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DOES FAMILY CONFLICT WITH COMMUNITY?

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[Editor's Note: In today's academic and popular literature on the family, the tendency is to pit families' commitments to their own members against families' commitments to their communities. The author finds this dichotomy problematic; she suggests that Catholic social teaching offers a resource to help families embrace values of solidarity and the common good. With these values in mind, she then studies ethical issues confronting families with regard to work, time, and money.]

IN A POPULAR child-care book, new parents who feel stressed are told that they will have to prioritize if they want to regain a feeling of control over their lives. Parents are advised to pare down their outside commitments and focus on their baby, their marital relationship, and themselves.[1] While this advice certainly cannot be discounted, especially in the first harried months after a baby's birth, it is troubling because it seems to be the first in a series of inward movements which experts recommend to families. Furthermore, it is representative of a body of ethical thought that pits family against community. In much of today's popular writing on the family, parents are given a choice: either do the right thing for their families by prioritizing their marriage and their children, or put their families at risk by furthering their career ambitions and volunteering within their communities. Academic ethicists who write on family issues often present parents with similarly stark choices. However, this kind of dichotomizing between family and community is unnecessary and unhelpful. In this article I would like to build upon Catholic social teaching on the family in order to suggest ways that families might begin to think about seeking their own good in the context of the common good as they make decisions about work, time, and money—the most crucial decisions of their lives.

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[1] Arlene Eisenberg et al., *What to Expect the First Year* (New York: Workman, 1989) 580–83.

THE FAMILY/COMMUNITY DIVIDE

Most current writing on the family assumes a dichotomy between family and community. Popular parenting literature often suggests that time is a scarce commodity, and that family should come first since it is one's most important commitment. Authors most often focus on the importance of making financial sacrifices that will enable one parent to stay home with young children. However, community activities such as sports, scouting, and volunteering are being scrutinized as well. Dolores Curran, a popular Catholic writer on family issues, argues that too many families allow family time to be sabotaged by their commitments to community activities. She claims that "contrary to the positive family image fostered by these organized youth activities, the family, in fact, suffers from them."[2] Although healthy families do value service to others, Curran writes, they tend to participate in service activities that allow them to be together, and they do not let these activities dominate their lives.[3]

While it is difficult to argue with the idea that balance is a virtue, or to deny the experience of many families that too much activity can cause problems, it seems that overinvestment in the community is not the major problem for most families. Rather, the majority of families are becoming increasingly isolated from their neighborhoods and communities.[4] Furthermore, given the obvious exceptions of overcommitment, it is not clear that family and community involvement are necessarily at odds with each other. In the family in which I grew up, family and community were connected. As a family, we were active participants in a small church community, we sometimes picketed at a local grocery store in support of the United Farmworkers, and when we came together for dinner, we often discussed social and political issues connected with my father's work as a lawyer for people who could not afford to pay. Moreover, we brought our individual experiences in community activities (girl scouts, soccer teams, liturgy committees, a halfway house for ex-convicts, etc.) back to the family when we were together. This enriched our conversations. Because we had experiences (both as a family and as individuals) that went beyond our family, we had more to talk about when together. Our identity as a family was strengthened by our commitments outside the family. Surely other families have had similar experiences. Why then do most child-rearing experts and commentators on family issues assume a dichotomy between family and community, job and family, family and world?

[2] Dolores Curran, *Traits of a Healthy Family* (New York: Ballantine, 1983) 157.

[3] Curran notes that conservative commentator James Dobson "calls overcommitment the number one marriage killer" (ibid. 289).

[4] A recent study by Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam shows that Americans are now joining associations and volunteering less than ever before; see Abigail McCarthy, "Going It Alone: Americans Are No Longer Joiners," *Commonweal* 122 (October 20, 1995) 7–8.

This tendency to divide is probably linked to the larger dichotomy between personal and social spheres that pervades popular ethical thinking. Because family is viewed as a private association, social values are assumed to be an intrusion. Love and self-sacrifice are primary family values; justice and solidarity are not, because family is supposed to be primarily about relationships, and at most a place to prepare good citizens for the public sphere. The family, it is assumed, must first take care of its own, and this necessitates a certain withdrawal from the community.

Popular Christian writers are not the only ones who hold this view. Many ethicists, despite their progressive intentions, agree. Communitarian political philosophers are among those ethicists who have recently begun paying a great deal of attention to family issues. They advocate a rethinking of the family in light of a revaluing of communities. However, by this they usually mean not more but less connection between families and communities. Amitai Etzioni, a prominent communitarian, argues strongly that parents need to stay home with their young children full time.[5] He draws a stark dichotomy between the sacrifice involved in prioritizing children and the greed and self-aggrandizement involved in pursuing a career. He asserts that "a finger should be pointed at those who, in effect, abandon their children to invest themselves whole hog in other pursuits."[6]

Etzioni proceeds from several questionable assumptions about child care, but the most troubling part of his argument is the privatistic idea of the family which drives it. One would think that a communitarian ethicist would call mainstream work/family dichotomies into question by pointing out that sometimes parents work because they are committed to bettering their communities (and more often because they must), that care for children can be shared by members of a community without necessarily becoming a nightmare, that parents who give up all public work may find themselves feeling unconnected, unfulfilled, and consequently undercommitted to the daily routine of child care. Communitarians such as Etzioni do not question the family-community dichotomy at all. In fact, their work contributes to the separation between the two spheres.

