

# Providence: Studies in Western Civilization

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Volume 1  
Number 1 *Fall 1992*

Article 5

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9-1-1992

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### Recommended Citation

May, William E. (1992) "Persons, Sex, and Families," *Providence: Studies in Western Civilization*: Vol. 1: No. 1, Article 5.

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# Persons, Sex, and Families

by WILLIAM E. MAY

ON DECEMBER 22, 1987, the Congress and President of the United States established a National Commission on Children "to serve as a forum on behalf of the children of the nation." This Commission issued its Final Report, entitled *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families*, in the summer of 1991. Some findings reported by the Commission are grim and will help us appreciate the magnitude of the "contemporary difficulties" confronting us. The following items reported by the Commission are both noteworthy and heartrending:

(1) Today, one in four children in the United States is raised by just one parent, usually a divorced or unmarried mother. Many grow up without the consistent presence of a father in their lives.... Each year, half a million babies are born to teenage girls ill prepared to assume the responsibilities of parenthood. Most of these mothers are unmarried.

(2) Illicit drugs and the wanton violence they spawn have ravaged U.S. communities, large and small, in recent years, with devastating consequences for children of all ages. Dramatically increasing numbers of babies are born already exposed to drugs, with health and developmental problems that will haunt them for a lifetime. Many are abandoned at birth by parents who are too impaired to want them or care for them. Young children

dodge bullets on their playgrounds and are the easy prey of drug dealers....today more adolescent boys die of gunshot wounds than of all natural causes.

(3) Over the past 20 years, a rapidly rising divorce rate and a rising rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing, especially among teenagers, have dramatically increased the number and proportion of children in single-parent families. In 1970 about 12 percent of children lived with only one parent, usually their mother; in 1989 approximately 25 percent, more than 16 million children, did.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission likewise noted that, although the number of children in the U.S. under age 18 was approximately the same in 1990 as it was in 1960, the proportion of children in the population sharply declined. In 1960 children under age 18 accounted for 36 percent of all Americans, whereas in 1990 they were about 26 percent.<sup>2</sup> The declining number of children in relation to the entire population is attributable to a sharply declining birthrate, caused by the widespread practice in the United States of contraception and, a matter on which the Commission's report is silent, of abortion. For the past decade, in fact, more than a million and a half unborn children have been aborted each year; and in some American cities, among them Washington, the nation's capital, more babies are aborted annually than are born.

These sobering statistics give us a glimpse of the difficulties confronting families in the United States today. Although the situation they portray may not be replicated in other nations - particularly the terrible street violence spawned by easy access to drugs and guns—there can be no doubt that contraception, abortion, and divorce, with their impact on children and families, are widespread throughout the western world and are being vigorously promoted elsewhere. I believe that these practices are rooted in an ideology underlying strong currents of thought in contemporary culture. The contours of this ideology can, I believe, be best

discerned by examining some highly influential ways in contemporary culture of understanding "persons," "sex," and "families."

### *Persons*

A person is a *being of moral worth*, that is, a subject of rights that are to be recognized and respected by others and protected by society. Unlike things, persons are subjects, not objects; unlike mere individuals, they are irreplaceable, not replaceable. They are never to be used merely as means, but are rather to be treated as ends. The existence of persons gives rise to what Karol Wojtyla calls the "personalistic norm."

This norm, in its negative aspect, states that the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form the personalistic norm confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.<sup>3</sup>

Most ordinary people, even today, believe that all human beings are persons. As the American philosopher Mortimer Adler puts the matter, "the dignity of man is the dignity of the human being as a person — a dignity not possessed by things. Precisely because we do not attribute to them the dignity of persons, we feel justified in treating things — other animals or machines--as means, as instruments to be used....The dignity of man as a person underlies the moral imperative that enjoins us never to use other human beings merely as means, but always to respect them as ends to be served."<sup>4</sup> Despite the widespread belief among ordinary men and women that all human beings are persons, there is a marked tendency among the intellectual elite, those who in large measure shape emerging public opinion and public policy, to regard this commonly held view as "speciesism," an irrational form of thinking, similar to racism, which

attributes unthinkingly the dignity of persons to *all* members of the human species.<sup>5</sup>

According to these thinkers “membership in a species,” such as the human species, “is of no moral significance” so far as personhood is concerned.<sup>6</sup> Being a human being does not suffice for personhood. Rather, for an entity to be regarded as a *person*, and hence as a being of moral worth, more is required. Different authors provide different criteria for personhood, but they commonly require that, in order to be a person, an entity must be consciously aware of itself as a self and as an enduring subject of desires, that it have “a developed capacity for reasoning, willing, desiring, and relating to others.”<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious that not all human beings have such a *developed* capacity. Not all human beings are aware of themselves as selves or actually capable of relating as selves to other selves. Among the human beings of whom this is true are unborn children; indeed, newborn children are by no means aware of themselves as selves, nor does a child have the *developed* capacity for “reasoning, willing, desiring, and relating to others” for some period of his or her life. Yet, according to these influential writers, these children — and adults who may be like them because of brain damage — do not count as persons. They are not the subjects of rights that are to be recognized by others and protected by society.

