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The Canadian Family Enters 1967

THE CONSCIENCE OF CANADA as she enters her second century of Confederation should be determined upon restoring and preserving the great principle of individual and national life: the family. The harmonious family forms the nearest to complete basis for the happiness and prosperity of the person as well as the necessary foundation of society.

In this latter part of the twentieth century we live in a highly dynamic world. No one expects or desires social development to come to an end. No one should expect the family to stop in its growth and adaptation. But we should see to it that the family preserves itself, in spite of all change, as a group united by agreement as to the things they love.

The family is the smallest of social institutions, but it holds first rank in importance. We must not let it dissolve, not only because of its national importance or its religious significance but because by its dissolution every human being in Canada would lose some of his humanity.

Family virtues

The family unit functions as it does because of its efficiency contrasted with any other sort of social unit devised for such purposes. It provides for a child's physical needs and trains him to survive; it affords the background in which he learns to live with other people; and it is a major source for the transmission of the values and knowledge of culture and religion. It develops the human virtues of love, pity, concern and sociability.

There is a cold, calm, remote way of describing the family legally: "A collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or management." How far that is from describing this mother cell of society! Here we find the personal and social expression necessary to human life. Here is an island of emotional shelter in the midst of a turbulent sea. Here are people living together in mutual helpfulness, protecting one another's interests.

The family confers personhood. Only in it can a person be fully himself. In all other spheres of life one

has to win recognition by accomplishment, but in the family one has status by existence.

Family patterns

Everyone has the desire to be not only a person, but to be part of something, to belong. In the family he finds the sort of fellow-feeling and mutual identification for which "we" is the natural expression. The essence of the family pattern is the acceptance of mutual rights and obligations. Sympathetic insight, called "empathy", means the capacity to enter into and share the emotions, attitudes, interests and experiences of others. The mutual giving of affectionate understanding is one of the strongest bonds in family life, and is unique there. Respect for opinions, ideals, habits and privacy of the individual are part of the pattern.

The shape of family behaviour is made up of many small pieces. Sacred writings teem with rites that protect family life. Little rituals observed today may form the framework of a larger comprehension, a consensus on values and objectives. A four-year-old is being incorporated into the family group as he completes his nightly prayer at mother's knee by asking a blessing for his parents, his sisters, his brothers, and his grandparents. A mother, who has sung the same little song, "Sailboat", to her son every evening for years has added a dowel holding the family structure together.

Anniversaries may be festivals rich in pleasure and meaning. When parents and children get together for a quiet evening, talk over the family events since the last anniversary, and discuss their expectations for future years, they foster helpful solidarity by recollecting jointly experienced gratifications.

The real core of family life lies in the behaviour of the individual members toward one another. The family circle is, as it should be, one of least reticence. The members of the family are free to speak out, to express themselves about mutual affairs and even about one another. It is "all in the family" and frankness is taken cheerfully.

Good families do not just happen, but are the re-

sult of unselfishness, forgiveness and honour. Here is a drama in which everyone is playing a vital role, sharpening his perceptions of what is possible and desirable in life.

Family functions

How different that is from the suggestion by Plato that the State should care for all children. In some countries behind the Iron Curtain babies are put on a conveyor belt that carries them from institution to institution and turns them out into life without their ever having experienced the tenderness of a mother's arms.

Even in free Western countries the contribution of the family has been gradually decreased during the past century as state and community have assumed duties which at one time were the responsibility of the family.

Suddenly, it seems, in the past twenty years, families have awakened to the fact that substitutes are not really doing the job the family did. And so the United Nations thunders in its *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

Family living needs material things, but only in the same way as walking requires a pair of feet. Where the walk takes one is something else. Within the family there must be developed aspirations and objectives which, while bringing into being a culture adapted to a scientific age, stimulate and develop the individuality of its members. The future of Canada depends upon the fostering of sane, responsible, integrated personalities, and this is an undoubted function of the family.

Family stability

The word "stability" when applied to the family does not mean social status stability, or economic stability, or stability enforced by law: family stability is concerned with the inner realities of life's experiences.

The world, changing from old controls to new, is finding constantly greater demand for the individual to know about and to face the personal and social problems of the modern age. The central issue in life remains choice. Moral judgments about how to behave, as well as career judgments about what to work at, must be made. They are forced upon us. For this reason, if for none higher, the family must be used to create the ability to choose and to judge wisely.

It is in the family that children learn techniques, customs, folklore, and all the many features of their cultural heritage. These form the basis of judgment and choice. We may measure the success of the family in the next generation very largely by its willingness to work out approaches, treatments and training which

will give young people the necessary guidance. This is its imperative duty.