Etzioni is just one of many commentators on the family who paint the dilemma of the modern family as one between, in the words of Christian ethicist Gilbert Meilaender, "self-giving and self-fulfillment."[7] The desire for self-fulfillment (often identified with radical individualism) is thought to be the greatest problem of the modern

[5] Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 59.

[6] Ibid. 64.

[7] Gilbert Meilaender, "A Christian View of the Family," in David Blankenhorn et al., ed., *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family* (Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1990) 141.

family. These commentators argue that if parents would just sacrifice more time, money, and energy for their families (and spend less on work and community activities), society would be much better off. They seek to strengthen families by asking family members to spend more time alone together and to prioritize their own good over the good of others. They do not begin to challenge the pervasive family-ism in American society which encourages families to see themselves as individual units unconnected to the larger society. There must be another way to reconstruct and strengthen the family. A good place to begin an alternative construction, in my view, is Catholic teaching on the family.

CATHOLIC TRADITION ON THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY

During his most recent trip to the U.S., John Paul II challenged Americans to practice solidarity toward their most vulnerable neighbors. He suggested that if they did not do so, they would find that their country had no soul, that their lives had no real meaning. In his speeches, the pope was drawing upon a long and rich tradition of Catholic social teaching that emphasizes the values of solidarity and the common good. In the context of this tradition, persons are viewed as truly and essentially social beings unable to achieve full humanity by their own efforts. Thus all persons have a duty to look beyond their own personal good and to seek that good perceived as best for the larger community of persons. They have a duty to "situate particular interests within a coherent vision of the common good."[8] Catholic teaching also obligates persons to take seriously the value of solidarity. This value is similar to the value of the common good, and is sometimes even used synonymously.[9] However, partly in response to the challenge of liberation theology, official Catholic teaching is coming to understand solidarity as a particular commitment to poor and oppressed peoples. There is an acknowledgment that to speak of a commitment to the common good in the abstract is to miss the point that some are much needier than others. Thus solidarity means that the powerful are called to serve and empower the poor.[10] Valuing solidarity inevitably leads one to embrace the option for the poor, that is, "to commit oneself to justice and therefore to take up the cause of the poor in their struggle for justice."[11]

Catholic social teaching is primarily addressed to the larger society, not to the family. However, tradition holds that the family is a domestic church with a personal and social vocation. Portions of social en-

[8] John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (Boston: St. Paul, 1991) no. 47.

[9] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1987) no. 38.

[10] Ibid. no. 39.

[11] Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching,* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 2.

cyclicals that address this issue are often not emphasized sufficiently. Still, it is significant that families are perceived as communities of love with a social mission. John Paul II has made this point more strongly than any recent pope, saying that the family is "called to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters through a 'preferential option' for the poor and disadvantaged."[12]

This social mandate of the family is perhaps the greatest strength of Catholic social teaching on the family. In contrast to those who argue that being a good family is primarily a private task, Catholic teaching emphasizes that moral thinking about the family makes sense only in a communal context. Still, because Catholic social teaching does not concentrate its attention on families and because Catholic family teaching does not concentrate on the family's social mission, this aspect of Catholic teaching is not as fully developed as it might be. John Paul II emphasizes lifting up the relationship of the married couple rather than challenging families to meet their social responsibilities. Because his theology of the body gives so much weight to the marital relationship, it tends to obscure the social calling of the family.[13] The radical idea that persons can find true fulfillment only in community is obscured in the quest to promote the view that man and woman find fulfillment only in relationship with each other.

Similarly, the idea that families are obligated to give of themselves to the poor and oppressed is obscured by the frequent failure to call families to that same kind of specific sacrifices to which nations are called. The absence of reflection on appropriate levels of sacrifice weakens those parts of the social teaching that speak to families. Because what is expected of families in the social realm is so vague, this part of Catholic social teaching is rendered virtually meaningless in the lives of Catholic families. What counts as Catholic teaching on the family is associated with encyclicals focusing on the personal rather than on the social. Thus most Catholics would doubtless affirm that their major moral duties are to love their families, to obey the Church's teaching on sexuality, and to stay together for life. They would justify their stance by arguing that this is the main thrust of Catholic teaching on the family.

However, there is justification for further developing the idea that families are called to incorporate the values of solidarity and the common good into their lives. For instance, recent reforms in the Catholic marriage ritual are signaling a renewed attention to how the couple's relationship must be seen in the context of the common good. No longer

[12] John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1981) no. 47.

[13] John Paul II's weekly audiences on marriage are published by the Daughters of St. Paul in four volumes: *Original Unity of Man and Woman* (Boston: St. Paul, 1981), *Blessed Are the Pure of Heart* (1983), *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* (1984), and *The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy* (1986).

can couples view their marriage as simply a union of two. It is rather, as Karl Rahner writes, "the act in which a 'we' is constituted which opens itself lovingly precisely to the *all.*"[14] If marriage is indeed a relationship that opens itself to the all, it must entail a commitment to the good of others. Similarly, when John Paul II speaks directly to the family as opposed to the married couple (as he does only in *Familiaris consortio*), he asserts that a social/political commitment is one of the crucial dimensions of family life.[15] It follows that family members are called to do more than simply love. According to the best of Catholic tradition, the family cannot be concerned solely with the welfare of its own members; it is obligated to take seriously the welfare of local, national, and even international communities. The family must situate its own good in the context of the common good, and it must make a commitment to serve the poor.