It is, indeed, on the grounds of the alleged “nonpersonhood” of unborn children that many today justify abortion on demand and even infanticide. Here it is instructive to note that one author, who justifies abortion precisely because she judges the unborn not to be persons, rejects infanticide, but for purely pragmatic reasons. She thinks that it would be wrong to kill infants “at least in this country [the USA] and at this period of history... because even if its parents do not want it and would not suffer from its destruction, there are other people who would like to have it and would... be deprived of a great deal of pleasure by its destruction. Thus,” she continues, “infanticide is wrong for reasons analogous to those which make it wrong to wantonly destroy natural resources or great works of art.”<sup>8</sup>

The contention that not all human beings are persons and that only entities consciously aware of themselves and capable of experiencing desires can be legitimately regarded as persons is championed by many intellectuals in various countries. It has indeed been implemented, for all practical purposes, in many Western and non-Western cultures. That this is so is evident in the widespread legalization of abortion on demand, in the “benign” neglect of seriously disabled newborns, and in the “animal rights” and euthanasia movements.

Note that on this view a *person* is essentially a “conscious subject, aware of itself as a self.” Consciousness is what is most important. Being a *living, human body, a living, human being*, is not. A presupposition behind this view—one that must be examined more critically later — is that human beings do not differ radically in kind from other animals; some — those for whom the predicate “person” is appropriate — simply differ greatly from other animals (and less developed humans) in the degree of their development; and, indeed, for some contemporary intellectuals, mature individuals of other animal species, for instance, gorillas, chimpanzees, and dolphins, have a greater claim on “personhood” and the rights attendant to it than do unborn and newborn human children, severely retarded boys and girls, demented or ammented human adults.<sup>9</sup>

## *Sex*

Why, basically, are human beings sexual in nature? This is a most important question. A more traditional understanding would respond that human beings are sexual in nature ultimately because they are members of a species that reproduces itself sexually, through the intimate, bodily union of male and female. While intimately uniting male and female (its person-uniting or unitive aspect), sexual congress also ensures the survival of the species (its procreative aspect). These two aspects were understood to be intimately and inherently interrelated: the unity between the male

and the female, uniquely expressed in and symbolized by their bodily union in sexual coition, served as a guarantee that any life they might beget in and through their sexual union would be given a home where it could take root and grow; the child begotten by them, flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone, was a living symbol of their own intimate, personal union.

In contemporary culture this traditional understanding of human sexuality — an understanding that I call “integralist” inasmuch as it sees the unitive and procreative aspects of human sexuality as intimately and inherently interrelated — is being replaced by a new understanding that can, I believe, be properly described as “separatist.” By this I mean that the separatist understanding has severed the existential and psychological bonds uniting the life-giving or procreative meaning of human sexuality and its person-uniting, love-giving, unitive meaning. It regards the person-uniting, love-giving, relational dimension of human sexuality as its truly human and personal aspect and consigns its procreative significance to the merely biological, the subhuman and subpersonal.

Proponents of this separatist understanding of human sexuality acknowledge that human sexual union can be procreative or, to use the term they prefer, *reproductive*. Yet sexual union has other, more personal purposes; and the fact that it results, at times, in conception and pregnancy has, in the past and even today, frequently inhibited the realization of these more personal purposes. But today — and this is *the* important consideration — it is possible, through the use of effective contraceptives, to sever completely the procreative or reproductive function of human sexuality from its other, more personal and relational purposes. According to the advocates of this understanding of human sexuality this is all to the good, for it enables us to realize more clearly that *human* sexuality, as distinct from animal sexuality, is relational in character. Indeed, it shows us that human sexuality is “preeminently...the mode whereby an isolated subjectivity reaches out to communion with another sub-

ject. Embodied subjectivity reaches out to another body-subject in order to banish loneliness and to experience the fullness of being-with-another in the human project."<sup>10</sup>