There are, in our Canadian society, prevailing principles of right action, decency and justice. They can be traced back to the *Institutes* of the Emperor Justinian fourteen hundred years ago: "to live honourably, to injure no other man, to render to every man his due."

These are principles taught in the home as preparation for the time when the child will make the transition to independence. As discipline relaxes in home and school, the need for self-discipline becomes correspondingly greater. It is upon what the home does today in conveying principles of ethics, manners and individuality that the future of Canada will be built socially, economically and politically.

Discipline

Family discipline is made up of love, sympathy, persuasion and compulsion. Children must learn obedience if they are to fit into adult situations without difficulty and pain. Obedience to instructions and laws is a primal requirement of business and society.

Discipline is not only a protective device but a development device. Family rules have two functions: to restrain from wrongdoing and to guide simplicity.

It is well, before laying down a law, to determine its purpose and to set reasonable limits to its practical application. Every parent, like every manager of an office or factory, has experienced the gradual pressing that people do against the fence of rules, testing where they can cause a bulge without reprimand, or a breakthrough without punishment.

Parents need to be careful not to create artificial illegalities for the sake of enforcing discipline. Children are sharp-eyed. Some tend to become slack if special demands are continually made on them without obvious reason.

One of the younger participants in the Canadian Conference on the Family remarked that children have good reason for rebelling if parents say "you can't do it because I didn't when I was your age". Forms of social behaviour have changed, and the problem is to know on what line to take a firm stand and where to stretch a point.

The infant years are important. Human life requires tender support in its beginnings. Psychoanalysis has revealed the need of children for warm-hearted parents who allow themselves to be loved and to love. If a child starts to grow away from parents it is not because the child is perverse but because some guidelines of affection have been allowed to fray.

A joint enterprise

Making a family is a joint enterprise. Parents are partners in a common cause, and as their children mature they too are brought into the partnership.

Men and women make a supremely important decision when they choose their marriage partners. There is nothing in life so much a test of our common sense and sense of decency and our ability to manage interpersonal relations as is marriage.

One might almost say that four things are necessary to happy married life. Each partner must have self-interest so as to keep alive mentally; each must be interested in the other, not passively and not only materially, but vitally and spiritually; both must be interested in their home and family in a co-operative and participating way; and both should share common goals outside themselves and their families. Such parents give their children models to imitate.

It is not necessary that the wife should understand her husband's job or keep up with its technical details, but she must understand its importance to him. The husband should be able to express a wide range of feelings openly and directly to his wife, and to become involved and interested in her activities.

Both parents must keep up with development of their children. Some are unaware until it is too late of the changed status of their daughters. Women were, until not many years ago, indifferent to the need of securing recognition of themselves as members of society. Economic opportunity has opened new doors to them. If a daughter's voice is not heard and respected in the family council, she is fitted by education and she is free under today's social code to move out to an apartment or lodgings.

Changing times

There is something dramatically intense about this age. It is not to be wondered at that today's children, who have never seen a world without automobiles, telephones, radio, television, electric light and airplanes should react to life in a different way from the way of their gas-lit, horse-drawn grandparents. When those grandparents looked up at the night sky they saw the moon and stars and constellations, but when their grandchildren look up they see space vehicles.

In the course of Canada's past hundred years the family has witnessed changes in birth folkways, economic activities, recreation, education, and religious behaviour. The task today is to evaluate changes, to agree on a basic ideal which shall be upheld, and to accommodate without disruption to the emerging pattern.

We must get away from the idea that any disturbance of an existing condition is a sign of deterioration. Change need not mean decay. Instead of becoming alarmed at the processes of change, or of fearing dire results, the family should glory in the opportunity to live in such a time, to cope with its problems, and to set up guidelines for the future.

It is not enough to shore up old institutions against changing tides. We need a type of family that reflects the underlying springs and currents of this period in

time, and bases its navigation upon principles found through the ages to be good.

Adolescence

As a child grows into his teens it is natural that he should look more and more outside the family for his play and social activities. If the parents are emotionally stable they can grant autonomy to their children without difficulty.

Some things that are done are bound to cause annoyance. Children, when put in possession of power and freedom which they feel to be altogether new, will take a delight in the exercise of them. Their manifestations may be extravagant, like regressive unkemptness and crude manners.

Parents must guard against leaving room for these young people to feel themselves to be left solitary at a crucial point in their maturation from childhood to adulthood, compelled to work out problems alone or with only the fumbling guidance of others of their age group.

But we should not underestimate the strength, wisdom and foresight of young people. Their stubbornness and stoutness of mind arise from natural pride in the capabilities they feel they have. They know more than the aged of a previous generation; they have more information, more stimulation. However, they still need the family.

