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croissance et d'épanouissement des enfants. Le défi est ailleurs. Saurons-nous réaffirmer les valeurs de l'esprit et du cœur, pour en faire l'étoffe véritable de notre société? Alors, et alors seulement, respectueux des attentes de nos enfants et conformément à la Déclaration des Nations Unies, nous les épaulerons sur la voie de la conquête de la liberté et de la créativité.

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THE FAMILY, FEMINISM AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION¹

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The current focus on the family is the subject of this paper. My specific concern is to examine what feminism can contribute to its educational and religious life.

The paper has two underlying premises: (1) The family is a significant educative setting,² and any change in its structure, pattern of life and relationship to the public world has enormous influence on human development. (2) The feminist movement is one of the most important religious³ movements in the latter part of the twentieth century and its implications for family living are profound.

The family, like many of our contemporary institutions, is struggling under the weight of a legitimation crisis. A redefinition of family life and its social relations is needed today to respond creatively to this current cultural problem. Feminism offers the family the possibility of the restoration of legitimacy and an imaginative reconstruction. This essay seeks to substantiate that claim.

Public/Private Split

Since the turn of the nineteenth century, society in the United States has tended to split and divide between a private and public

¹ *The Family*: The term is restricted here to the bond between parents and children.

Feminism: The term is ambiguous due to a number of referents for it. In this work, it is used to denote the quest for full social, sexual, political and religious equality.

Religious Education: A term connoting the encounter of education and religion in contemporary culture.

² Education is an intentional process that links the unfolding biography of an individual with the unfolding history of society. It is concern for the growth and reconstruction of the person in relation to the public world.

³ Religious refers to a set of attitudes, actions and mental constructs that push beyond the limits of the everyday given and established. It is manifested in the form of ultimate questions, communal symbols and in acts of protest against the negations of life.

world. What is unique today is the polarization of these worlds and the expansion of the private sphere. With the rise of corporate capitalism, the private space widened and it became the location where personal meaning and identity was acquired. The public became a distant arena, cut off from personal relevance, with its own roles, rules, and version of reality. At one pole, the individual is central and a desperate search for warmth, intimacy and mutual support prevails. At the other pole, social relations are more anonymous, abstract and utilitarian. The family is the major institution in our society today firmly lodged in the private sphere and restricted to the personal needs and care of its members.⁴ We are experiencing a cleavage between our private beliefs/meanings/interests and our public roles/values/perceptions. In brief, we are experiencing a dual reality whose spheres are at variance with each other. This cultural contradiction lies at the root of our contemporary crisis. Only a dialectical integration between our private lives and the public world will enable us to transcend this dichotomy and restore a semblance of harmony and balance to our lives. The family can make a valuable contribution to this private-public reintegration when it takes on a religiously educative style.

Two Poles: Right and Left Wing

There is a decisive sense of uneasiness, disenchantment and recurrent crisis in our contemporary situation. In such circumstances, the family has become a focal point of concern. It has moved to the center of much recent scholarship and debate.⁵ This interest has arisen both out of a fear for its future and a concern that it have an alternative future. Right and left wing forces approach it as a testing ground for their respective orthodoxies. The right wing defends the traditional family, tends to praise it exorbitantly and romanticizes it. Their language is preachy, moralistic and sentimental. With patriotic zeal and fundamen-

⁴ Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

⁵ As representative examples see: Mary Jo Bane, *Here to Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Jane Howard, *Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Kenneth Keniston and the Carnegie Council on Children, *All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (New York: Seahory Press, 1978). Popular fiction and nonfiction is now focused on the topic. Current movies and TV programs have also begun to closely examine the subject. I note especially an NBC-TV three-hour production, "The American Family an Endangered Species?" January 2, 1979.

talistic spirit, they present the family as the nursery of all virtue and our shield against a vice-laden world. Phyllis Schlafly's anti-ERA campaign, Anita Bryant's attack on homosexuality as a threat to the family and Marabel Morgan's Total Woman Movement (which purports to teach women to hold on to their husbands through seduction)⁶ are prominent demonstrations of this conservative ideology.