It cannot be denied, I believe, that many today in the Western world (and increasingly in the non-Western world) regard the emergence of contraceptive technologies as a truly liberating event in human history. In their judgment the effective use of contraceptives enables human persons, for the first time in the history of the race, to liberate the *personal* and *human* purposes of sexuality and of genital intercourse from the tyranny of biological and physiological processes. Many today would agree with Ashley Montagu's assertion that

the pill provides a dependable means of controlling conception. For the first time, the pill makes it possible to render every individual of reproductive age completely responsible for both his sexual and his reproductive behavior. *It is necessary to be unequivocally clear concerning the distinction between sexual behavior and reproductive behavior. Sexual behavior may have no purpose other than pleasure....without the slightest intent of reproducing, or it may be indulged in for both pleasure and reproduction.*<sup>11</sup>

The availability of effective contraceptives has given rise to this new, revolutionary understanding of human sexuality. Human sexuality still has a reproductive purpose, but this is basically a biological fact; the reproductive potential of sexuality is purely pragmatic and biological, not personal, in value; moreover, the development of new and perhaps better ways of generating human life may eventually lead to a diminution or possibly to the replacement of this function.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to the pill and other contraceptives such as Norplant, there is no longer any need, as there was in the entire past history of the race, to be overly concerned about reproducing in the act of sexual union. Indeed, the taboos imposed on sexual behavior because of its association with reproduction no



longer need to inhibit human choices. There is, in short, no reason to worry about "making babies" while one is "making love."

A perceptive observer of the contemporary scene, George Gilder, has put the matter this way:

The members of the sex coalition go well beyond a mere search for better contraceptives. They are not satisfied merely to control the biological tie between intercourse and childbirth. They also want to eliminate the psychological and symbolic connections.... By far the most frequent and durably important long-term use of sex, they would say, is the fulfillment of the physical and psychological need for orgasmic pleasure and the communication of affection. For these purposes, sex is most adaptable if it is not connected with procreation, if it is regarded as a completely separate mode of activity.<sup>13</sup>

In essence, the separatist understanding of human sexuality, so widespread in contemporary culture, discovers the human and personal value of sex in its relational purposes, in its ability to help persons escape from the prison of loneliness and to enter into meaningful relationships with significant others and, in so doing, to enjoy themselves and find refreshment and ecstasy.

When the human significance of sex is viewed in this way, the principal criterion for evaluating genital sexual acts focuses on the quality of the relationship established and/or expressed by such acts. That is, the affection, tenderness, and fellowship sexual acts both engender and express become the primary considerations regarding sexual choices. No one seriously advocates sexual behavior that is cruel, callous, or exploitative of others, for such behavior would be destructive of the interpersonal communion that sexual union, "as an honored method of innocent and useful communion" is intended to foster.<sup>14</sup> But many today endorse the sentiments of those who, like Montagu, stress that genital sex must be "responsible." By this is meant genital sex that is caring and sensitive to the needs of the

partner, that seeks to prevent sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS by the use of condoms, and that is, unless a pregnancy is actually sought, contraceptive.

On this view, moreover, there is no need that individuals who responsibly choose sexual union be married. There is, in fact, no need that they be of different sexes. After all, homosexually oriented persons, both male and female, have the same need for communicating affection and relieving sexual tensions through orgasm as do heterosexually oriented persons.<sup>15</sup> What counts, morally, is the nature of the relationship signified by the sexual act. So long as this relationship is amicable and takes into account the partners' responsibility to each other and to society, the behavior is good; the marital or nonmarital, homosexual or heterosexual, status of the parties involved is not of critical moral significance.

Here it is worth noting the comments of one advocate of this separatist understanding of human sexuality, Lawrence Lipton. In his book, *The Erotic Revolution*, Lipton looked forward to the day when the old "Judeo-Christian" ethic loses its grip on public policies and mores. When that day arrives, and it surely has come much closer than it was when he wrote in 1965, "the new morality will show a higher and higher percentage of successful experiments, until no one will think of them as experiments any longer and the vision of the new poets and myth-makers of today will finally be seen as a prophecy for the new life ways and sexways of tomorrow."<sup>16</sup> What Lipton means by "experimentation," as James Schall notes, "involves making legal marriage optional, legalizing homosexuality, abolishing any meaning of 'unnatural' acts, multiple and plural marriage, abortion on demand, and finally making legal all forms of mating when there is mutual consent. These varied forms of sexual life are to be experienced and promoted precisely as a superior way of life."<sup>17</sup>

I submit that this "separatist" understanding of human sexuality is dominant in contemporary Western culture. It is the understanding set forth in countless popular magazines and television shows,

in films and music. It is, moreover, an understanding of human sexuality that goes hand in glove with the understanding of "person" previously considered, namely, of a being aware of itself as a self and capable of relating to other selves, with an indifference to the *bodily* character of human persons. On the view of person previously discussed a person is essentially a "conscious subject." What is of most importance is conscious experience and the quality of this experience. On the separatist view of human sexuality, what is most important about *human* sexuality, what makes it to be *personal*, is the conscious experience of togetherness, of affection, of orgasmic states effected by sexual congress. The "reproductive" aspect of sexual union is, in this view, not *personal* in and of itself; for this aspect need not be consciously experienced or desired or willed. It is a mere biological given, that *becomes* personal *only* when consciously willed and planned.<sup>18</sup> The conception of a child, when *not* planned and willed, is regarded as a disaster; indeed, for many advocates of this separatist understanding of human sexuality, a child conceived when it is not wanted or desired is a kind of venereal disease, one that can be "cured" by abortion, which is today regarded by many as a "back up" to contraception.