This tradition is a helpful starting point for rethinking the relationship between family and society. It would be fruitful to reflect systematically about how to build upon this tradition, showing how Christian families can uphold values of solidarity and the common good as they make decisions affecting their lives.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PASSION

Some persons may be uncomfortable with my proposed project. Some may fear that the movement toward a more socially concerned family will be a movement away from a family that values passionate relationships between husbands and wives, and parents and children. Others contend that in our unloving society, the family's first and most important mission is to be a place of love. For example, the late social critic Christopher Lasch mourned the loss of the family's status as a "haven in a heartless world," and argued that it is "[n]ot the family's isolation but its inability to protect its members from external dangers [that] has eroded domestic ties."[16] Lasch claimed that the family can or should serve as a kind of refuge from the world's evils. This view has value as a partial strategy.[17] Families are called to nurture their own, especially in times of crisis. However, in the long run, the Catholic ideal of the family as domestic church with a definite social mission has greater merit than the "haven" ideal, since if all families decided to abandon the evil world for their small places of refuge, the world would be less sanctified. Eventually, the world would intrude upon families,

[14] Karl Rahner, "Marriage as a Sacrament," *Theological Investigations* 10, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1973) 199–221, at 207; see also Paul Covino, *Celebrating Marriage: A Workbook for Engaged Couples,* rev. ed. (Laurel, Md.: Pastoral, 1994).

[15] See *Familiaris consortio* nos. 42–48.

[16] Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic, 1977) 156.

[17] After hearing my criticism of Lasch's notion of the family, one father told me that while he understood my point, "a haven in a heartless world" was often the best he and his wife could offer their teenage sons.

in spite of their efforts to secure themselves against it; it would also hamper their efforts to be good to one another. In contrast, the Catholic ideal can help families to embrace both the challenge of building loving relationships among members and the challenge of humanizing the world.

It is important to emphasize that a family with a strong social commitment need not inevitably be void of strong commitments among its members. Jean Bethke Elshtain sees in many attempts to make the family more public a certain totalitarianism that "strives to govern all of life; to allow for only one public identity; to destroy private life; and most of all, to require that individuals never allow their commitments to specific others—family, friends, comrades—to weaken their commitment to the state."[18] Here again, there is a false dichotomy. To ask of the family a serious public commitment is not to demand that all private commitments must end. Sometimes a family's values and actions will serve as a protest against the values or actions of the state or community, but if the family witnesses to its values in public ways and strives to change the society of which it is a part, then it is serving both private and public commitments by strengthening its identity and cohesiveness through its efforts to transform the world.

Could a family achieve its full potential without involving itself intensely in the larger communities? This is a difficult question to answer. However, in my judgment there will be a certain emptiness in a family that chooses to value only itself. This emptiness resembles that which eventually overtakes a conversation focusing only on personal concerns or a relationship about only two human beings. In the short run, these conversations and relationships may be satisfying, even intensely so. Eventually, however, unless the two go outside of themselves, there will be little left to say or do. Ultimately, there should be something more to relationships than relationships.

Many philosophers who have written on friendship have made this precise point. Robert Bellah recalls Aristotle's view that a "shared commitment to the good" is the most important component of friendship.[19] Friends are to help each other to be good citizens, "for friendship and its virtues are not merely private, they are also public, even political, for a civic order, a 'city,' is above all a network of friends."[20] According to Aristotle, true friends take pleasure in one another's company and in their shared commitment to the polis. A friendship without that crucial public dimension is not a true friendship at all.

If husbands and wives are truly friends, their relationship should be about more than themselves. A marriage based solely on love and sacrifice of one to the other lacks the fullness of a marital friendship in

[18] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Family and Civic Life," in Blankenhorn et al., *Rebuilding the Nest* 127.

[19] Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) 115.

[20] Ibid. 116.

which both spouses see their love for each other as the beginning of love for others. Men and women who are friends can attest to the richness of married love that goes beyond itself. Of course, in most cases, marital love is called to go beyond the two spouses in the love for children. Many theologies of marriage see children as the necessary larger component of marital love, and children do in fact provide a broader sense of purpose for most married couples. However, this does not seem to be quite what Aristotle alluded to. Friends are called upon to care for a wider community, for the common good or the good of the polis. This is part of the Catholic tradition that asks families to look beyond themselves and thereby find their own commitments strengthened by love for others.

I argue therefore that by questioning the dichotomy between family and community, the Catholic tradition will encourage families to ask, "What, ultimately, are we about?" It will offer for reflection a model of family ethics that has room for both the intimate passion that exists among parents and children and the solidarity that animates the struggle for justice in the world. In the areas of work, time, and money, it will give families a way to attach greater consideration to important social values, such as solidarity and the common good.

WORK

Most historians of the family agree that families in the postindustrial world are fundamentally different from families in earlier times because they do not normally find their identity in their work.[21] Because most families do not run farms or shops together, most are no longer defined by the work they do. Rather, families are separate from the jobs that individual parents engage in so that the family will be able to live well. Since the family is no longer centered around a common mission, its function is uncertain. In the age of the welfare state, when many families receive from the government services they cannot provide for themselves (e.g. care of the elderly, food stamps, and health care), the function of the family becomes more questionable. In recent decades, when more and more middle-class families have begun buying services they used to perform (e.g. meal preparation, house cleaning, and day care), we have become even more uncertain about family goals. Thus today we have to ask, "What does the family do? What would it mean for the family to be itself?"[22]

Many would argue that the modern family exists primarily to nurture and support its members. In this view, a romantic ideal of the family is assumed and the necessity of a commitment to care for the family members above all other commitments is asserted. This vision is dominant in both popular and scholarly writing on the family, but it

[21] See Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families* (New York: Basic, 1991) 3–19.
[22] See *Familiaris consortio* no. 17.

is inadequate according to the Catholic tradition that calls families both to nurture and to service. Thus the family should be seen not primarily as a haven of love but as a community of disciples. Its members, part of this community of disciples, have a mission to one another and to the world. Each family has as its task to work out in its own terms what its specific mission will be, but the work of the adult family members will be crucial in defining that mission. Work does not have to cease being central to a family's mission. It can be central in a new way. Work that mothers and fathers choose to do can be fundamental to a family's public identity.