The left wing reaction sometimes comes in the form of outright attack. The family is degraded as a bourgeois invention, destructive of human liberty and a locus of social, sexual and political control.⁷ They advocate its dismantling. The language and attitudes here are often elitist, mindless and self-destructive. Some utopian experiments, radical therapists and certain segments of feminism betray an unrealistic and ruthless approach in their opposition to family life and its relationship to the rest of society.

Both positions, I believe, are extreme and reactionary. In any struggle between the two, the *traditional* family is sure to win and become even more solidified and privatized. To elevate the family into an abstract ideal is to render it powerless, whereas the attempt to eliminate the family can only be judged a cruel illusion. Seducing one's husband will not alleviate the growing pressures on marriage; suppressing homosexuality will not hold families together; and preaching on the virtues of the home only perpetuates the current mystification surrounding it. These movements point to no viable solution. However, they do bring into the open problems associated with the breakdown of traditional family structure and roles.

My efforts here are not a conservative justification for the traditional family and its traditional roles. Rather, the concern is to envision the family as a religiously educative unit and to articulate its religiously educative task in terms of reconstructing our personal lives and public world. This perspective critiques the family but does not attack it, calls into question its present pattern but affirms its basic value, negates its current form but suggests an alternative way for it to be together in the public world. The conviction is that when the family embodies a

⁶ See Joyce Maynard, "The Liberation of the Total Woman," *New York Times Magazine*, 28 September 1975, p. 9 ff.

⁷ See David Cooper, *The Death of the Family* (New York: Vintage, 1971); Schulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1972); Rustum and Della Roy, "Is Monogamy Outdated," in *Family, Marriage, and the Struggle of the Sexes*, ed. Hans Peter Dreitzel (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 332-350; Mihaly Vajda and Agnes Heller, "Family Structure and Communism," *Telos* 7 (1969): 99-111.

renewed educational and religious life, this process empowers it with new possibilities in its (inter) personal life and public role.

The work of this paper examines (1) the retreat of the family from the public world; (2) the *educative structures* of the family (its language, roles and power relations, etc.) from a feminist perspective. This analysis reveals the limits of the current family form and points the family beyond its given mode of social relations to new religiously educative possibilities; (3) closely related to this analysis is an examination of the social context in which the family is set. An investigation is made of the "external forces" — economic, social, political — which shape family relationships and influence its educative pattern and power; and, finally, (4) a *reintegration* of the family in the public sphere is advocated through the creation and linking of various family networks.

Two Errors

The exposing of two major errors, commonly believed, may help to prepare the ground for this discussion. First, a torrent of recent publicity has suggested that the family today is weak, inert, incapable of defending itself and at the point of disintegration.⁸ The sounding of this alarm is nothing new in our history.⁹ In fact, from the time of the early settlers in Plymouth to some modern cultural critiques, the fear of the breakdown of the family has haunted our society. Every generation seems to predict its collapse. But this rhetoric hides the fact that the contemporary family was never stronger.¹⁰ It has a stability, conformity and continuity about it unrivaled in past time. The forces of urbanization and industrialization that initially weakened the family have produced the conditions that now support, sustain and strengthen it — but in its *traditional* form. It is not a question of the family's survival; rather, it is more a problem of its isolation, introversion and individualism. It has become a prisoner of its

⁸ See for example Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Nobody Home: The Erosion of the American Family," *Psychology Today*, 10 May 1977, pp. 41-47.

⁹ The historiography of the family has emerged as an area of lively scholarship and interest. See Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1962); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth* (New York: Oxford Un. Press, 1973) and "The American Family in Past Time," *The American Scholar* 43 (Summer 1974): 422-446; Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

¹⁰ See Mary Jo Bane, *Here to Stay: The American Family in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

own love¹¹ — too strong, too intimate, too intense. It is now burdened with attempting to do too much.

The second misconception is our almost naive approach toward the family in relation to its social and political influences and impact. This naivete has led the Carter administration into unforeseen problems and has delayed the launching of the White House Conference on The Family. It is erroneous to believe that family programs and policies are neutral and enhance the "general welfare." We are inclined to turn a blind eye to the fact that the family is at the center of many of our current political debates. The form, structure, social arrangements and social involvement of the family is inherently political. Partisan interests are involved. And these policies and power arrangements have a pervasive social purpose, which is directly related to our educational and religious lives.