A presupposition underlying this understanding of human sexuality is that the procreative meaning of human sexuality is, of itself, merely biological in value. Other underlying presuppositions are that we "make" babies and "make" love and that there is an "art" governing both "baby-making" and "love-making." I will return later to these presuppositions.

### *Families*

In his recent encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, published to mark the hundredth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II wrote as follows about the family:

The first and fundamental structure for "human ecology" is *the*

*family*, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the *family founded on marriage*, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny.<sup>19</sup>

The understanding of "family" expressed in this passage is undoubtedly the traditional one in Western culture, and indeed in most cultures of the world, and many persons throughout the world still conceive the family in this way.

Nonetheless, in contemporary culture many influential writers sharply challenge this understanding of family, centered as it is on husband, wife, and their children. There is, first of all, the anti-child ideology widespread in many affluent Western nations, spawned, in large measure, by the belief that people are the major causes of the pollution of the planet and that their numbers must be drastically reduced. A typical expression of this fear of more children as "polluters" is provided by Julian Huxley, who wrote:

...the world's demographic situation is becoming impossible. Man, in the person of the present generation of human beings, is laying a burden on his own future....More and more human beings will be competing for less and less.<sup>20</sup>

This terrible fear of more children as a threat to human well-being has even led some to propose that "each girl on approaching maturity would be presented with a certificate which will entitle its owner to have, say, 2.2 children, or whatever number would ensure a reproduction rate of one."<sup>21</sup>

Although the passages just cited date from the 1960's, when the fear of a "population explosion" was, perhaps, greater than today, the same anti-child mentality is spawned by many influential writers today. Paul Ehrlich, for instance, whose book *The Population*

*Bomb* was among the most popular works of the late 1960's, has continually revised his work and his predictions of doom for the race unless population growth is reduced to zero.<sup>22</sup> So much is this the case that one writer has been led to conclude that "*this is probably the first generation in the history of mankind which is being told that the child itself is evil and a menace to the human race.*"<sup>23</sup> The generation to which this author referred was the generation growing up in the 70's, but the present generation is likewise being told the same thing. The drastically reduced fertility rates in affluent Western societies, of whom several now need "guest workers," i.e., men and women from the developing nations of the Third World, to meet their labor needs, bear eloquent testimony to this.

Another factor contributing to the anti-child mentality and to changed attitudes toward the family is closely related to the new understanding of human sexuality set forth previously and is embodied in what one scholar, Edward Hoffman, calls the "Personal Liberation Ideology."<sup>24</sup> Popularized in a succession of articles, books, television talk shows and magazines, this mentality commends childlessness (or, at the most, one or two children) as a means of securing personal freedom and self-fulfillment.<sup>25</sup> It regards a monogamous, faithful marriage as a "bourgeois" institution to be replaced by relations based on "free love." Marriage, when it is advocated, is looked upon essentially as a means for enabling the spouses to fulfill themselves, to further their personal growth. The partners commit themselves to help each other "grow"; they do *not* commit themselves irrevocably to each other or to sexual exclusiveness within their marriage, for their personal growth may require them to find other outlets for their sexual desires and may, eventually, require them to "grow apart."<sup>26</sup>

A third factor contributing to the erosion of the more traditional understanding of "family" as a community founded on marriage and on a husband and wife and their children is the attack on monogamous marriage as a form of "patriarchy" that is enslaving of women. This attack is launched by some leading feminist writers;

one of them, explicitly relying on Marxist analysis, claims that monogamy marks the victory of private property over common ownership and that it "does not by any means make its appearance...as the reconciliation of man and woman...[but] on the contrary...as the subjection of one sex by the other."<sup>27</sup>

Militant feminism of this kind finds a natural ally in those who champion the legitimacy of homosexual relations as an "alternative" life style. According to the apologists of gay and lesbian unions a "patriarchal, heterosexist culture," with its claim that monogamous marriage between a male and female is normative, actually prevents "the flowering of friendships of any kind, much less same-sex ones."<sup>28</sup> The patriarchal ethos, so oppressive of women and, by reason of its homophobia, irrationally opposed to the legitimate desires of homosexually oriented men and women, so these advocates claim, has unjustly restricted marriage to heterosexual unions. The time has now come, they maintain, to recognize as fully legitimate the holy unions of gays and lesbians.<sup>29</sup> And, in fact, influenced by feminist and homosexual activists, several cities in the United States (e.g., San Francisco, Washington) now grant, for all practical purposes, the same legal and social benefits to homosexual couples as to husbands and wives in monogamous marriages. Moreover, with the advent of new reproductive technologies, homosexual couples, both male and female, are now "having" their own children with the help of artificial insemination, surrogate mothers, etc.