If a junior member opts out of the family he is losing something that is bigger than his gain. He may be venturesome and tough when making minor experiments in the art of living, but when it comes to matters which affect his whole life happiness he must have a place to turn for guidance. Parents have learned many lessons "the hard way", and they would like to save their children some of the pain they experienced.

There is a tiresome repetition in published interviews and television debates of the phrase "they don't understand". When we hide behind "they do not understand" we are doing two things: we are indulging in self-pity and we are admitting our inability to communicate our ideas. Unless both parents and children make an earnest effort to understand the other point of view they are in no position to challenge it.

What to do

One way to reach mutual understanding is through the family council, where a companionable family exchanges experiences, ideas, and the sharing of burdens. Everyone gets to see just a little bit more of any situation than was at first apparent.

Where family members engage in intimate, personal and informal communication, they come to know one another intelligently, and as a group they become better able to deal with problems raised by internal and other forces.

A dynamically unified family has not solidified into

a closed corporation run by rules. Its unity is based upon the consensus of its members; it emphasizes the individuality of its members and their personality development; it is characterized by the adaptability of the group and its members in meeting crises; it works out differences as they arise.

The qualities of the family council are: to hear courteously, to answer wisely, to consider soberly, to convince and persuade rather than to overrule, and to decide impartially.

Even highly-charged feelings may have their sting drawn off in a family conference. Giving expression to conflict of ideas lessens the tension which arises from suppressed and unsolved conflicts.

The family council is constructive, too, because it throws new ideas on the table, and families need new ideas just as much as do business concerns. One family council, debating the problem of getting young children away from absorption with television and interested in reading and constructive activities, produced 37 suggestions.

Parents who wish to be perfectly stable have the feeling sometimes in dealing with their children that the world is on a slight tilt. All parents know, even when their affection remains high, alternate periods of hope and despair.

An interesting question arises: what is being done effectively to provide education especially designed to help these parents and prospective parents? While the definitive plan for family life is being drawn up through the research of sociologists and others, some immediate action is called for.

If we accept the conception of the family as that of guiding children by interpreting and integrating the conflicting impacts of the world upon them, we presuppose that parents are keeping themselves abreast of what is happening by studying, reading, and discussing these things.

Any conversation between parents reveals that they recognize the precarious state of the family in our society. They see the need, and they have good intentions about doing something, but just how to go about it is not clear. Without guidance, the task is like trying to untie knots while wearing mittens.

During the past thirty years there has been an increasing awareness on the part of members of many professions of the function they perform in counselling on marriage and family problems beyond the traditional scope of their practice. Not only ministers, lawyers, psychologists and social workers are consulted, but general medical practitioners, teachers, foremen and managers are approached: anyone, in fact, who appears to be in a position to give advice.

We need something more definite, more fixed, more readily available. No sweeping philosophies or meticulous statistics will do, but a programme of education and leadership, starting now.

Churches of all faiths have a vital role. They need to put forth immediately an imaginative and vigorous and continuing effort to make themselves the powerful nucleus of families, sustaining, advising and proffering the infinite help and comfort of religion.

Not new, but newly urgent

The need for good family relationships is not new. One of the oldest books in the world, written six thousand years ago, advised Egyptian princes: "Take care of thine own house, cherish thy wife."

In 1964 the Canadian Conference on the Family was convened by Their Excellencies the Governor General and Madame Vanier to consider how to meet existing and developing pressures.

"The structure of a civilization may change," said the Governor General in his opening address. "From time to time the emphasis may be placed on different values, but one thing always remains immutable: the family."

After mentioning that he and his wife had often spoken of their hopes and fears in this regard, he went on to say: "We have talked of our fears because we have been impressed by the tendency to forget that the union of man with woman carries noble and great responsibilities that are fundamentally sacred, and that the raising of children depends upon the devotion of their parents. We have not been without hope, however, because we are confident that Canadians in facing up to the problems that exist will be able to work together in building a society that is more aware of truly human values, and so more respectful of family ties."

The Conference gave rise to the Vanier Institute of the Family, whose President is Dr. Wilder Penfield. The Institute is to continue the work started by the Conference, directing large research projects, holding periodical scientific meetings, and co-ordinating research for other welfare agencies.

There is no place like home

We are still turning pages in the history of Canada and the development of the family.

What sort of family seems to be emerging as Canada celebrates the hundredth anniversary of what the City of Saint John saluted in 1867 as "the greatest of all modern marriages"? It is, indeed, like the confederation of the provinces. It is a companionship family, emphasizing intimate interpersonal association. It is characterized by the giving and receiving of affection; the assumption of equality of husband and wife; democracy in family decisions, with a voice and a vote by the children; the personality development of its members as a family objective; freedom of expression consistent with family unity; and the expectation that the greatest happiness is to be found in the family.

In a country like Canada the words "There is no place like home" should not sound quaint or amusing.