Retreat from Public World

Many of the values and expectations of the contemporary family¹² can be traced directly to the nineteenth century. The retreat to privacy, the loss of public power, the emergence of a consumer mentality and mass culture, the splitting of sexual roles/functions, the spirit of sentimentality and the emphasis on the family as a center of intimacy, nurture and affection, all took root during the industrialization of the nineteenth century.¹³

The rise of monopoly capitalism, in the twentieth century, brought added stress and strain on the family unit but, at the same time, solidified and reinforced many of the familial attitudes of the previous century. The retreat to the private sphere and the isolation of the family from public affairs continues. Home is the place to come in out of the storm and find repose and renewal.¹⁴ This introversion and cult of privacy has been accelerated by the

¹¹ Philippe Aries, "The Family, Prison of Love," *Psychology Today*, August 1975, pp. 53-58.

¹² It may be more accurate to restrict these remarks to the white middle-class family. On the black family and its unique experience see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

¹³ See Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England 1880-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Cult of True Womanhood and Industrial Society," in *From Machismo to Mutuality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 39-53, by Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary R. Ruether; Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

¹⁴ Philippe Aries, "The Family and the City," *Daedalus* 106 (Spring 1977): 227-235.

introduction of the automobile and television. Introspection intensifies. Families are thrown back on their own emotional resources in an effort to counteract the depersonalization of the marketplace. The search for personal meaning and identity is restricted to the private family arena — divorced from social meaning. Work is not expected to have socially redeeming qualities. In one sense, the family has acquired a new importance as a key target and market for industrial commodities. Stereotype sexual roles are reinforced in the popular imagination and practice. Women are identified with the emotional life, men with the struggle for existence. The "freedom" of men in the public sphere takes its meaning from the restriction of women in the private. And children suffer from excessive sentimentalization and lack of rights.

The contemporary family has been increasingly set off from public life and invested with a sort of moral halo. One of its major problems is the excessive demands now being placed upon it. We are witnessing its inability to fulfill many of these functions. Its isolation from social, economic and public power has rendered it severely incapacitated.

These remarks are not meant in any way to disparage the family. In spite of its contradictions, I accept it as an institution that is fundamentally necessary, nurturing and inevitable.¹⁵ However, it is only when its current form and arrangements are uncovered that its problems and possibilities come into sharper focus. The thesis suggested here is that an adequate response to these problems and possibilities requires the introduction of a vibrant *educational* and *religious* process. What that would look like is the concern of the rest of this essay.

Crucial to our task is the need to see the family both in terms of its own social relationships and in the context of the wider social environment. An understanding of the dialectical relationship between personal family life and public world is vital here. There is a need to demonstrate the inextricable link between the forms and arrangements within the family and the forms and patterns in our public world. An explicit recognition of the systematic relations between both is one key to unlocking the dilemma we are caught in. That awareness opens the door to the possibility of adjusting and reconstructing *both sides* of the equation.

¹⁵ Vivian M. Rakoff, "The Family: An Ethological Imperative," *Social Research* 44 (Summer 1977): 216-234.

The Family as Educator

Education is a way of being with other people over time in which a concern for the future predominates. In this sense, the family can be viewed as an educative arena where a multiplicity of educational encounters occur.¹⁶ The family members consciously (and unconsciously) structure an environment that attempts to care for their future temporality. Constantly they order, structure and form their social arrangements so as to transmit meanings, values, stories, skills and traditions. They educate each other by being a family. And the richness of the education depends on the quality of their common experience. The ecology of the household is a major part of the family's educational curriculum. In the family setting, new realities are built, kept in a state of repair and repeatedly refurnished.¹⁷ Common memories are preserved and future horizons shared. It is the crucible in which our emotional life takes shape. From breakfast table to bedtime parents and children are engaged in endless conversation that stamps their character, reinforces their world and reconstructs their visions. The style the family takes on, in terms of mutual relations, language employed, sexual roles, authority structures, interpretative schemes, etc., stimulates a continuing whirlpool of interaction that takes on a unique educational character.