As a result of all these movements, there is today considerable debate on the meaning of "family." It can no longer, many claim, be restricted to the community of persons founded on marriage and centered on a husband and wife and their children and bound together, in quite significant ways, by bonds of blood and kinship as well as by bonds forged by human choice. Rather, "families should be broadly defined to include, besides the traditional biological relationships, those committed relationships between individuals which fulfill the functions of family."<sup>30</sup> Or, to put it another way, "Family members are individuals who by birth, adoption, marriage,

or declared commitment share deep personal connections and are mutually entitled to receive and obligated to provide support of various kinds to the extent possible, especially in times of need."<sup>31</sup> "Families," in short, are now to be defined primarily in terms of the free choices made by the individuals who compose them.

It is evident that this new understanding of "families" fits in well with the understandings of "persons" and of "sex" already described. Since persons are conscious subjects aware of themselves as selves and capable of relating to others, sexuality itself must be understood essentially as something relational and not "reproductive"; families, in turn, are formed by the choices of their members. They may choose to be monogamously married, but this is not essential, and it is absolutely unjust to restrict the rights and privileges of "marriage" and "family" to men and women united in monogamous marriage. Such rights and privileges must now be given to all groups, whether heterosexual or homosexual, married or nonmarried, who by their "declared commitment share deep personal connections." Such "commitments," of course, need not be irrevocable; rather, they endure so long as those making them choose.

### *Summary:*

The basic ideology underlying these new understandings of "persons," "sex," and "families," it seems to me, is the following. Persons, i.e., conscious subjects aware of themselves and capable of relating to other selves, are individuals who are free to do as they please, so long as they respect the autonomy of other persons, who are likewise free to do as they please. They are at liberty to choose any form of sexual activity they desire, so long as they act responsibly. They act responsibly by securing the consent of their sexual partners and by taking measures to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including unwanted pregnancies. Since they marry in order to fulfill themselves, they are at liberty to make

marriage what they choose it to be and to opt out of marriage whenever it no longer serves as a means to their own self-fulfillment. There is no essential link between marriage and children, although married persons, of course, have the liberty to have children should they so desire, and they can have them either by begetting them through their own sexual union or by other means if these should prove either necessary or desirable: artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilization and embryo transfer, the use of surrogates, etc. Moreover, unmarried males and females and homosexual couples likewise have the liberty to have children should they so desire, for such a child will be a "wanted child," and those who want the child would naturally, as we have seen earlier, "be deprived of a great deal of pleasure by its destruction."<sup>32</sup>

### *Critique of This Ideology of "Persons," "Sex," and "Families"*

Here it is possible only to offer a brief critique of the ideology of "Persons," "Sex," and "Families" set forth in the previous pages. In this critique I will be offering a far different understanding of these realities, rooted in much different presuppositions.

#### *Persons:*

In presenting the new understanding of "persons" dominant in Western culture today, I noted that it presupposed that human beings are in no way radically different from other kinds of animals: membership in the human species has no moral significance.

As Christians, we believe that membership in the human species *is* of crucial moral significance and that human beings *are* radically different in kind from other animals. For human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1.27); indeed, they are the "created words" of God that his Uncreated and Eternal Word became precisely to show us how deeply we human beings are loved by God. This belief, of course, is rooted in religious faith. Yet the truth that human beings are indeed radically different from



other kinds of animals can also be shown on philosophical grounds. There are, in truth, some things that human beings do that other animals do not and can not do: we speak in propositional sentences, we affirm the truth or falsity of propositions, we engage in argument, we make choices, we read journals of this kind. It is true, of course, that not all human beings actually engage in these activities (preborn and newborn children, for example). Yet they have, rooted in their *being* as human beings, the radical capacity to do so. For, as can be shown philosophically (although I cannot do so here), in order to account for these uniquely human activities, it is necessary to infer that there is present, within the entitative makeup of human beings, a nonmaterial or spiritual soul, that makes us to be the kind of beings we are and that is totally lacking in other animals.<sup>33</sup> In other words, human beings have the *radical capacity* to come to know the truth and to shape their lives by free choices made in the light of the truth they come to know.

