support family values and the free market. Rabbi Lapin and his wife, Susan, have seven children.
PRESERVATION OF THE FAMILY IS THE PROMOTION OF PEACE

by Madame Jehan Sadat

The sanctity of the family is increasingly receiving attacks from many different quarters. As a result, the ability of the family to survive into the next century is being questioned. Considering the conditions being imposed upon parents and their children by poverty, illiteracy, and rapid social changes, I can understand why scholars and ordinary citizens are cynically predicting the extinction of the traditional family. Although I understand this, I will never agree with anyone who says the family is a relic of worn-out virtues and values that can no longer be applied to modern society.

The family today, and as it has been since the creation of Adam and Eve, is the basic element of society. It stands alone in the position of prominence in determining the quality of life. Without God, mankind is lost, and left to wander and stumble blindly in a wilderness of desperation. Only when the relationships between family members are rooted firmly in mutual love, trust, respect, and dignity can the community hope to be strong. If not, no matter how developed or prosperous society is, it is doomed.

To us in Egypt, the center of life is the family, an attitude validated by the depictions of daily activities found on our ancient temple walls and in our museums. From our agrarian background, we developed strong bonds to the land and to family, creating a deep sense of social responsibility prevalent in our modern way of life. No one can grow up in such an atmosphere and become immune to the condition of life for others. As we say in Egypt, “Paradise without people is not worth the having.”

When an Egyptian speaks of family, he means the father, mother, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and scores of cousins. Everyone is generously welcomed whether by a rich uncle in Cairo or a distant and poor cousin in Aswan. We think of ourselves as one big family. As Egypt continues to develop, the rituals of family life will naturally change. However, we will never allow our ties to the land and to family to be completely broken.

World change need not imply the loss of traditional values. Nor is progress another word for moral decay. It is not development that jeopardizes values and morality but rather the absence of a strong moral foundation developed foremost in the family. Surely we can enjoy the conveniences of modern life—airplanes and automobiles, computers and cell phones—without losing our sense of values. When we love God, love our families, we can enjoy life without betraying the practices of decency, without betraying the traditions of our culture.

The Holy Book of Islam, the Qur’an, clearly prescribes how we are to treat each other, especially parents. It tells us to obey, respect, and love them, with an attitude of humility and tenderness. Treatment of parents is second only to the worship of God. And mothers hold a very special place. There is a story in my culture that tells of a Muslim who asked the Prophet Mohammed, “Who is most deserving of my compassion?” The Prophet responded, “Your mother.” Mothers are the ones who give us life. They are our first teachers, giving us the lessons and values we will carry for the rest of our lives. Our Prophet said, “Heaven lies at the feet of mothers.”

Behavior in marriage is also addressed in Islam. This relationship between a husband and wife is one of God’s signs; therefore, there should be an atmosphere of peace and quiet, kindness and mercy. The Qur’an states, “Your wives are your inner garments and you are their inner garments.” This does not mean that a spouse is as ordinary as a favorite sweater, but rather each partner is to protect and cover the mistakes of the other. Husband and wife should never expose the deficiencies of the other, but rather complement each other. The foundation of the marriage is nourished by loyalty and love, growing ever stronger with experiences that only time can bring. Husband and wife must work together, in a loving way, in order to bring peace and happiness to the family.

In reference to family values my husband wrote, “I could never turn against or show the least lack of loyalty to my family, since this is in sharp contradiction with the family values I was brought up on—the values that continue to sustain my lifeblood and determine my mental life more effectively than anything else. Indeed, the faith I have in these values deepens day after day, so much that I have come to believe that only adherence to such values can save society . . . .” No matter where I may go in this world, Egypt is my breath and my family is the beating of my heart. The love given me by my children, grandchildren, and Anwar Sadat give me great satisfaction, pride, and happiness. I will leave you with this thought: Preservation of the family is the enactment of God’s will and is, therefore, the promotion of peace that brings the wholeness and happiness of life.

Madame Jehan Sadat, Ph.D., has earned the title “First Lady of the World” for her work with and support for charitable organizations. She and her husband, the late Nobel Peace Prize-winner and president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, are the parents of four children. She is also a proud grandmother.
Governments must recognize and respect the natural family, in much the same way, and for exactly the same reason, that they must recognize and respect basic human rights, since the natural family... constitutes a fundamental dimension of human flourishing....

—DAVID BLANKENHORN