But the contemporary family setting also reveals a situation and location with severe restrictions, oppressive limits and a rigid orientation. Its structure and interpersonal dynamics can be mis-educative. The social arrangements can hinder an intelligent life and cut off future possibilities. In other words, its educative potential can be and is being blocked. The contemporary feminist movement exposes many of these restrictions in family life today. It unveils and calls into question taken-for-granted roles, power relations and language patterns. When this feminist perspective is taken to the educative setting of the family, it opens up new educational and religious possibilities for social relationships within the family and increases their potential contribution toward rebuilding our public world.

¹⁶ Hope Jensen Leichter, ed., *The Family as Educator* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1975), and "Families and Communities as Educators: Some Concepts of Relationship," *Teachers College Record* 79, no. 4 (1975): 567-658. Also see Davis S. Steward, "Parents as Teachers," *Religious Education* 66, no. 6 (1971): 442-449.

¹⁷ Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality," in *Recent Sociology*, no. 2, ed. Hans Peter Dreitzel (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 50-72.

Feminism and Family Limits

Feminism is a vision of a transformed social order. It seeks to release new possibilities for communal as well as personal regeneration. It has a strong utopian element, which comes back as personal and social critique. "What contemporary feminist criticism signals," writes Beverly W. Harrison, "is the beginning of a *broadbased* cultural demystification."¹⁸ It exposes the symbolic and mythic structures which operate in our interpersonal lives and, thereby, creates the possibility of loosening the chains of oppressive thought patterns and practices. By pointing to the potentiality in human relationships, it intends to lay bare the oppressive forces at work in our personal lives and the destructive arrangements of the market-place which impinge upon them. This new feminine consciousness can open up a vision in the educative setting of the family and point toward new directions. The imagination is freed to image anew how to be human and to envision new possibilities for human community.

Feminism, then, initiates us into a new narrative of human experience. The story it tells is of the transformation of consciousness and a basic change in the human and cosmic story. The story, according to Dominic Crossan's categorization, is parabolic.¹⁹ It subverts the accepted, conventional way of viewing reality, "the way things are," and acts as a counterforce to the prevailing values and modes of functioning. Our ordinary world of the regular, routine and given is broken. And the established social, political, economic, mythic structures are called into question. Life is redescribed and redefined. We are asked to "convert" to that redescription and redefinition — not just mentally but in our total way of being in the world.²⁰ A new style of action is forged out. New songs are sung and new journeys undertaken. In a word, the old story is undermined and a new story told. This is not to romanticize the feminist movement. It is merely to point to the scope and depth of its implications for our personal and social lives. Its piercing perspective suggests a reconstruction of familial relations and calls the family beyond itself to contribute to the rebuilding of our public world. When

embodied in familial relationships, this vision allows the family to be a vital educational and religious body. Its praxis is religiously educative.

Language and Social Relations

A sensitivity to language use is an appropriate point of concern here. Language is an extension of the body. It is our "house of being" and it opens the door to how we dwell with others. Huebner²¹ demonstrates how language is grounded in the interpersonal, how it arises out of our social relations and is a manifestation of them. Merleau-Ponty reminds us of the crucial role it plays in our perception of other people.²² The state of a language, then, reflects the condition of our personal/social lives and relationships, and to some extent shapes them. Feminists point out how our dominant language form has been used as an instrument of manipulation, mystification and domination.²³

Women find themselves today outside the existing language structures because their own experiences are not expressed in them. This restricts and clouds their perspectives and robs them of a language to articulate their own situation. A subtle (and, sometimes, not so subtle) repression prevails which is expressed in the tendency to idealize and pedestalize women in their working/living activities. They are socialized into a male semantic structure and limited in their capacity to name their world and verbalize their own bodily experiences. The result is a state of "social amnesia."²⁴ Not only are they devoid of a vision of the future but also they are without a memory of any alternative.

At its deepest level, feminism seeks the demystification and the elimination of sexist language that binds women (and men) to their current exploitation. Its commitment is to wide-awakeness and to allow people to be present to themselves and regain touch with their lived world. Linguistically, it attempts to both unmask the established familial relationships and indicate new educative directions for the family's social form.