Long ago, Boethius defined a person as an individual substance of a rational or intelligent nature. According to this definition, every individual human being is a person, for every individual human being is an individual substance, and the nature of that being—human nature—is a rational nature, i.e., a nature that possesses the radical (even if not *developed*) capacity to judge the truth of propositions and to make choices.

The concept of person is philosophical. I believe that Boethius's definition is true, whereas the definition of person as a "conscious subject aware of itself as self" is not. But I also think that it is dangerous to make the rights of human beings depend on philosophers (I submit that philosophers ought to respect the rights of human beings). Although civil governments do not have, as such, the competence to discriminate between different philosophical concepts of persons, they do have the obligation to protect the lives and respect the rights of human beings, for civil governments are the creation and servants of human beings. Thus they ought to operate on the supposition that *membership in the human species is of crucial*

*moral significance and that individual human beings ought to be recognized by society as persons, beings who enjoy a status not enjoyed by other biological organisms or inanimate objects.*

To put it another way: "what is necessary and sufficient to be a human person is to be a whole, bodily individual with a human nature."<sup>34</sup> Common humanity is the source of the rights of human beings as persons. If we begin to discriminate among those who share this common humanity, deeming some to be "persons" or "meaningfully human" and others to be nonpersons, we are on the road to a society in which some human beings will be subordinated to the interests of others. If we do not accept our common humanity as our normative criterion for respecting human lives, then, as Mortimer Adler once said:

those who now oppose injurious discrimination on the moral ground that *all* human beings, equal in their humanity, should be treated equally in all those respects that concern their common humanity, would have no solid basis in fact to support their normative principle. A social and political ideal that has operated with revolutionary force in human history could be validly dismissed as a hollow illusion that should become defunct.... We can now imagine a future state of affairs in which a new global division of mankind... separates the human elite at the top of the scale from the human scum at the bottom, a division based on accurate scientific measurement of human ability and achievement and one, therefore, that is factually incontrovertible...<sup>35</sup>

The new ideology of person leads to this state of affairs. It is no longer in the future, but unfortunately has to some extent already arrived. Our challenge is to oppose it and defend the personal rights of every human being.

## Sex:

The new understanding of human sexuality is predicated on the presupposition that the procreative, or, to use the term preferred by the advocates of this understanding, the "reproductive" aspect of human sexuality is purely biological in character and not personal. The person, after all (so it is claimed), is the "conscious subject," and it is for this reason that the relational aspect of human sexuality is personal, since this aspect depends for its being on consciousness. But the reproductive aspect, along with the body to which it pertains, is subpersonal in character.

But this presupposition is false and is dualistic in character. Human persons are not "conscious subjects" who happen to be embodied. Rather human persons are bodily beings, and their bodies are not instruments of the conscious subject but are rather integral to their being as persons. After all, when one breaks one's arm, one does not say that one has damaged one's property; rather, one rightly says that one has hurt one's *self*, one's *person*. Thus the human power to generate human life is *not* something subpersonal, but is rather a personal power. Indeed, "human sexuality and the human power to generate life wondrously surpass the endowments of lower forms of life," and they do so precisely because they are integral to the human person.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, we do not "make" either love or babies, as the proponents of this new understanding of human sexuality suppose. Love is not a product, like a car or cake, that one makes. It is, rather, something that one *gives*, it is something that one *does*. Similarly, human babies are not products inferior to their producers and subject to quality controls. They are, rather, persons equal in dignity to their parents. When a husband and wife give themselves to one another in the marital embrace, they can indeed generate or beget a child; but the child is not a product of their art; it is, rather, a gift supervening on their gift of themselves as procreative persons to one another. It is for this reason, in truth, that the laboratory generation of human life, now possible through the use of artificial insemina-

tion, *in vitro* fertilization and other “reproductive” technologies, is dehumanizing. It is so because it treats a human child as a product, not a person. “Reproducing” babies is something quite different from “procreating” them in an act of spousal love. The latter way of engendering children respects their dignity as persons; the former reduces them to the level of objects of desire, products inferior to their producers and subject to quality controls.<sup>37</sup> Human persons, in short, are to be “begotten, not made.”

### *Families:*

The normative understanding of “family” generated by these ways of conceiving persons and human sexuality and propagated by the champions of personal liberation, militant feminism, and the gay revolution is that a family is essentially a matter of choice: a group of individuals sharing deep personal connections. The claim is that groups so formed — and, we must remember, as permanent and binding as the individuals composing it determine by their own choice — have just as much a right to be regarded as “families” as does the family founded on the marriage of a husband and wife, who, by giving themselves irrevocably to one another, have created the environment in which children can be born, take root, grow, and develop their potentialities as human persons.