In my own family, my father's work as an attorney for Legal Services defined us in many ways. The relatively low pay meant that we did not have some of the luxuries many of our friends enjoyed. The political nature of the work meant that our conversations were frequently political. The public nature of the work meant that we were often put in the position of having to defend our values to neighbors and friends. My father's work did not account for all that our family stood for, but it did play a major role in forming our ideas about who we were as a small Christian community. My example is undoubtedly elitist; few have the privilege that my father enjoys of doing this kind of intellectually challenging and morally invigorating work. Still, there are many people who see work as something more than individualistic pursuit of self-fulfillment or monetary gain. Teachers, health-care workers, social workers, business people, day-care providers, government workers, and many others choose their work because of their social commitment. Perhaps not many of these workers think of their work as part of their family's social mission, but they could. Surely their work defines them in significant ways and influences their families in ways no less important.

Perhaps most people in our society do not see their work as constitutive of both themselves and their families because they see the public and private dimensions of their selves as two different things. Robert Bellah and his colleagues argue that the lives of Americans are diminished because they have separated themselves too much from their work and come to see work only as a way to secure income.[23] These authors wish to provide people with a renewed sense that work is a calling.[24] Their views echo those of John Paul II in *Laborem exercens,* in which he argues that the human person is oriented toward self-realization through work and states that a person should work out of a desire to "realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person

[23] Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage, 1991). It is important to distinguish Bellah and his colleagues from more reactionary communitarians like Amitai Etzioni; Bellah is not limited by the same privatistic, patriarchal conception of the family.

[24] Ibid. 106.

that is his by reason of his humanity."[25] If work is meant to be so closely connected with the self-realization of Christians, then the public work of parents cannot help but be a fundamental aspect of a family's self-realization as a community of disciples.

One would think that this view of work would appeal not only to Christians but also to communitarians who prioritize the common good over the desires of individuals. In fact, there is notable resistance to the idea that work is an ethically important dimension of family life. Amitai Etzioni is one of many who argue that "parents who have satisfied their elementary economic needs [should] invest themselves in their children by spending less time on their careers and consumeristic pursuits and more time with their youngsters."[26] It is hard to argue with the idea that the first two or three years of a child's life are a particularly important time during which it would, in most cases, be beneficial for parents to have greater flexibility in their work hours. However, the notion that only elementary economic needs can compete with the needs of children for full-time parental nurturing is disputed by those who argue that full-time care for young children, mostly on the part of the mother, is not necessary or even desirable. Some writers are concerned about the role of women in society; they point to the possible destructive consequences of the isolated mother and child and speak to the need of women to participate in the larger public world.[27] Communitarians denigrate this need for public work as selfishness. But is the desire to be involved in contributing to the community not precisely what Catholic teaching calls a commitment to the common good? Christians and communitarians should be affirming these desires, not questioning their legitimacy.

To contrast the self-sacrificial value of "the family" (i.e. the private needs of family members) in radical opposition to the imagined individualistic, greedy pursuits of parents in the public sphere is to misunderstand a very basic value.[28] When families decide how to balance the demands of the workplace with the demands of family members (especially children), they are often struggling with the problem of how to balance their family's needs with the needs of students, patients, clients, or causes they serve. According to Catholic teaching, parents have a duty to provide for the family, but they also have a duty to contribute to the community through work. They cannot abandon their obligations to the common good simply because they are parents. Par-

[25] John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1987) no. 6.

[26] Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* 82.

[27] See, e.g., Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Minotaur and the Mermaid* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976); or Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).

[28] In addition to Etzioni, see, e.g., the essays by Blankenhorn, Meileander, Popenoe and Zigler in Blankenhorn et al., *Rebuilding the Nest.*

ents rather should be encouraged to consider how they might best serve needy members of the community through their work. They need not feel that they must sacrifice all public concern for the sake of their children.

A family's commitment to a social mission may necessitate child care. However, this should not be a matter of grave concern to those who value community. Child care is care of children by members of a community. The African phrase "It takes a village to raise a child" has become something of a cliché. If this phrase means anything, however, it means that care of children by nonrelatives can be beneficial to children. Yet, it is precisely this ideal of community care for children that so many question. A mother interviewed in a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times,* for instance, stated that she and her husband are committed to a job-sharing arrangement because, "We didn't have kids for someone else to raise."[29] Her assertion reflects a typical American assumption that only those parents who do not allow non-family members to care for their children are truly good parents. However, this privatistic model of the family is not necessarily the most Christian model, nor is it the healthiest.