To unmask the present family pattern is to recognize that the language assigned presumes and reinforces a particular place for

¹⁸ Beverly W. Harrison, "The New Consciousness of Women: A Socio-Political Resource," *Cross Currents* 24 (Winter 1975): 451. Italics in text.

¹⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Ill.: Argus, 1975). On feminism as a profoundly new way of interpreting human experience see Vivian Gornick, *Essays in Feminism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 32-46.

²⁰ On conversion see: Sallie McFague, "Conversion: Life on the Edge of the Raft," *Interpretation* 32, no. 3 (1978): 225-268.

²¹ Dwayne Huebner, "An Educator's Perspective on Language about God," a paper read at Consultation on Language about God, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., October 3-4, 1977.

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

²³ Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

²⁴ Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

women and a predetermined relationship to society. The assumption is that it's a man's world and woman has her place.²⁵ This sets up a system of classification, sex role differentiation, and functional segregation. The home is expected to be a "haven in a heartless world." Domestic tasks are assigned to the mother, while the father is expected to "go out to work." Roles are defined in mutually exclusive terms. Work and home do not touch. Women are segregated into childraising, consumer management and nurturants of the emotional life, while the man's workday is organized on the presupposition that he has a wife who performs all auxiliary functions for him thereby freeing him for exclusive attention to the "job." Women are asked to bring off something of an "emotional tour de force"²⁶ in the privacy of the home (without much outside assistance). And male "success" is measured by income in the "public" marketplace. Male and female functions are defined as opposite halves of a complementary system that allows neither sex to participate very much in the sphere of the other. Identity for both is acquired in different places. Access to the public domain is severely restricted to the woman, while the man returns home from the ("real") job expecting respite from the pressures of work in the form of warmth, affection, good meals and quiet kids.²⁷ The imposition of these fixed roles induces women (and men) to falsify their sense of themselves and curtails their identity.

Feminism and Religious Education

These cultural stereotypes are deeply embedded in our language patterns and practice. They condition and mystify the family's interpersonal relationships and they are reinforced by the ideology and patterns of the surrounding public institutions. To allow the family to break through those stereotypes and to embody in practice an alternative social form of relationship would empower it with a renewed educative style. With this in mind, feminism calls upon family members to critically reflect on their lives, roles, and ways of being together. This re-examination cuts to the core of what it means to be human. It is not simply a matter of negating patriarchal patterns but of positively proposing a new way of life. The call is to radically reshape our

²⁵ Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁷ Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer, eds., *Men and Masculinity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974).

identities as men and women and to bring into existence a new style of human interaction which is particularly human. Inherent in this feminist perspective is a religious drive that pushes back against our established cultural boundaries and pushes beyond towards new emancipatory limits. This movement points the way to a reconstruction of the family's pattern and re-envisioning of its educative task.

If the family is to be a vibrant educational unit today, a transformation in these personal relations is called for. This reconstruction would be educational in practice. It would rebuild a new structure of care, meaning and significance in the home and, thereby, enlarge its educative possibilities. In effect, a more wholesome environment is constructed that allows growth toward psychological, social and religious maturity. Women receive back the power to say their own word, construct their own reality and interpret their own situation. Children are nurtured in a milieu where they are not as inhibited to freely express their experiences or question their validity. And new opportunities open up for men enabling them to acquire new perspectives and a new sense of freedom from their renewed sense of identity. In a word, the educative context lends itself to emancipatory discourse and practice in the living-out of the rebuilt familial social relations. The family now lives beyond its current established form and opens up toward new possibilities. This way of life can appropriately be named religiously educative.