But this claim is spurious. The human race survives only in its children; and its children can flourish fully only in the family centered on husband and wife. Civilization depends on the begetting, *nourishing, and educating* of its children. But to be nourished and educated rightly, children *need* both a mother and a father.<sup>38</sup>

Mothering does not present the difficulties that fathering does. As one writer notes, “simply stated, an adult female will be naturally transformed into a social mother when she bears a child, but there is no corresponding natural transformation for a male.”<sup>39</sup> The father involved family, as another author points out, “is a fragile cultural achievement that cannot be taken for granted.”<sup>40</sup>

The essence of the matter can be put this way. In order for a male to be induced to undertake the responsibilities of fathering, he needs, first of all, to give himself unreservedly to a particular woman, who in turn must receive him and, in receiving him, to give herself to him. Both the man and the woman, if the father's role is to be properly fulfilled, must give themselves to each other unreservedly. They must, in other words, take upon themselves the responsibilities of marriage, of fidelity to each other, of selfless service to their children. Consequently, as John Miller has so eloquently put it, when

a culture ceases to support, through its mores, symbols, models, laws and rituals, the sanctity of the sexual bond between a man and his wife and a father's involvement with his own children, powerful natural forces will inevitably take over in favor of the mother-alone family; the fragility of the sexual bond (and the investment of fathers with children) will give way to the strength of the primary bond between mother and child.<sup>41</sup>

Today, at least in the United States, we are witnessing the breakdown of the father-involved family, a breakdown caused, in my opinion, by the dualistic, indeed neo-Manichean understandings of human personhood and human sexuality described above, fueled by the ideology of personal fulfillment, and championed by militant feminists and homosexual activists.

### *Conclusion*

"No unwanted baby ought ever to be born" is the slogan of those championing the new understandings of persons, sex, and families. "No human being, including babies, ought to be unwanted" is the truth that ought to shape our choices and actions. This truth requires that children be begotten in an act of marital love, the personal act

of a man and a woman who have already, by their own free and irrevocable choice, made each other *to be* irreplaceable and nonsubstitutable spouses. This truth requires that all members of the human species are recognized for what they are, persons of irreplaceable dignity. And among the members of the human species who are to be recognized as persons are children, unborn and newborn; they are persons equal in dignity to their parents, not toys or pets or products of human desire and artifice. This truth requires that society fosters and supports the family rooted in the conjugal covenant of husbands and wives, the family that is in truth the "*sanctuary of life*," the "place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life."<sup>42</sup>

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families* (Final Report of the National Commission on Children) (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Children, 1991), pp. 4, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), p. 41. On this subject see also Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

<sup>4</sup> Mortimer Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* (New York and Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1968), p. 17. I might note here that the very title of Adler's book would today, in some quarters, evoke outrage as being "sexist" in character and demeaning to women.

<sup>5</sup> On this see, for example, Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 48-54.

<sup>6</sup> On this see, for example, Michael Tooley, "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1972) 44, 48, 55. See also his *Abortion and Infanticide* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 50-86, where he argues this point at length.

<sup>7</sup> On this see, for instance, Daniel Callahan, *Abortion: Law, Choice, and*

*Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 497-498.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp and LeRoy Walters (2nd ed.: Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982), p. 259. Warren's essay originally appeared in *the Monist* 57 (1973).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review/Random House, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Kosnik et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (New York: Paulist, 1977), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Sex, Man, and Society* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1969), pp. 13-14. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>12</sup> Many separatists anticipate the day when the laboratory generation of human life is readily available (as it is now becoming). Thus Joseph Fletcher exults: "Man is a maker and a selector and a designer, and the more rationally contrived and deliberate anything is, the more human it is. Any attempt to set up an antinomy between natural and biological reproduction, on the one hand, and artificial or designed reproduction, on the other, is absurd. The real difference is between accidental or random reproduction and rationally willed and chosen reproduction....It [the latter] is willed, chosen, purposed, and controlled, and surely these are among the traits that distinguish *homo sapiens* from others in the animal genus, from the primates down. Genital reproduction is, therefore, less human than laboratory reproduction, more fun, to be sure, *but with our present separation of baby-making from love-making* both become matters of choice, not chance." In "Ethical Aspects of Genetic Controls," *New England Journal of Medicine* 285 (1971) 781-782; emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> George Gilder, *Sexual Suicide* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> On this see Robert and Anna Francoeur, "The Aesthetics of Social Sex," a paper given at a conference on "Sex and Society" at the School of Medicine of Missouri University, April 23-24, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> On this see, among others, Gilbert Nash and Mary Pat Fisher, *Sexuality Today* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1988), pp. 155-184.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Lipton, *The Erotic Revolution* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1965), p. 284.