A brief example may help to illuminate this issue. A friend of mine who is a single mother recently returned from a three-year stay in Tanzania with her young son. She tells me that even though her work required her to attend many evening functions and travel on weekends, she never had to think about child care. Young men in the town would frequently take her son to the beach during the day. Neighbors would automatically assume responsibility for him when she had to work. Housemates would not think twice about caring for her son for an entire weekend. Children often moved in groups from one house to the next, and no one seemed to mind. Returning to the U.S. filled her with dread because she could not imagine how she could organize or afford enough child care. Now in the U.S. again, she mourns the loss of a truly supportive community and feels that her son's life is diminished by the absence of multiple caretakers whom he called aunt, uncle, and even mother. She sees few advantages to the American system, and wonders why American parents are so anxious about community care for children.[30]

If community responsibility for children is a worthy ideal, community care for and influence on children should not be threatening; it should be exciting. Critics of too much parental "careerism" often tell gloomy tales of the gross inadequacy of day care in the U.S.[31] However,

[29] Greg Beckman, "Tag Team Parenting," *Los Angeles Times* (6 November 1995) D-II, 5.

[30] The quality of relative care is also a relevant issue. According to Susan Kontos, care provided by relatives is more often inadequate than care provided by family day care homes or day care centers (*Quality in Family Child Care and Relative Care* [New York: Teachers College, 1995]).

[31] See, e.g., Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* 58.

truly appalling situations seem to be rare.[32] Most parents are very satisfied with their day-care providers. They often feel that their caretakers offer their children opportunities they cannot get at home. If day care enables parents to work for the good of the poor or other members of the community, does not endanger their children, and may even be beneficial for their children, it seems that parents may consider it a viable option.

I do not mean to imply that all parents should use full-time day care or that they should not make compromises in their work commitments in order to be there for their children, but I do argue that the work vs. family dilemma is not simply a question of individualism vs. self-sacrifice for a greater good. In reality, many goods are at stake when parents make decisions about work, such as the benefits of parents' spending time with their children, the benefits of children's exposure to different adult role models, the gifts that parents have to offer communities. Questions regarding the ethics of work, when viewed in a larger communal context, in the context of solidarity and the common good, become more difficult, but they are more properly situated for a specifically Christian discussion of what the family is about.

TIME

Questions about work are intimately related to questions about time, since most families feel there is not enough time to be the kind of family they want to be. Even if families are committed to work for the common good, they also need time to be themselves. A 1989 survey of American families commissioned by the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company reported that most Americans see lack of time as the crucial problem facing families today.[33] Lack of family time affects not only parents who work more and consequently see their children for fewer hours. Children today also see their grandparents, aunts, and uncles less because of increased mobility; parents see their teenage sons and daughters less because more of them are working part-time.[34] Husbands and wives find it harder to take time for each other. Most agree that "more time" would help them and others be better families. Anyone who has experienced the pressures of family life during the 1990s would doubtless agree. Time is a serious problem for many

[32] For a review of the literature on the effects of day care on young children, see Cheryl D. Hayes et al., *Who Cares for America's Children?* (Washington: National Academy, 1990). The authors conclude that most child care is at least adequate, although poor families are more likely to receive poor quality care. See also Catherine Chilman, "Parental Employment and Child-Care Trends: Some Critical Issues and Suggested Policies," *Social Work* 38, no. 4 (July 1993) 452. Chilman suggests that most researchers agree that most child care is not harmful and that high quality care can in fact be beneficial, especially to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (though there is still some debate about full-time care in the first year of life).

[33] Mark Mellman et al., "Family Time, Family Values," in *Rebuilding the Nest* 73–92.

[34] Ibid. 67.

families. If society values families, it certainly should make it possible for families to spend more time together.[35]

What is to be done? Bellah and his collaborators claim that when faced with problems like this, most Americans tend to focus on what they can do themselves; they feel powerless in the face of institutions they feel unable to change, so they assume that they must change themselves.[36] The problem, as Bellah points out, is that institutions affect every aspect of people's lives. Thus while individual families can make small changes, the problem of time will not go away. Americans need to realize that "converting individuals, however important, does not take the place of converting institutions."[37] It is not enough to urge members of families to work less and make do with less money. Those who care about the future of the family, especially the most vulnerable families, need to seek to reform institutions. This means campaigning for paid family leave, flextime options, day-care availability, and child allowances.

If a coalition of families were to band together in a pro-family movement, at least some of these goals could be achieved. Until now, family-friendly legislation has been held back by debates about what kind of family was being favored by the legislation. If most families agree that they need more time, and if economic pressures make it almost impossible to send women home to their former roles, then some unity of purpose should be possible. Some have argued that the Democratic party won the last election in the U.S. at least in part because people across the political spectrum favored the pro-family initiatives emphasized by the Clinton campaign. Both parties now realize that they must at least appear to be family-friendly. In this climate, families could come together and ask government and businesses to help them promote family values.

Economist Sylvia Hewlett argues that despite their cost, family-friendly work options are beneficial to employers as well as to employees. Employers who give parents the option to spend more time with their children report a host of tangible benefits, including improved recruitment, reduced turnover and absenteeism, increased productiv-

[35] Arlie Hochschild's *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Holt, 1997), raises some questions about whether or not families truly want more time together, since the overwhelming majority of the workers she studied chose not to take advantage of time offered to them. This study may reveal the extent to which our family lives have become impoverished both by the privatization of leisure and by the stresses of the typical dual-career schedule. Hochschild calls for a "time movement" much like the one I advocate above. In my view, the success of such a movement depends both on the ability of men and women to share (and scale back) domestic labor (so that home is not such an undesirable place to be) and on the ability of family members to find in family time the combination of mission and enjoyment that they find at work. The family/community divide is a key source of the problem and should not be increased in a misguided attempt to help families find more time together.