In such a context, all the family educates all the family to live intelligently and religiously.²⁸ By the way they live together, act out their roles and channel their power, they demonstrate in practice an educational and religious life. And it all does not have to look terribly dramatic. In their ordinary everyday lives, the family as religious educator can be recognized. Parents educate usually not by teaching but by parenting. Their role as parents is coextensive with their role as religious educators. Their everyday nurturing, discourse, and caring activities *are* religiously educative. A new and profound mode of care is set in motion that breaks through standard patterns/staid stereotypes and enriches the human family at its deepest level. Children receive their first religious education by simply growing up in such an environ-

²⁸ See Gabriel Moran, *Religious Body: Design for a New Reformation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 158-186. The same principle underlies Horace Bushnell's theory of christian nurture; see *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale Un. Press, 1967; first published 1847).

ment. The curriculum is the ecology of the household, i.e., things said, deeds performed, roles lived out, etc. A key test is the natural integration of occasions of birth and death into the life of all its members. In particular, the death of old standpoints, presuppositions and assumptions, followed by the birth of new dreams, images and patterns of life can be educative moments with a religious character in any home. In sum, parents and children are together educationally and religiously when their social relations open up to a renewed and deep sense of humanness — offering freedom to go beyond the established roles and room to create new familial patterns/practices.

The Family and Its Social Context

The family plays a part but a crucial part in religious education. However, it needs all the help it can get from schools, television stations, churches, political and economic institutions and other civic organizations. The extraordinary, heavy burden (social and psychological) now being placed upon it is sapping its energy. But those institutions that should be part of the solution instead remain a major part of its problem. Its educative life is acutely affected by the wide range of social relations around it. This has been vividly pointed out by the Carnegie Council on Children:

Families are not now, nor were they ever, the self-sufficient building blocks of society, exclusively responsible, praiseworthy, and blamable for their own destiny. They are deeply influenced by broad social and economic forces over which they have little control.²⁹

Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a broadbased social reconstruction of the family without a corresponding transformation of our social/economic/political and other cultural forms.³⁰

The form of the family is bound up with what Marx calls class struggle, i.e., it is linked to the shape of the public world and the relation of the public to the reproduction of society.³¹ Sheila Rowbotham claims that this situation produces not only a distorted reality in the family but it allows the values of commodity production to mold and determine aspects of human

²⁹ Kenneth Keniston and the Carnegie Council on Children, *All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 12.

³⁰ Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, "The Family," in *Aspects of Sociology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 129-147, with a preface by Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno; Ann Foreman, *Femininity as Alienation: Woman and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 150-158.

³¹ Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

experience.³² Max Horkheimer³³ has shown how the hierarchy of authority in the work-place carries over to the authority structures in the family. Hence children acquire attitudes and behavior required for the workforce, and the mother becomes an instrument for maintaining this hierarchical pattern of authority. Jerome Kagan³⁴ points out how a family's socioeconomic position exerts a profound influence on many aspects of the child's development. Dorothy Dinnerstein³⁵ demonstrates how sexual divisions within the home (modeled after the divisions in the marketplace) leave child care almost exclusively to women with effects on the later emotional predilections of the child. Michael Schneider³⁶ argues that the contemporary work ethic of compulsion, competition and achievement puts its stamp on the social structure of instincts in general and on sexuality in particular. Consequently, the family gets caught in a situation of producing aspects of the human personality that correspond to the rigid structures of contemporary society.

The family, then, is inextricably woven into the social process and its fate is linked with it. It is socially mediated down to its innermost structure. The ideology of consumerism surrounding it impinges on and penetrates the fabric of its life. The effects on the family's educative life are crippling. There is a retreat to privacy and the loss of a sense of public responsibility. This excessive focus on the intimate and interior denies us a larger part of our humanity and the enrichment of a public life.³⁷ The biggest loss, however, may be the loss of critical consciousness — in other words, an acceptance of the given and established familial social relations. For, fundamentally, what lies behind the glittering consumerist ideology is a rigid conservatism, namely, the desire to retain the present social/sexual, personal/political, economic/ecological arrangements precisely as they are. Nothing could

³² Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 53; also see Joan B. Landes, "Women, Labor and Family Life," *Science and Society* 61 no. 4 (1977-78): 386-409; Joel Kovel, "Rationalization and the Family," *Telos* 37 (Fall 1978): 5-21.

³³ Max Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family," in *Critical Theory* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), pp. 47-128.

³⁴ Jerome Kagan, "The Child in the Family," *Daedalus* 106 (Spring 1977): 33-56.