<sup>17</sup> James Schall, S.J., *Human Dignity and Human Number* (New York: Alba House, 1971), p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> On this see "The Question Is Not Closed" (the English title given to the *Documentum Syntheticum de Moralitate Regulationis Nativitatum*, one of the

"reports" of the Papal Commission on Population, the Family and Natality). This document is found in *The Birth-Control Debate*, ed. Robert Hoyt (Kansas City, MO: National Catholic Reporter, 1969), p. 71: "biological fecundity...ought to be *assumed* into the human sphere" (emphasis added). This means that biological fertility is not, of itself, human and personal in nature, but becomes such only when "assumed" into the "human" sphere, i.e., when consciously chosen and willed.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, n. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Julian Huxley, "The World Population Problem," *The Human Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Boulding, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> His *The Population Bomb* was first published in 1969 (New York: Ballentine). It was revised in 1983 and again in 1986. With his wife, Anne, Ehrlich has also published *Extinction: The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of the Species* (New York: Ballentine, 1985), another popular title advancing an anti-child mentality.

<sup>23</sup> Schall, *Human Dignity and Human Numbers*, p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Hoffman, "Pop Psychology and the Rise of Anti-Child Ideology: 1966-1974," *The Family in America* 5.8 (August, 1991) 1-10.

<sup>25</sup> Among representative books promoting this ideology are: Nena and George O'Neill, *Open Marriage: A New Lifestyle for Couples* (New York: Evans, 1972); William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *The Pleasure Bond: A New Look at Sexuality and Commitment* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1970); Robert and Anna Francouer, *Hot Sex, Cool Sex* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Johanovich, 1975); *The New Sexual Revolution*, eds. Lester A. Kirkendall and Robert N. Whitehurst (New York: Donald W. Brown, 1971). The titles of some of the essays in the Kirkendall and Whitehurst anthology say it all: "Is Monogamy Outdated?" and "Sterilization--Accepting the Irrevocable."

<sup>26</sup> It is instructive here to note the kind of "commitment" given in some contemporary marriage services. The sociologist Jessie Bernard describes some in her influential book, *The Future of Marriage* (New York: Bantam, 1972), and one example she provides illustrates the "Personal Liberation Ideology" quite well: "Both of us commit ourselves to: (1) continue to grow, each in his or her own unique way; (2) retain future choices about our relationships, recognizing that the risks of growth include the risks of growing apart; (3) give room for the process of growing...(4) provide a climate that stimulates and invites growing..." (p. 98). Note that nothing



is said of children; note that there is no promise to be faithful until death. The commitment is not to the *person* of the other, but to a mutual search for growth, for fulfillment, for "personal liberation."

<sup>27</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 101-102. In developing her thesis Ruether explicitly appeals to Friedrich Engels' *The Origin and History of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

<sup>28</sup> Mary E. Hunt, "Lovingly Lesbian: Toward a Feminist Theology of Friendship," in *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*, ed. Robert Nugent (New York: Crossroads, 1987), p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> See Daniel Maguire, "The Morality of Homosexual Marriage," in *A Challenge to Love*, pp. 118-134.

<sup>30</sup> Carol Levine, "AIDS and Changing Concepts of Family," *Milbank Quarterly* 68. Supplement 1 (1990) 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> See endnote 6.

<sup>33</sup> On this see, for instance, the arguments developed by Adler in *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*.

<sup>34</sup> Germain Grisez, "When Do People Begin?" in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Vol. 63, *The Ethics of Having Children* (Washington, D.C.: American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1990) 40. Grisez's excellent article provides a detailed critique of the understanding of person advocated by Tooley, Singer, and others.

<sup>35</sup> Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>36</sup> On this see Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 51.

<sup>37</sup> For an extended defense of the view summarily set forth in the text see my "Catholic Teaching on the Laboratory Generation of Human Life," in *The Gift of Life: The Proceedings of a National Conference on the Vatican Instruction on Reproductive Ethics and Technology*, eds. Marilyn Wallace, R.S.M., and Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D. (Omaha: Pope Paul VI Institute Press, 1990), pp. 77-92. See also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origins and on the Dignity of Procreation (Donum Vitae)*.

<sup>38</sup> On this see *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families*, p. xix: "Children do best when they have the personal involvement and material support of a father and mother and when both parents fulfill their responsibility to be loving providers. The family [consisting of husband, wife, and children] is and should remain society's primary institution for bringing children into the world and for supporting their growth and development throughout childhood."

<sup>39</sup> Peter Wilson, *Man the Promising Primate: The Conditions of Human Evolution* (2nd ed.: New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> John W. Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering: Why We Call God "Father"* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19. The text is italicized in the original. On this question it is worth reading George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Centesimus Annus*, n. 39.