[36] Bellah et al., *The Good Society* 23. [37] Ibid. 33.

ity, and a better company image.[38] Hewlett argues that companies can effectively use part-time or job-sharing workers, for "[m]ost hourly work, and a great deal of middle-management work, is susceptible to being organized this way. There is nothing inherently efficient in 9-to-5 workdays, or 40-to-50 hour work weeks."[39] As the experience of employers with nontraditional arrangements grows, it is likely that more and more parents will be able to ask for and receive work arrangements that allow them to spend more time at home. A grassroots pro-family movement could accelerate this trend and ensure that even the poorest workers were able to benefit.

What, then, will be done with this time? Why do families want time? There is a danger that more family time will simply encourage greater privatization in American culture. If families simply spend more time together at the mall or in front of the TV set, they will have gained little. It may be difficult for families to think of time any differently. It is no doubt easier for a family to see itself in solidarity with other families when fighting for something it needs than to think of itself this way once it has the time it needs. As Bellah notes, Americans have developed a very private ideal of leisure. Especially since the rise of the middle class after World War II, private leisure came to be seen as the most important element of the good life, for "[h]ere intimacy, solidarity, and voluntary accomplishments in sport, art, or craft flourished, crowned life, and made it whole."[40]

Catholic social teaching calls this idealization of private leisure into question and asks families to think not only of their own interests, but also of the interests of those in their communities most in need of help. To be valuable, the time families spend together need not be private. In fact, Bellah claims that most people are not very satisfied with the most typical of leisure activities, TV watching. He argues that when we engage in leisure that is "mildly demanding but inherently meaningful—reading a good book, repairing the car, talking to someone we love, or even cooking the family meal—we are more apt to find that we are 'relaxed.' "[41] Would not leisure spent in activities which help others have a similar effect? The privatistic view of leisure is pervasive and powerful but models of alternative praxis could help families rethink their ideas about sharing "family time."

People appear to want to move in this direction; families seem to feel an increasing need to connect with other families and engage in meaningful common activities. Grassroots family movements such as the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network encourage families to engage

[38] Sylvia Ann Hewlett, "Good News? The Private Sector and Win-Win Scenarios," in Blankenhorn et al., *Rebuilding the Nest* 209.

[39] Ibid. 215.

[40] Bellah et al., *The Good Society* 61. Bellah shows how public life came to be seen merely as the instrumental means to the really important end of private life.

[41] Ibid. 255.

in service activities together and contend that it is possible to be a good parent without abandoning one's commitment to those in need.[42] The growing Voluntary Simplicity movement also emphasizes service to one's community.[43] Families can use more time to build their own small community of disciples by serving the common good. Each family will work out the specifics in its own way. What is important is that the time gained not be used simply for families to be together alone. Ideally families will gain the freedom and space they need to think about what they can do together for others. Perhaps families will finally be in a position to think concretely about how to get an entire village to be really responsible for all of its own.

MONEY

How do commitments to solidarity and the common good affect families' choices about how to spend their money? To ask the question in the context of social ethics seems almost absurd. Some might argue that ethicists should not concern themselves with decisions about clothes, cars, homes, vacations, food, and entertainment, because these are issues of personal or pastoral concern. Ethicists are at home analyzing the budgets of nations or corporations, not the budgets of families. Perhaps discomfort about the issue is revealing. Is this not a private issue? Each family is different and spends relatively little. There is a tendency to trivialize this aspect of life, ignoring the reality that the way families choose to spend their money has a significant effect on their lives and on the lives of others. Spending money is one of the most significant ethical domains in most people's lives.

In a recent story from the Business Section of the *Los Angeles Times,* Daniel Gaines shows how an average college-educated couple can buy a house, send their children to college, and live comfortably while saving enough to become millionaires by the time they retire.[44] He suggests that most families can get out of debt and achieve the same goal by following the prudent example of this ideal couple. What seems to be a simple article on personal finances is in fact a statement of important values. This couple is shown to have one major goal in life, wealth. They succeed because, after more than 40 years of frugality, they end up as millionaires who can spend their time traveling around the world. To achieve their goal, the couple relies upon two steady, uninterrupted incomes. No allowance is made for exploring people's vocations in life, for volunteering, or for easing their workloads when children arrive. The social import of their work is not a relevant consid-

[42] See James B. and Kathleen McGinnis, *Parenting for Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990).

[43] See, e.g., Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity,* rev. ed. (New York: William Morris, 1993).

[44] Daniel Gaines, "Mapping Out Your Own Road," *Los Angeles Times* (1 October 1995) D2.

eration. Nor is the fact that they will miss out on time with their children, on time spent in nonlucrative community activities, and on time spent alone. The money they earn goes directly into necessary expenditures and long-term investments. The ethical values controlling their decisions about work, time, and money are related to personal security in the present and personal wealth in the future. No room is given to consideration of solidarity or the common good. The family is assumed to be a private community that does well when it meets its own needs. Many readers would perhaps consider this family a good role model. Yet, considering what values this family denies in order to gain material success, this story clearly privileges a distinctive way of life and it calls for moral analysis.

Pope John Paul II called that model into question when he appealed for families to consider seriously the ethical import of their way of life:

> I wish to appeal with simplicity and humility to everyone, to all men and women without exception. I wish to ask them to be convinced of the seriousness of the present moment and of each one's individual responsibility, and to implement—by the way they live as individuals and as families, by the use of their resources, by their civic activity, by contributing to economic and political decisions and by personal commitment to national and international undertakings—the measures inspired by solidarity and love of preference for the poor.[45]

How people live and spend their money is extremely important. Christian families cannot claim to uphold values of solidarity and the common good simply by voting for the right candidates or supporting the right causes. They must scrutinize their daily lives and their use of resources, asking whether their use of resources is consistent with the values they uphold in the public sphere. Their private lives are not simply isolated individual cases, because everyone is connected to everyone else by seemingly mundane choices that have social import, and because "we are all really responsible for all."[46] Families are not accustomed to hearing this emphasis. Most think of their economic decisions primarily in terms of making ends meet and giving what they can to charity. In other words, most see their decisions in terms of personal ethics, rather than social ethics. However, if solidarity and the common good are family values, then a broader perspective is needed for discussing families and money.