³⁵ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

³⁶ Michael Schneider, "Neurosis and Class Struggle: Toward a Pathology of Capitalist Commodity Society," *New German Critique* 1 (Fall 1974): 109-126.

³⁷ Peter Marin, "The New Narcissism," *Harper's*, October 1975, pp. 45-56; Christopher Lasch, "The Narcissistic Personality of Our Times," *Partisan Review* 64 (1977): 9-19, and *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978).

be more detrimental to our educational and religious lives. That is why the religious education of the family is inherently tied up with the quality of life on the work site, on our TV screens, in our schools, churches, neighborhoods, towns and cities. One cannot be reconstructed without the other. And any change in one will tend to result in a qualitative change in the other.

Feminism, then, is a form of protest against the reification and alienation in our personal lives and in the order of our public world. It is an indictment of our current social conditions and confronts us with the social costs of our unwillingness to remedy the situation. It is a struggle to overcome privatism, to heal the public/private split and to restore the interpersonal to the public sector. It is the reminder that changes in character structure and personality development are tied to changes in our social, economic and political institutions. At its deepest level, the story it tells is that there can be no emancipation of the family without the emancipation and transformation of our public world.

The Family and Public Reintegration

This task, however, may seem overwhelming and the vision could be paralyzing. Strategically and educationally, what is critically needed is the surrounding supportive environment of a community that would give context and strength to the family's life. Wife, child and husband need space and the context of other people to explore these issues that affect their lives and their deaths. They need to feel and be part of a communion that has unity, tolerance and mutuality. Rosemary Ruether writes that

an urgent task for those concerned about the society of the future is the development of viable forms of local communalization on the level of residential groups, work places, and the townships that can increase our control over the quality of our own lives.³⁸

These communal forms require "a new architecture" that balances the private and public dimensions of life. The development of diverse communities that cut across the isolation of families and individuals is the great *educational* need in our society today. The family is not devalued in such a context. Rather, it finds new bonds of intimate association and mutual exchange with other families and groupings.³⁹ The future

³⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 207.

³⁹ For interaction of family with familial and non-familial forms see: Gabriel Moran, "The Way We Are: Communal Forms and Church Response," in *Parish Religious Education*, ed. Maria Harris (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 25-40.

educational and religious development of the family is tied to the construction of such communal arrangements.

The need for close cooperation among small collectivities of families is now gaining public recognition.⁴⁰ This holds the possibility of breaking down the social, economic and political isolation pervading our cities and suburbs. Families need support groups in the face of hostile, social and economic circumstances. These family networks could function as centers of resistance to our larger bureaucratic institutions. They could demonstrate through their many-sided relationships, their cooperative efforts and the rearrangement of stereotyped patterns and roles, etc., the possibility of something more human. "Not only would such family bonding be enormously helpful support for parents," notes Rosemary Ruether, "but it would be a much more satisfying community for children that would diffuse much of the sibling rivalry and child-parent antagonism of the isolated family."⁴¹ Some basic shifts in personal/interpersonal/interfamily relationships are involved here. But the shift would imbed the family in a large supportive network which it so desperately needs.

This essay was begun (and concludes) with the conviction that the family is a persistent manifestation of the human need for intimacy, stability, and nurture. The analysis employed here reveals, however, that a major part of the contemporary family's problem is a structural one. Feminism uncovers many of the elements that are blocking its educational life and proposes a new pattern for its social relations. When this is embodied in the praxis of family living, its educative life can be enriched, deepened and imbued with a religious character.

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⁴⁰ See Margaret M. Sawin, "Nurturing Families: A Task of Religious Education," *Living Light* 13, no. 1 (1976): 77-82; "Family Cluster Education," *Religious Education* 68, no. 2 (1973): 275-276; "Growing in Faith through Family Clusters," in *Parish Religious Education*, pp. 41-55; Joseph and Mercedes Iannone, "Parish Education in Stewardship," *Living Light* 13, no. 1 (1976): 83-91. Note: While I affirm the Family Cluster (Sawin's) and Family Learning Team (Iannone's) approaches both, I believe, fail to attend adequately to the social, economic, and political context of the family.

⁴¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Working Women and the Male Workday," *Christianity and Crisis* 37 (February 1977): 7.