Would such a perspective be lost on most families? A large proportion of American families probably see themselves as stretched to their limit. They work hard and feel distressed that they seem to have less than their parents did.[47] As recent debates over tax breaks for the rich suggest, even those who earn $100,000 or more do not feel that they are

[45] *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 47. [46] Ibid. no. 38.

[47] This may not be true. Robert Samuelson, who writes about economic issues for the *Los Angeles Times,* suggests that most families are working harder because they are living better than their parents did (Samuelson, "Debunking the Two-Earner Family

rich. They feel that they are just getting by. The deep dissatisfaction of the middle class fuels campaigns against affirmative action, welfare, and immigration. Most Americans feel that they do not have the luxury of sharing more of what they have.

Families at the bottom of the income distribution really are limited by their lack of ability to fill basic needs. Still the American ideology of consumerism makes most families' lives much emptier than they might be. The ideology constrains their choices, eats up their time, denies them happiness, and constricts their ability to act on commitments to the common good. Many books for Christian families touch on this theme. Popular Catholic author Mitch Finley argues that consumerism, though powerful, can be resisted, for as Christians, "[w]e believe that we are created to love one another, not to go shopping."[48] Finley's suggestion that Christians should not be influenced by consumerism is fine; but most people who read his book probably think he is talking about somebody else's family, not their own. Furthermore, even those who do recognize their own excesses find it difficult to break free of something so pervasive. Families of all income levels consider themselves needy. The process by which desires have become needs is not clear to them. If they had just a little more money, they reason, they would be happier. What is needed is an analysis of this dissatisfaction.

John Kavanaugh's best-selling book on consumer culture gives a particularly vivid account of the destructive force of an ideology fed by dissatisfaction.[49] Kavanaugh attempts to illustrate this phenomenon by comparing a family content with a relatively simple lifestyle to a family dissatisfied with internal relationships and simple pleasures, one that turns to consumer culture for pleasure. Of the first family he writes, "If you just like talking to people, visiting them, spending time in conversation with them, if you enjoy living simply, if you sense no need to compete with your friends or neighbors—what good are you economically in terms of our system? You haven't spent a nickel yet."[50] The second family, of course, is very good for our system, because it wants so much. What Kavanaugh points out so starkly is that capitalism as an economic system needs dissatisfaction in order to survive. It encourages people to feel unhappy with what they have and urges them to seek fulfillment in consumption.

At the same time, consumerism discourages intimacy, relationships, and respect for persons as they are. It makes families feel they must keep up with everyone else. They end up working longer hours, spend-

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Myth," *Los Angeles Times* [1 January 1997] B5). Moreover, many economists are questioning the idea that real wages have dropped.

[48] Mitch Finley, *Your Family in Focus* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1993) 48.

[49] John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society,* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

[50] Ibid. 60.

ing ever more time shopping,[51] and buying things they cannot afford on credit cards which keep them tied to working too much. Families fill the emptiness that popular culture creates in them with things, and persons necessarily become secondary. There is no time or space for valuing relationships with family and friends, let alone making room in their lives for the poor.

Kavanaugh may be justly criticized for glossing over the fact that many Americans are struggling to meet real needs. Still, one must take seriously his contention that consumerism functions as a kind of armor that isolates people from their friends and family and allows them to refuse to hear the cries of the poor.[52] When so many American families, who are so much better off than most other families in the world, feel unable to commit themselves in solidarity to the world's least fortunate, something is dreadfully wrong. Social analysis exposes the power of the ideology that significantly impacts family economic decisions, and may allow families to think seriously about how they can better value solidarity and the common good in their lives.

How might this be achieved? Narrative ethics offers some insight. There is no way to come to an understanding about good ways to realize solidarity in the family without dealing with models. It is necessary to talk about how real-life families are struggling to balance the important values of their own security and happiness with the no less important values of solidarity and the common good.

Consider the case of the Murphys, a family of six in Washington. Bill and Sharon Murphy have run a shelter for homeless families for over 15 years. They live in the main building of the shelter with their four children (who now range in age from 13 to 20) and two homeless families. They receive only small stipends for their work, and have lived simply for all of their married life. The Murphys' simple lifestyle, hospitality, refusal to work merely for money, and their general valuing of persons over things, challenges all families who seek to fulfill a commitment to the common good. The Murphys have found an extraordinary way of making economic decisions that value family and community. Few families will be called to this kind of life, so it is also necessary to hear the stories of those who make smaller choices (such as starting a child-care co-op or sharing a home with another family). However trivial these choices might seem at first, they are choices that

[51] Women especially spend an inordinate amount of time shopping. Marxist-feminist analysts argue that women's labor in gathering information about products, using coupons, and actually shopping is crucial to the capitalist system; see Nona Glazer, "Servants to Capital: Unpaid Domestic Labor and Paid Work," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 16.1 (1984) 61–87. Studies of housework show that despite the increased use of appliances, time spent doing housework has not decreased, largely because we spend so much more time shopping; see Heidi Hartmann, "The Family as Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," in Sandra Harding, ed., *Feminism and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University) 125.

[52] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ* 60.

allow families to give more of their resources and share more of their time with those who are needy. They are a necessary part of concrete ethical discussions of solidarity and the common good. Yet models like the Murphys are an important challenge to middle-class lifestyles and to the pervasive feeling that it is impossible to give any more than we already do. Transforming the way families think about money will be just as difficult, if not more difficult, than changing the way families think about work or time. Inspirational stories are a necessary part of conversion to a socially informed set of family values that move beyond the popular but unnecessary dichotomy between family and community.[53]

THE FAMILY MEAL

Many contemporary commentators on the family speak of the demise of the family meal as a symbol of the decline of the family. They argue that the restoration of this daily ritual is crucial to the health of family life. Bellah even goes so far as to call the family dinner hour a missing sacrament. He claims that "the family meal . . . is the chief family celebration, even a family sacrament," and worries about "[w]hat happens when no one has time to prepare a meal, when for days on end the family has no common meal."[54] For Bellah what is fundamental to the sacramental meal includes time together, a commitment to limit work so that time is available, a corresponding willingness to forgo the extra money that more work might earn, and a shared responsibility for the meal that assumes that both husband and wife have public commitments outside the home. A Catholic understanding of sacrament would presume something more than the shared time together made possible by strong moral commitments. Sacraments in the Catholic tradition are about unity and action. Sacraments concern what the Church is in itself and what the Church does for society in order to become itself. Thus working out a Catholic sacramental understanding of the family meal provides a good opportunity to show how the Catholic tradition can function as an important resource for those who seek to understand the family as a community which, like the Church, has duties both to itself and to society.

[53] The voluntary-simplicity movement provides helpful narratives of downsizing. Though not all those who downsize end up being more involved in their communities, at least some do. A 1995 Merck Family Fund study found that 28% of Americans polled said that they had made a lifestyle change in the past five years which had resulted in a decrease in their earnings, so this can be considered a significant trend; see Elaine St. James, *Living the Simple Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1996) or Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin, *Your Money or Your Life* (New York: Penguin, 1992). Amy Dacyczyn's newsletter, "The Tightwad Gazette" (collected in *The Tightwad Gazette* 3 vols. [New York: Viking, 1992, 1996, 1997]) is particularly helpful for families and includes a wealth of how-to information and success stories from middle-class families who are living well (and often sharing more) on $20,000–$30,000 a year.

[54] Bellah et al., *The Good Society* 260.

What would a Catholic understanding of a sacramental family meal look like? David Hollenbach provides an interesting model when he argues that "the sacramental imagination is a central source of the Church's prophetic action in society."[55] He claims that sacramental celebrations provide important insights into the Church's social role, and he uses the Eucharist to illustrate his point. Since the Eucharist is the sacrament of the unity of all humankind, and since this unity is symbolized by the sharing of food, he believes it makes sense to think of feeding the hungry as a central part of the Christian mission.[56] Thus, through the Eucharist, Christians "are graced with a concrete manifestation of the shape of God's covenant with all humanity as a covenant that is realized in the sharing of food. This covenant, Christians believe, is a fact, not simply an ideal or a general norm. The covenant confronts Christians with a call or vocation."[57] Hollenbach's analysis of the Eucharist is right on target. He sees in the sacramentalized meal a moral imperative that cannot be simply spiritualized. In their sharing of food Christians celebrate who they are. If sharing food was Jesus' way of symbolizing his commitment to the early Christian community and to all people, Christians need to share food with others.

If a Christian family can be thought of as a "domestic church,"[58] their meal is in some sense, eucharistic. In a traditional Catholic sense, it can be thought of as a sacramental, like holy water or the rosary. The family meal, like the Eucharist, is important not because it is the high point of the family's life or the pinnacle of their experience together but because it symbolizes who the family is and who its members are. If the family meal is neglected, not only do the relationships between family members suffer, but so does the sense of what the family is as a community. The meal is important because it brings the family together and provides an opportunity for shared talk, celebration, and mission.

When parents talk about their experiences at work, or children talk about their struggles at school, those experiences can become defining family experiences. In my own family, for example, dinner conversations about my father's work as a lawyer became fundamental to the identity of all three children. They influenced our career choices, shaped our politics, and gave us a strong sense of civic responsibility. Similarly, my parents took up into their lives and identities their children's challenges in journalism, theater, and Christian youth groups.

[55] David Hollenbach, "A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination," in John C. Haughey, ed., *The Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Paulist, 1977) 234–63, at 256.

[56] Ibid. 258.

[57] Ibid. 258–59.

[58] For more on this ideal of family life, see Michael A. Fahey, "The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II," in *The Family,* ed. Lisa S. Cahill and Dietmar Mieth (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) [*Concilium* 1995/4] 85–92; William P. Roberts, "The Family as Domestic Church: Contemporary Implications," in *Christian Marriage and Family,* ed. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996) 79–90.

Both kinds of conversations led us into discussions of larger social issues. Both brought our family closer together. As we shared stories about our work and argued about our values, we became more a part of each other's lives. We grew as a family because we took the time to talk, and because we had something bigger than ourselves to talk about.

If family meals are to be sacramental, they must be about more than just the family members, just as the Eucharist should be about more than just the Church. The family is public as well as private. The family should share meals together not only so that its members may enjoy each other's company and solidify bonds that will be crucial to all members, but also because families are small communities with social missions. If the family does not gather as a community of love in the home, it cannot then be a community of love for the world. Inviting families to place loyalties to their own members over and above the needs of others does families a disservice, for families are called to and capable of much more.